The Anthem Companion to

AUGUSTE COMTE

Edited by ANDREW WERNICK

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INTRODUCTION

Andrew Wernick

Alfred North Whitehead famously remarked, "A science that hesitates to forget its founders is lost."[1] Whether sociology is a science, and in what sense, used to be hotly debated. Today, perhaps, it has ceased to matter. Sociology has become too multi-tendency, too divided into specialisms and too overtaken by a general interdisciplinary movement to have any single epistemological stance. It would in any case be hard to argue that it ever could be the kind of science that Whitehead had in mind: one marked, that is, by an accumulating body of discoveries and laws that could be passed on in abstraction from the history that produced them. Indeed, the dictum could be reversed. If sociology forgets its founders, it not only cuts itself off from a rich store of concepts, interpretations and paradigms that can be continually mined for insight and creative re-combinations; it also forgets the large-scale questions with which they were engaged, and shrinks its own ambitions. Be that as it may, few modern thinkers have been more forgotten, or had vaster horizons, than the one who lived in what is now a small *musée* in Paris at 10 Monsieur-le-prince.

Auguste Comte, the grand systematizer of positivism and, in later years, self-proclaimed *Grand-prêtre de l'Humanité*, coined the term *sociology* and was the first to attempt to establish a systematic science of society. A controversial but highly influential nineteenth-century figure, his ideas left their imprint on an extraordinary range of thinkers, writers and tendencies.[2] These included John Stuart Mill, Emile Littré, Herbert Spencer, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, George Eliot, Ernest Renan, Charles Maurras, Lester Ward and Emile Durkheim. Comte's work gave impetus to the establishment of sociology as an academic discipline in France, Germany and the United States. His philosophy of the sciences attracted the praise of many leading scientists of the day. He did much to organize biology into a coherent field (Canguilhem 1994: 237–61). His Religion of Humanity established branches in several European and New World countries (Wartelle 2001) and was a major ingredient in the "invention of altruism" in Victorian England (Dixon 2008).

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1   In a lecture given in 1916 to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, of which he was president.
2   For the widespread influence of Comte on nineteenth-century thinkers in France, England and elsewhere, see Simon (1963), Singer (2005), Cashdollar (1989), Harp (1994) and Woodward (1971).

Overseas, Comte's followers played an important role in the politics of several Latin American countries and to this day his watchword *orde e progresso*, order and progress, is emblazoned on the Brazilian flag.

Yet for most of the twentieth century Comte's work was under a cloud, and his voluminous oeuvre largely ignored, even in France. In philosophy, his *positivisme* came to be eclipsed by, and confused with, "logical positivism." His religious project was ridiculed. His politics were excoriated as technocratic, authoritarian and a foreshadowing of totalitarianism (Hayek 1980). In sociology, itself, the science he claimed to have invented and the cornerstone of his positive philosophy, he came to be regarded more as an eccentric precursor to Durkheim than a real founder of the discipline, or even a significant contributor to its stock of ideas.

In recent decades, however, Comte's life and writings have begun to be critically re-examined, together with the wider project of social, political and religious reform to which his intellectual labors were devoted.[3] What has emerged is a much more complicated picture of his thought and its significance, both historically and with regard to current issues. The collection of new essays presented here on the formation, legacy and rediscovered relevance of Comte's social theory and philosophy aims to further this re-examination, while providing, from a diversity of perspectives, a general introduction to his thought.

I will turn to these essays, and to the themes and issues they explore, in a moment. But considering Comte's still-marginal place in the canon and the myths and mis-recognitions that have clung to his name, it will be useful first to sketch out some basic background and context. Who was Comte? What was his project? What were his major works, and how do they relate to one another? What was his sociology? And what issues have surrounded the way his thought has been received and interpreted?

Life and Works

"My life is based on a novel." (Car, c'est un roman que le fond de ma vie.)

Auguste Comte[4]

Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte—he became plain Auguste in his early twenties—was born in 1798 in Montpellier in the south of France[5]. His father was a provincial tax official and his mother, like his sister, devoutly religious. Precocious and rebellious, he was at odds with his royalist and Catholic family from early on, and by the age of fourteen he was a declared atheist and republican. He also bridled at Napoleonic rule, disliking its militarism, censorship, imperial monarchy and accommodation with the Church. At the same time, he was no supporter of parliamentarism, still less of

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3   In France, important figures in the post-1960s reevaluation of Comte have included Angèle Kremer-Marietti, Juliette Grange, Annie Petit, Jean-François Braunstein and Michel Bourdeau. For a good sample of recent scholarship, see Bourdeau et al. (2003) and Petit (2003).

4   From a letter to Comte's friend Pierre Valat in 1825, cited in Gouhier (1997: 15).

5   Pickering 1993–2009 is today the definitive biography, though Gouhier's earlier study (1997) gives a vivid picture and his work on Comte's early life remains important.

Rousseau-ian ideas of direct democracy. His sympathies, as a republican, were with Condorcet and the Dantonist current represented by the Convention of 1793–94 and its rule by experts and managers.

Comte's initial path, in line with his father's wishes, was toward a career in engineering. He excelled at his lycée, especially in mathematics, to such an extent that his teacher and mentor Daniel Encontre (to whom Comte dedicated his last work, the *Synthèse subjective*) entered him a year early into competition for admission to the elite École Polytechnique. The school was one of the *grandes écoles* established by the Convention in 1794, and was designed to bring together leading mathematicians and scientists in the training of a national engineering elite. Comte came fourth in the national competition, and a year later, in 1814, moved to Paris.

At the École he pursued his studies in mathematics and the natural sciences and was considered head of the class. However, between 1814 and 1816 the school was caught up in the political turmoil that began with Napoleon's defeat at the hands of the Sixth Coalition, the siege of Paris and the first restoration of the Bourbon monarchy; after which came Napoleon's escape from Elba and ousting of the new king (the "100 days"), his final defeat at Waterloo and, in 1815, the second restoration and accession of Louis XVIII. In the clampdown that followed, the École, which was administered under the Ministry of Defense, was suspect as a hotbed of republicanism. An opportunity to act against it came in 1816 with a protest led by Comte against an unpopular royalist teacher and a more general conflict with the administration, which led to the school's closure and the whole class being expelled (Belhoste: 47). A year later the École Polytechnique reopened. However, Comte refused the required loyalty conditions and was barred from readmission. Meanwhile, he had returned to Montpellier, attending lectures at the renowned faculty of medicine, where he acquired a life-long interest in biology (Canguilhem 1994; Braunstein 2009). Back in Paris, with his schooling suspended and his father's support at an end, he began a hand-to-mouth life as a private tutor and gravitated to the circle of young intellectuals, many from the École, who had gathered round Henri de Saint-Simon.

Saint-Simon—an adventuring aristocrat and reformer who had renounced his title in the Revolution, escaped the guillotine, lost a fortune, then set up house near the École Polytechnique to study and write—had attracted attention with his visionary program for post-Revolutionary reconstruction. With the help of those he drew round him Saint-Simon launched a series of journals, including *l'Industrie* (1816–17) and *l'Organisateur* (1819), to propound and develop his ideas. Their guiding thread was a panoramic history of human society in which, in a final phase of development, a feudal–Catholic order was giving way to a production-centered one based on industry and science. Such a society would be peaceful and cooperative rather than military and coercive, and it would realize the Baconian dream of harnessing the powers of nature for the "alleviation of man's estate." The eighteenth century, Saint-Simon declared, had been a period of destruction. The nineteenth would be one of organization. Key to this, he became convinced, was not only a political reform in which *les industriels* (scientists, engineers, managers and bankers as well as workers) would come to power, displacing non-productive classes of both the old and revolutionary regimes, but also an intellectual

reform in which a new philosophy based on positive science would establish a new mental consensus as the basis for a this-worldly, solidaristic, morality. The socio-historical analysis on which this whole schema rested—an amalgam of Bacon, Condorcet and Scottish and French political economy, among others—was vouchsafed by a would-be science of Man that, having uncovered the laws of history and human nature, would complete the scientific revolution.

In 1818 Comte succeeded the historian Augustin Thierry as Saint-Simon's secretary and principal collaborator, and he remained so until their bitter parting in 1824. At first it was a good fit. Their outlooks converged and Comte, with his deep formation in the contemporary sciences and prodigious powers of intellectual organization, could give logic and substance to a framework that the self-taught Saint-Simon could only speculatively sketch out. The relationship became troubled, however, by disputes over money and Comte's terms of employment, and then by a clash over authorship and egos. Matters came to a head over an essay published by Saint-Simon in *Catéchisme des Industriels* (with a disparaging preface) but which Comte had written and insisted, first, on publishing separately under his own name.[6] Originally entitled *Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société*, Comte's version was called *Système de politique positive* (not to be confused with the later four-volume work by Comte with the same title). He later referred to it as "mon opuscule fondamentale," and in 1854 republished it under its original title, together with all the other writings of his youth, as an appendix to volume four of the *Système*.

For Comte this was his first major statement, the culmination of thinking he had been doing since his teens. Its most important idea (refining an earlier one of Saint-Simon's) was the "law of three states." This stated that as cognition develops from infancy to maturity it passes through three stages: theological, or fictive; metaphysical, or abstract; and positive, or scientific. Presented as a law of mental development applicable both to the individual and to society as a whole, this provided a scientific key, Comte thought, for understanding the growth of knowledge and the relation of this to the progress of civilization from its tribal–military–agrarian beginnings, and also for understanding the centuries-long upheaval culminating in the French Revolution linked to the decline of feudal–Catholic society and the rise of science and industry. As well, the law of three states would provide a solid basis for organizing historical data so as to establish a true science of politics. Against the metaphysical views of the progressive party and the theological views of the retrograde party, and beyond their fruitless clash, it would then be possible to establish a new consensus, resolve the post-1789 crisis and chart a realistic path toward the post-feudal industrial order struggling to be born.

Disentangling Comte's ideas from Saint-Simon's is no easy matter. During the period of their collaboration, their positions no doubt co-developed. But by the time of the split there were already important differences. Comte rejected Saint-Simon's idea of unifying the sciences through a pyramid of axioms (with gravity, "the universal law

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6   For the complicated circumstances surrounding the text and publication of the Plan see the introduction by H. S. Jones to Comte (1998).

of attraction," at the unifying apex). In addition, a rigorous science of Man and society had yet to be established and, in general, Comte thought, Saint-Simon wanted to rush ahead with a half-baked political program before the intellectual groundwork was done.

Comte also wanted no part in the *Nouveau Christianisme*—with its injunction to "love one another as brothers"—that Saint-Simon launched in 1824, the year before his death, and which his followers, led by Saint-Amand Bazard and Prosper Enfantin, fervently took up. However, like Saint-Simon, Comte took seriously the conservative Catholic critique of Enlightenment progressivism, and he likewise praised Joseph de Maistre's *Du Pape*, with its "retrograde" project of resuscitating Western Christendom under a revitalized papacy. For Comte, Christianity was to be rejected, not reformed. Nor was there any thought yet of a whole new religion. But his 1828 essay "On the Spiritual Power" insisted on the continuing need for a moral-ideological authority independent of the state. Its shape was unclear, but it would draw on the prestige of science and scientists, would be in charge of education, and its role would be to guide public opinion and counsel the temporal power.

Whatever the truth of who took what from whom, Comte, after their parting, barely mentioned his former mentor's name again (referring to him later, in the preface to the second volume of the *Système de politique*, as "a depraved juggler") and never acknowledged any intellectual debt.

In 1825 Comte married Caroline Massin,[7] with whom he had been living for two years. Nothing in Comte's life was ever straightforward. They had met in 1821. Massin, the abandoned daughter of actors, was—if Comte's demeaning later account is to be believed[8]—a prostitute. She also ran a reading room (provided by a wealthy lover) and had her own intellectual interests. A complicated, but mutually supportive, friendship ensued. The marriage, vehemently disapproved of by Comte's family, was intended, on his side, to rescue Massin from her irregular *mode de vie* and most immediately from police registration. For Massin it provided security, or might have if Comte had not proved so difficult a person to live with, and if his career ambitions, which became fixed on a professorship at the École Polytechnique, had come to fruition. Through many trials and storms the marriage lasted till they formally separated in 1842, although they conducted a correspondence for several years thereafter.

The period of Comte's relationship with Massin coincided almost exactly with what Comte retrospectively called his "first career." In this he was, in his own terms, a philosopher, and his major accomplishment was the laborious production of the work by which he is best known: the *Cours de philosophie positive*.

The program outlined in the "opuscule fondamentale" had pointed in two directions. The most pressing was political, the devising of a realistic and social-science-based program for social reform. But the first and fundamental task, he decided, would be

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7   For a detailed account of Comte's marriage to Caroline Massin, see Pickering (I: 315–26).

8   Comte revealed Massin's scandalous background in the "secret addition" to his *Testament* of 1855, thereby justifying his disinheritance of her, despite being still legally his wife (Pickering III: 479).

to establish a positive, that is, science-based, synthesis of the sciences as the basis for a new socially unifying philosophy. This would necessarily include what he initially called social physics, on the basis of which a scientific program could be designed for the post-revolutionary reconstruction of state and society.

In 1826, feeling himself ready, he gave the first of what eventually became a course of 60 lectures on the history and philosophy of the sciences. However, after the opening lectures, attended by a glittering array of leading scientists, he suffered a mental collapse—complete with a manic episode leading to his forced hospitalization—and was unable to resume his work until 1828.[9]

What resulted was the monumental *Cours de philosophie positive*, published in six volumes between 1830 and 1842. The first three volumes covered mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology; the last three covered social physics which, to distinguish it from the statistically oriented "social physics" of Adolphe Quetelet, he renamed "sociology." Together, the six fundamental sciences constituted what he called the "encyclopedic scale." Beginning with mathematics, the object-domain of each succeeding science was less general and more complex than the one before. Each science, correspondingly, depended on the prior establishment of those that preceded it—astronomy on mathematics, chemistry on physics, sociology on biology, and so forth. Altogether, then, the scale traced the order, both historical and logically necessary, of their rise to positivity. The *Cours* concluded its lengthy exposition of sociology with an analysis of the French Revolution and of the wider Western crisis accompanying the transition to industrial society, and the outline of a program to resolve it.

Volume Six of the *Cours* also contained a personal preface in which Comte inveighed against his enemies, real and imagined, for blocking his efforts to obtain a professorship at the École Polytechnique. He had been able to gain the position of *répétiteur* (an assistant teaching post) in 1832 and *examineur* (for entrance exams) in 1837. But despite, and because of, his increasingly insistent lobbying during the 1830s he failed to get the professorship of mathematics he sought at the École, or to persuade the Collège de France to create a new professorship for him in the history and philosophy of the sciences.[10] By 1844 he had lost both posts at the École and from then on sought to support himself and his activities through subscriptions for publications and direct gifts. With the academic world now firmly closed off as a base from which to launch his project of intellectual and social–political reform, Comte began to recruit and to raise funds for his own organization. This, the vehicle for organizing what became the Church of Humanity, was formally set up in 1848 as the Positivist Society.

Response to the *Cours* was slow at first, but by the early 1840s it had begun to draw some admiring notice. Notable among early enthusiasts were John Stuart Mill and the

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9   Comte's episodes of mental illness, and the more general question of his psychological peculiarities, have been commented on by many. See, for example, Sokoloff (1975) and Kofman (1978). Comte himself interpreted his 1826 breakdown as a regression to childhood fetishism and a subjective confirmation of his law of three states.

10 For a history of Comte's troubled relations with the École Polytechnique, see Gentil (2012).

eminent French academician Emile Littré, through whose support and expository writings (Mill 1968; Littré 1971) Comte's positive philosophy became more widely disseminated. Although Comte and Mill never met, Mill initiated a correspondence in 1841 that lasted for six years. It was at first a meeting of minds. But strains developed as Comte attempted to assert leadership and pressed Mill to find subscribers for his project. Mill was alarmed, too, by the illiberal strain in Comte's social program. The final break came in 1847 over the issue of women's equality, which Comte opposed on physiological grounds (women's brains were apparently smaller).

The episode with Mill overlapped with a larger shake-up in Comte's life and thinking. In what he called his first career, he had been the Aristotle of positivism: in his second career, he was to be its St. Paul. The catalyst for the shift was his brief but transformative romance with Clotilde de Vaux.[11]

Clotilde, an aspiring writer from a well-to-do family who had been abandoned by her husband, had met Comte in 1844 through her brother, who was attending Comte's public lectures. In the ensuing months they began a passionate but Platonic (at her insistence) relationship. In a happy and hierarchical division of roles between head and heart that he had never been able to impose on Massin, the teacher had found his acolyte, the muse her guru. Clotilde opened Comte not only to art and literature but to the whole world of feeling and sentiment. In their relationship, too, he discovered a form of love (pure, altruistic, harmonious, differential) that transformed his thinking and became, for him, the very prototype of social regeneration. His happiness, though, was short-lived. Clotilde fell ill with tuberculosis and, after his "glorious year" with her, died in 1846.

Comte emerged from his grief a changed personality. It was as if he had undergone a religious conversion. The rituals and "effusions" he had devised to keep alive and sanctify Clotilde's memory became the devotional starting point for what became the Religion of Humanity, which he now hastened to establish.[12] The experience had also brought about a profound conceptual shift. The sentiments and their moral elevation moved to the center of the picture. The summarizing slogan *ordre et progrès* was replaced by *amour pour principe, ordre pour base, progrès pour but*. The role of women as "the loving sex" became strategic. To the system of the sciences elaborated in the *Cours* was to be added a "subjective synthesis," suffused with love of humanity, culminating in a science of morals.

Both motive and opportunity to present these ideas to a wider public came soon after. Renewed political turmoil in the late 1840s, in which working-class militancy added to republican pressure for democratic reforms, led to the February Revolution in 1848 and the collapse of Louis-Phillipe's "bourgeois monarchy." This touched off a wave of democratic and nationalist uprisings across Europe. Comte entered the arena with *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme* (Comte 1880 [1848]), a summary of the revised position to which he had come. It was, in effect, a positivist manifesto. Positioning itself against

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11 For a hagiographical account of Clotilde and Comte's relationship with her, see Style (1928). For a more balanced study of both Massin and Clotilde, see Pickering (1996) and Gane (1993).

12 Comte's devotional writings about, and to, "Sainte-Clotilde," are included in Comte (2009). For the place of these in Comte's system of private and public worship, see Pickering (II: 226–27).

the communists and radical republicans on the left and the royalists and conservative Catholics on the right, it explicated key features of positivism as a philosophy, contextualized the current crisis, and called on the support of women, workers, artists and *patriciens* of industry for the establishment of a new political and religious settlement required to complete the transition to a stable positive-industrial society. Like the *Communist Manifesto* of that same year it also had an international dimension, calling for the creation of a Western republic as a step toward a federated global society, spiritually united by a positivist outlook capped by the Religion of Humanity.

Comte also appealed to rulers, including the Russian Tsar and the Turkish Sultan. To them he extolled the virtues of positivism and the devolution of their power, as the only way to preserve order while navigating the inevitable transition to industrialism. In similar terms, and just as fruitlessly, he appealed to Louis Napoleon after the coup of 1852, seeing in the Second Empire the possibility of a positivist reform from above. In *Appel aux Conservateurs* (Comte 2010 [1855]) he pitched his program more generally to those alarmed by a chronic instability that neither partisans of revolution nor those of reaction had been able to fix. (Before 1848, one notes, Comte had aligned with other republicans against conservative efforts to restore the *ancien régime*; after 1848, with the restoration project defeated and new threats to order appearing on the left, he sought allies on the right, including among Catholics.)

These interventions, though, contained only general statements. The full version of Comte's post-Clotilde position, which incorporated the 1848 *Discours* as its preamble, was elaborated in his second major work: the *Système de politique positive, ou treatise sur sociologie, instituant la religion de l'Humanité*. (*System of Positive Politics, or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity*). The *Système* was published in four volumes between 1851 and 1854. The first volume dealt with basic principles, including a revised version of the encyclopedic scale and a theoretical preparation for sociology; the second concerned the nature and laws of social order in perfected form; the third the laws and stages of history culminating in the long "Western crisis"; and the fourth concerned the human future, with a detailed account of the fully perfected industrial–positivist society.

As its subtitles indicate, the *Système* had more than one aim. On one level it was the fulfillment of Comte's initial goal: the scientific production of a social program suited to the objective needs of the times. Simultaneously, it was a systematic exposition of sociology—its presuppositions, methodology, statics and dynamics—and its application to an understanding of the present, past and future. More startling, however, was the second subtitle, and the prominent, indeed pervasive, place in the *Système* of Comte's Religion of Humanity.

The forms of worship, doctrines, moral rules and institutional structures of what was projected to be, after Christianity and all other theisms, the dominant new world religion, were laid out in great detail. Among its striking features were: (a) a priesthood of positive philosophers (with himself at the head), who would control education, and provide moral guidance both to the general public and to the temporal managers of the state; (b) a morally elevated (but politically and economically excluded) status for women as part of the spiritual power and as mediators to men of a saving love; (c) a trans-historical concept of Humanity, whose worship was heavily weighted to the

veneration of its dead members and benefactors; and (d) a reconfigured idea of salvation consisting of posthumous incorporation into the "Great Being" for those individuals deemed worthy of being honored and remembered. Overall, even more than its predecessors, the Religion of Humanity was totalistic. Every facet of life and element of society was implicated in its system of worship and moral rule. Indeed, in Comte's revised understanding of religion—which he had initially defined more narrowly in terms of supernatural belief—religion itself, as that which rallies individuals and binds them together, was virtually coextensive with the social totality, and with what unifies it as such (Arbousse-Bastide 1966).

But the *Système* was not just *about* the new religion. It was performative, aiming actually to bring that religion into being. Hence, the prayerful preface invoking the angelic spirit of Clotilde. The sociology it propounded, moreover, was internal to positive religion as part of its doctrine and similar to Christian theology in having as its knowledge object the object of its faith. It was, at the same time, a religion like none before. Its object was a reality cognizable by a positive science. Positive religion was *une foi démontrable*. At its center, Humanity, as that which is immanent in and transcendent to each of its members, was unveiled and worshiped as *le vrai Grand-Être* (the true Great Being).

Comte's religious turn, which the first volume of the *Système* made glaringly apparent, split his followers and did much to discredit him. Littré remained faithful to the positivism of the *Cours* but rejected the *Système* as incompatible with its principles. Like many, he thought Comte had gone mad. (He was also vocal in his disapproval of Comte's contemptuous treatment of Massin.). Mill spoke of the ruin of a great mind.

Unperturbed, Comte recruited, sent missionaries to establish branches in Europe and the New World and continued to elaborate ceremonials, prayers and doctrines for his church. He devised, and revised, a Positivist Calendar (Appendix A), each day, month and trimester dedicated to a different human benefactor in a sequence that would simultaneously take celebrants through the stage-by-stage development of the Great Being, ending with a general Festival of the Dead. In 1852 he published the *Catéchisme positiviste* to explain the doctrines and practices of the Religion of Humanity to a wider public, especially women. He continued to give public lectures. But above all he ploughed on with the ever-expanding synthesis for which the *Cours* and now the *Système* had prepared the way. The result, in 1856, was the first volume (on "positive logic or the philosophy of mathematics") of what was intended to be a four-volume work: the *Synthèse subjective, ou, Système universel des conceptions propres à l'état normal de l'humanité* (*Subjective Synthesis, or Universal System of Conceptions Proper to the Normal State of Humanity*).

As planned, volumes two and three would have treated the theoretical (science of the soul) and practical (moral education) components of the positive philosophy of *la morale*. Together with the first volume, on positive logic and mathematics, these three treatises would comprise the first and last of a revised encyclopedic scale (Appendix C) that structured the "subjective synthesis" of knowledge. In this revised scale, with *la morale* added as a seventh and culminating science, knowledge domains were conceived outwards from humanity ("in its normal state") as the basis for a scientific education that would double as moral–religious training for the positivist priesthood. Of what was envisaged for the fourth volume of the *Synthèse subjective* we have only the title: *Système d'industrie positive, ou*

Traité de l'action totale de l'humanité sur son planète (*System of Positive Industry, or Treatise on the Total Action of Humanity on Its Planet*).

A noteworthy feature of Comte's final work was its recasting of positive religion as a scientifically aware form of "fetishism," the current anthropological term for the animistic projection of spirits into things. Thus, the final form of religion would revert to what it was taken to be in the beginning, but at a higher and scientifically self-conscious level. The schema of worship also became trinitarian. Alongside the cult of Humanity (*le Grand-Être*) was to be a cult of the Earth or the World (*le Grand-Fétiche*) and of Space (*le Grand-Milieu*). In the revised imaginary of positivist worship, these three figures were indexed to the triad of sentiment-action-intelligence, which organized the wider conceptual grid, and both, in turn, to the three logics of sentiments, images and signs, which formed the ground plan for both an understanding of the fundamental branches of mathematics (calculus, algebra and geometry) and a general theory of language and semiology. All this had been hinted at in the *Systême*. But its elaboration became central in the *Synthèse*, and indicated a further development in Comte's thought. Where this might have gone, we do not know. After completing volume one of the *Synthèse*, Comte fell ill with a stomach ailment (probably cancer) from which he had suffered for some time, and a few months later, in February 1857, he died.

In a strange way, Comte had already been writing as if from beyond the grave. The *Synthêse subjective* was written, its preface tells us, as if in 1927. By that time, Comte confidently predicted, the positive industrial order would have been firmly established, and humanity would have achieved its normal, that is, perfectly harmonious, condition. In his *Testament*, written in late 1855 while working on the *Synthèse*, he announced the adoption of this futural viewpoint as a methodological decision:

> habitant une tombe anticipée, je dois désormais tenir aux vivants un langage posthume que sera mieux affranchi des divers préjugés, surtout théoriques, dont nos successeurs se trouveront préservés.

> (Inhabiting an anticipated tomb, I shall henceforth adopt towards the living a posthumous language which will be freer from various prejudices, above all theoretical, from which our successors will find themselves preserved.)

Comte's Thought and Its Difficulties

Among the difficulties facing the modern reader of Comte perhaps none is greater than how to approach a mode of thought that aims to incorporate everything into an all-encompassing system. The very form of such thinking, which reaches back to the great *Summae* of the Middle Ages and whose modern history can be traced from Bacon, Spinoza and Leibnitz to the rival totalizations of Comte and Hegel, strikes us now as hopelessly dated, if not actually dangerous (Hayek 1980; Popper 1945).[13] What is striking about Comte in this regard is not only his "mania for regulation" and "inordinate

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13 Nietzsche's Maxim 26 in part one of *Twilight of the Idols* is also worth citing: "I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."

demand for unity and systematization" (Mill 1961: 153, 141) but the mind-numbing comprehensiveness of what he tried to synthesize: not only the entire range of contemporary scientific knowledge (whose principles Comte considered complete) but history, thought, politics and, in his later work, religion, art, language, morality, subjectivity and the sentiments as well.

The parallels with Hegel (whom Comte never mentions[14]) are evident. Like Hegel's *Encyclopedia* with its circle of circles, Comte's system of systems has no privileged point of entry. It somehow asks to be grasped as a whole. Like Hegel, too, Comte's totalization is historicist and teleological; and it is similarly reflexive, so as to include the rise of the finally knowing subject as a determinate moment in the development of (human) being. But there is an important difference. Hegel's philosophy was self-sufficient as a contemplative totality. For Comte, on the other hand, (positive) theory was always for the sake of practice. Both the *Cours* and the *Système de politique positive* presented themselves as urgent and essential steps for resolving the crisis of the transition to industrialism. Positivism itself was a political intervention. Nor, by the same token, was history over. To be sure, Comte's final writings assume the fully harmonized position of a (positivization) process fully accomplished. But Comte's Minerva only spreads her wings in the future-perfect of 1927. The prediction takes us through the fog of the future in a flight sustained by faith. To close the system and keep history on its scientifically predicted course, action was required: in the shape of a political program with allies and supporters to bring it about, central to which was the installation of a new spiritual power without which, indeed, the epistemic shift upon which all else depended could not itself be sustained.

It would be impossible here to follow all the intricacies of Comte's system(s). Some sense of the detail can be gleaned from his summarizing charts and diagrams in Appendices A–D. But three further points, and puzzles, about Comte's thought and its architecture are worth highlighting, each of which has given rise to much debate among commentators.

Positivisme

The first concerns the meaning of *positivisme* itself. Championed or opposed, the term came to have a much narrower meaning than Comte gave it. As he made clear in *Discours sur l'esprit du positivisme* (1843) positivism was not just an epistemological principle, although it was certainly that. It was a spirit, a manner of thinking, that suffused every aspect of the philosophy it named and, in its wider meaning, it took on all the connotations of the word.

To begin at the most basic level: positive phenomena are those that impose themselves on the senses from the outside. Whence, positive as real, non-imaginary, and positivism as the principle that truth claims should be limited to what can be validly inferred from

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14 Beyond vague references to the "vain speculations" of German philosophy, there is no evidence that Comte had read, or knew anything about, Hegel. Kant, however, is cited once or twice with qualified approval: "Hume is my principal precursor in philosophy, but with Hume I connect Kant as an accessory" (Comte 2010 (1858): 7).

phenomena. Whence, too, the "relative" rather than "absolute" status of such knowledge. Comte followed Hume and Kant in his insistence that we could not go behind phenomena to things in themselves, nor to real causes. In breaking from theology and metaphysics, a positive approach to knowledge renounced notions of absolute truth and the vain, ultimately mystical, quest for it. Enquiry should limit itself to what can be known. Astronomy for example should confine itself to the operations of the solar system for it is the limit of what we can observe in any detail, and beyond it nothing materially affects us (Gane 2006: 59).

For Comte, at the same time, positive knowledge was far from a-theoretical. While the "concrete sciences," like geology, focused on empirical objects, the fundamental sciences that they applied were abstract. What they aimed to know were the laws, the invariable regularities, which obtain in a general class of phenomena. Nor were their procedures purely inductive. First, because they presupposed that there were such laws (*l'ordre universel*); secondly because each science had to go through an arduous preparation in which its break to positivity—in an order determined by its place in the encyclopedic scale—depended on forming a conception of its field, and on an appropriate methodology. The methodological sequence, in the movement up the scale from mathematics to sociology, went from calculation, observation and experiment to comparison and the historical method.

From such considerations came that synthesis of the sciences that Comte called positive philosophy. What should be underlined is that this was neither an apriori construct, propounding the essence of science-in-general, nor a mathematical unification, as advanced in Comte's day by Pierre Laplace (Comte 1896 I: 41). Positive philosophy drew its schemas and principles—eventually distilled into the 15 axioms of "first philosophy" (Appendix D)—from what it took to be the actual history, methods and results of the sciences, including the order in which they had become positive. That history, in turn, was calibrated with the overall movement of dominant philosophies, from theology in its various stages (fetishism, polytheism, monotheism) through metaphysics to positivism. Positive philosophy was, indeed, doubly positive. On the one hand, it articulated the principles of the positive sciences and the logic of their formation. On the other hand, by treating constellations of knowledge and belief as empirical realities it placed them in the domain of the socio-historical, and thus within the purview of the laws presumed to operate at that level.

As Comte conceived it, in short, positive philosophy was the positivization of philosophy itself. It marked a definitive break at the highest, and synthesizing, level of thought from the fictions, abstractions and absolutisms of theology and metaphysics. Moreover, it not only constituted a change in theoretical mode, it was also that change itself, grasped positively: that is, in the overall context of the modern transition from Catholic-feudalism to positive-industrialism in which the rise of the sciences was a determined, and determining, element.

The positive spirit also extended to practice. As Bacon had seen in his *New Organon*,[15] a science that establishes empirical laws is predictive—if x under condition C then y—which

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15 Aphorism 3 of the *New Organon*: "Human knowledge and human power meet in one; for, where the cause is not known, the effect cannot be produced. Nature to be commanded must be obeyed; and that which in contemplation is as the cause is in operation as the rule."

fitted it like a glove for technical application. In Comte's formula: *voir pour prévoir; prévoir pour pouvoir* (observe to predict; predict to empower). This was evident in the sphere of material production. The scientific revolution had paved the way for the industrial revolution, which had vastly enhanced humanity's power to modify its terrestrial milieu. But sociology now made possible scientifically informed action directed at society itself. Whence positive politics, with its scientific diagnosis of society's post-1789 "great crisis," and its reconstructive program for the coming new order. And here we come to a further connotation of positive: positive as opposed to negative, constructive as opposed to destructive, and indeed useful as opposed to useless. To which relates also an ideological sense, in which positivism as an affirmative outlook is contrasted with critical, metaphysical and negative doctrines such as those, for example, that anarchically proclaimed the liberty of the individual and, at worst, attacked any and all constraining authority.

The positive spirit, lastly, was incarnate in Comte's reform program itself. The vision it held out was not merely scientifically derived, as an inductively arrived at law leading to a prediction of the normal order that the transition should lead to. In the final phase of human development, the entire society and its institutions, from the family and economy to the state, religion and ruling philosophy would be positivized. In their form and function, that is, they would operate on lines consistent with what biology and social science prescribed, individually and collectively, for a full state of health and normality.

The Two Comtes

The second issue, and among Comte's nineteenth-century followers the most contentious, concerns the relation between the *Cours* and the *Système*, and more generally between the writings of Comte's "first" and "second" careers.

For Comte, himself, however profound the personal and mental changes he went through in the 1840s, there was an essential continuity to his oeuvre. The *Cours* was a provisional synthesis, the *Système* a final one; but the first was a necessary preparation for the second and remained the intended cornerstone of a reformed education system. The early writings, too, were incorporated into his self-defined canon. Contemporaries, however, were sharply divided. Among admirers of the first Comte, some, like Pierre Lafitte, and Richard Congreve in England followed him all the way into the Religion of Humanity. But respectable opinion, alarmed by Comte's changed persona and the cult-like eccentricities of his new religion, went with Mill and Littré in rejecting Comte's later work, finding it incompatible with the positivism of the *Cours*. A generation later, Lévy-Bruhl (1903), following the thread of Comte's politics, offered a more continuist reading; but his was the last serious study before Comte's work passed into limbo, and by then positive philosophy, positive religion and sociology had gone their separate ways.

Current views of Comte and the development of his project are less dichotomous than they used to be (Kremer-Marietti 2007, Bourdeau, Gane 2006). As Pickering's intellectual biography has shown, there were several twists and turns, and not one simple divide between pre- and post-Clotilde. In any case, with the coolness of historical distance, it has become easier to set aside earlier controversies surrounding the later writings and to read the *Système* and the *Cours*, and indeed the writings of the 1820s, in the light of one another.

It would be a mistake, though, to downplay the extent of the conceptual shift Comte underwent in the 1840s. The theory of the sentiments, with that of their primacy vis-à-vis thought and action, was not a mere add-on. It changed the matrix. In effect, a binary organizing schema—theory/practice, or knowledge/action—was turned into a tripartite one, with effects at every level. Positive philosophy, infused with benevolent love, transmuted into the "subjective synthesis." In the revised system of sciences, the theory and practice of *la morale*—a hybrid of sociology and biology—was placed at the top. In the revamped sociology of the *Système* we also see significant changes, including the ascendancy of the order motif, the expanded meaning of "religion" (detached from supernatural belief and equated with social reproduction) and the elevation of women to a salvational role in the moral economy of family and society. In the later Comte, there is also a revised historical periodization in which his initial schema of theology–metaphysics–positivism is replaced by a more complex one in which humanity and religion trace a spiraling journey from an original fetishism to a positivist (and consciously imaginary) fetishism via various admixtures of theism and metaphysics (Gane 2007).

Underpinning all these changes to Comte's first system are two crucial innovations. The first is a science of the soul—a frankly speculative construct based on Gall's phrenology, which mapped the faculties of feeling, thought and action, and their 18 subdivisions, onto to specific regions of the brain (Appendix B). The second is the adoption of a religious faith, deemed "demonstrable," in which human society—past present and future—is recognized and venerated as the "true Great Being," and in which positivism itself becomes a kind of theology. Neither can be said to be simple derivatives from arguments advanced in the *Cours*.

Sociology at the Center

A third point about the overall structure of Comte's thought is perhaps the most obvious: the centrality of sociology. It is not just that five volumes of his major works are devoted to establishing it. Sociology is the lynchpin of his whole construct. Down one track, sociology enables there to be positive politics and a scientific diagnosis and program. Down another, sociology completes the scientific revolution, making a synthesis of the sciences possible. In the *Cours*, the synthesis itself depends on sociology, with the whole process of positivization being internal to sociology's field of study. In the second system, the role of sociology increases further: (a) it is the science of the absolute, of Humanity—and so occupies a similar place in positive religion as theology in Christianity; and (b) it installs the "social viewpoint" which, in turn, is a cognitive bridge to altruism and the moral elevation at which positive religion and morale aim.

Comte's Sociology

Of course, Comte's sociology could only play so central a role in his construct if it were constituted in the right way and delivered the right result. And, magically, it does. Comte's sociology, as Durkheim noted (1982: 119), builds in a teleology or, as we would say, a grand narrative, with only the flimsiest of "positive" demonstrations. And that is

before we pick apart a concept of society that could inflate it into an object of worship. Not only Durkheimians, but modern sociology more generally (especially in the liberal anglosphere) has remained aloof from Comte for these reasons.

But if we are to extract anything of value from Comte there is no point belaboring the obvious, nor getting stuck in mere negation. If we set aside the laws of order and progress that Comte prematurely claimed to have established—the "positive" guise of his metaphysics—what Comte's sociology gives us is something more interesting: (a) a project for a science of society which, with all its misconceptions, opens out onto a vast program of research (that Comte never carried out!) and (b) a substantive analysis of both world history and of the (crisis-ridden) transition to industrial modernity. The latter, if we relax its scientific pretensions, we can regard as interpretative: one heuristic mapping of modernity among several that fed from the nineteenth century into twentieth-century social thought. It is in such general terms that Comte's sociology and its vicissitudes have, for all the disavowals, influenced the social sciences, particularly via Durkheim and his school.

But what was Comte's sociology? In its basic features, Comte's sociology can be summed up as holistic, socio-historical and comparative. That is to say, *first*, its focus was on society as a whole, taken to be an integral being irreducible to the individuals who comprise it.[16] Behind this was a quasi-biological model in which the organized human group was conceived as a system of interlinked organs and functions. Like biology, then, and in contrast to the physical sciences, sociology proceeded from the whole to the parts. The smallest social unit, and the germ cell of society, was the family; the largest unit was humanity which came into its own only in the last stage of social development as an englobing society of societies. *Second*, society did not have a fixed form, but changed its institutional shape through time. Each metamorphosis involved a crisis of transition—a "critical period"—followed by restored harmony in a new mental and institutional order. Differences between types of society reflected differences in stages of development. Using both historical and contemporary data, then, one could compare instances of the same type of society and arrange different types of society into a logical and historical series.

Sociology, accordingly, had two departments: statics and dynamics. The first aimed to discover the laws of order, that is, how societies cohered, with what patterns of family, state, economy, language, ideas and religion, and within what limits of variation. The second concerned the laws of progress, that is, the direction of change, the succession of phases through which it occurred, and its institutional and theoretical–ideological ramifications.

In principle, both were inductive operations: on the statics side, the discovery of regularities of concomitance; on the dynamic side regularities of succession. The scale and

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16 "Man […] as an individual, cannot properly be said to exist, except in the exaggerated abstractions of metaphysicians. Existence in the true sense can only be predicated of Humanity" (Comte 1880: 354).

difficulty of the research such a gargantuan enquiry would have required had it been pursued with any methodological rigor are beyond imagination. Comte's charts, series and sweeping historical vistas put some meat on the bone; but they were more in the nature of persuasive illustrations than empirical proofs. And two of Comte's principal ideas, the law of three states and the need for a science-age spiritual power to replace the Catholic Church, had been already formulated in the works of Comte's youth. But urgency drove him on. The prime task at hand, a positive analysis of the present situation, could only come after the laws of statics and dynamics had been established. Only then could one deduce from the past the direction of change, the transitional nature of the present crisis, and the shape of the post-feudal order struggling to be born. It was a Comtean dictum that the middle of three terms was to be understood in terms of the end points that it mediated.

Three further features of Comte's sociology that flow from its general design are also worth noting.

First, the flip side of having a strong, not to say realist, concept of society was a focus on the problem of social solidarity and, more generally, on what—given the strength of selfish drives—binds individuals together, both with one another and with the group as a whole. A considerable amount of Comte's sociology and theorizing about human nature, was devoted to this problem, especially in the *Système*. It is in this context, reflecting as well the importance of Christianity and its future in the ideological battles of post-Revolutionary France, that religion came to occupy the foreground of Comte's sociological attention. It is a preoccupation, one may add, that carries through into twentieth-century French sociology, not only via Durkheim and the Annales school, but also through the heretical offshoot represented by Georges Bataille and the Collège de Sociologie. Bataille's first major work—a trilogy of writings on "inner experience," "the guilty," and Nietzsche—was titled (with an implicit tip of the hat to Comte as well as Aquinas) *Summa Atheologica*.

Secondly, in designating *fétichisme* (the projecting of spirits into objects) the earliest form of religion in the earliest form of society, Comte was following a common contemporary practice whereby humanity's prehistoric origins were read into what at the time were taken to be the practices and beliefs of the "primitive" peoples encountered by expanding European empires.[17] Understood this way, the concept of fetishism had a double function in Comte's sociology. First, it served as an alternative to classical antiquity and medieval Europe, both as a reference point for understanding the distinctiveness of contemporary society, and as a help toward developing a relative standpoint, so as to appraise each epoch of social development in its own terms as well as in terms of its place in the ladder of progress. Secondly, as the originating matrix in the genesis of religion (Canguilhem 1995), *fétichisme* provided a clue to the deepest structures of social life. Here, too, in the equation of the primal with the elemental, and aided by the rise of ethnography, we find a theme that runs through much of modern French social theory. It

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17 For the history (and cultural misperception) of "fetishism" in Western ethnology and social theory, see Pietz (1985, 1987 and 1988).

is evident in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and also, by way of Mauss's *Essay on the Gift*, in Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Forms of Kinship* and, more radically, in Jean Baudrillard's notion of symbolic exchange.

The third point concerns the ambiguous role, in Comte's sociology, of ideas and consciousness. Ambiguous because, at first sight, his sociology is straightforwardly idealist: social order rests on a mental consensus, and the progress of that order follows the logic of the shift in dominant consciousness from theism and metaphysics to positivism. However, as his later work makes clear, order is multi-dimensional and involves a harmony of practice and sentiment as well as of ideas. And, likewise, on the dynamic side, Comte's story of humanity is not just the unfolding of mind in its ascent to positive knowledge and mental maturity. Epistemological progress, and that of the sentiments, too, is integrally linked to the rise of industry, that is, organized productive work, a dialectical process in which, on the one side, practical interests drive the pursuit of knowledge and, on the other, humanity's capacity to modify its environment, and thereby itself, increases with the rise of positive science.

That Comte's construct has some affinities with Marx's historical materialism is not surprising, given their common root in Saint-Simon. It remains the case, though, that the socio-historical importance of (collective) ideas is greater for Comte than for Marx and, in the final transition, is indeed decisive. Moreover, if Comte's pairing of feudalism and Catholicism and of industry and positivism, implies a kind of base/superstructure model, it is quite different from that of Marx. Not only is a greater effectivity attributed to the superstructure. In the economic base—society's "nutritive function" (Comte 1880: 393 et seq)—no real distinction is made between technical and economic relations, and distribution and exchange are missing as problems or structures. Thus, although in his discussion of the rise of industry Comte draws from Adam Smith an appreciation of the division of labor as a driver of productivity and wealth creation, he has nothing to say about the "hidden hand" of the market or about commodity production, or about the structural significance of these for social class and political power. In general, that is to say, industrialism and capitalism are conflated, which again is a feature of Comtian sociology that passes over into Durkheim and the French classical tradition.

Chapters and Themes

In keeping with the *Companion*'s aim to provide a general introduction, the chapters that follow explore a wide range of themes prominent in Comte's work. All in some way concern Comte's contribution to sociology and social theory. All build on the scholarship and reflection that, in the past few decades, have brought Comte's thought and writings in from the margins (work to which many of these authors have themselves contributed). And all, as a consideration especially emphasized in this collection, aim to throw new light on the place of Comte's thought and its legacy in the wider traditions of modern Western thought.

Johan Heilbron leads off with an essay on Comte's best known work, the *Course of Positive Philosophy*. Heilbron's reading, which takes account of the central role played by French mathematicians and scientists in Comte's own day, frontally challenges what has

been a predominantly historicist interpretation of this work. For Heilbron, the *Cours* was a path-breaking effort to bring an overall coherence to the proliferating disciplines, capped by those of the life sciences, associated with the "second scientific revolution." Its central thread, he argues, concerns not the law of three states—still less when this is understood as a deterministic progression—but the "encyclopedic scale" with its differential epistemology and compellingly elegant schema for understanding how the fundamental branches of scientific knowledge are both distinguished and interrelated.

The chapter by Derek Robbins further explores the meaning and historical context of positive philosophy. His approach is, however, from the side of Comte's social science, with its social and historical reflexivity and its dual logic of statics and dynamics. Taking his cues from Jacques Derrida's (philosophical) and Pierre Bourdieu's (sociological) reflections on Husserl's distinction between the "structure" and "genesis" of ideas, Robbins examines the project of Comte's "first career" at three historical junctures, 1822, 1830 and 1842. Rejecting any simple, linear account of how Comte's thought developed from his early twenties to its elaboration in the *Cours*, Robbins analyses it as a shifting constellation, the contents of which should be understood both in their own terms and in terms of changes in the political and intellectual fields to which Comte's intertwined concepts of sociology and positive philosophy pertained.

Breaking from the classical tradition of political philosophy that descended from Aristotle, Comte's "positive politics" introduced a clear distinction between state and society and between the political and the social. Indeed, it was the second of these terms that Comte made the object of the new science he claimed to have established. But how—Jean Terrier asks—did Comte understand their relation to one another? And what, more fundamentally, did he understand by the social and the political in the first place? Terrier examines both Comte's earlier and later work in pursuit of these questions, arguing first that Comte's innovation was to subordinate the political instance— understood as the dimension of order and cohesion—by incorporating it within a larger understanding of society; and second that he rejected both the individualist/rationalist account of society as a deliberately fashioned structure (favored by contract theorists and the *légistes* of the Revolution) and the account of the "naturalists" who argued that differences between forms of society were determined by external factors such as climate, geography or race. Instead, although with some ambiguity, Comte settled on an understanding of society as a dense combination of social relations with its own quasi-autonomous forms of determinacy.

That Comte's social program, summarized in the slogan "order and progress," combined Enlightenment with counter-Enlightenment themes, has long been recognized. But the conservative element in his thinking, which became more pronounced in the 1840s and 1850s, and the sources on which he drew, has been little studied. In a corrective to views such as those of Pierre Macherey, the French Althusserian, which downplay, against Comte's own assertions, the direct importance to Comte of the Catholic counter-revolutionaries, and especially de Maistre, Carolina Armanteros examines the relation of Comte to these thinkers and to their "retrograde" revaluation of medieval Christendom. Ranging across Comte's neo-medievalism, her chapter treats not only the impact of Catholicism on his proposed church and Religion of Humanity, but also his *culte de femme*

and revived form of chivalry in a wide-ranging essay that also disentangles the influence of de Maistre from that of Louis de Bonald and François-Renée de Chateaubriand.

From positive philosophy to positive politics to positive religion, Comte's entire life work was conceived as an effort to provide the intellectual and moral foundations for the new industrial society that was emerging from the ruins of feudalism. Only thus could the "great crisis" that he took to be the hallmark of his age be overcome. My own chapter examines Comte's analysis of this crisis, why he thought it to be so threatening and in what sense it was for him most deeply a crisis of religion. In these terms, the chapter goes on to explore the largely unrecognized relation between Comte's analysis of the decline of theism, *négativisme* and the post-Revolutionary crisis, and Nietzsche's much better known problematization of European nihilism and the "death of God." In this, I argue, Comte was not just a precursor of Nietzsche. Comte offered a rival framework with its own heuristic value for understanding nihilism in the age of the death of the social.

Reading Comte against the grain of his scientism, as one who came—in the *Système* and in his religious moment—to place fantasy, imagination and emotion at the center of his sociological account, Tom Kemple's chapter offers a critical reassessment of Comte's "impossible project." Kemple focuses especially on Comte's concern for the (re)moralization of civic culture, examining the place of this aspect of his thinking in both phases of his career. Kemple also examines derivations and modifications of Comte's thinking in Durkheim's reflections on civic morals, professional ethics and the role of the modern university. After an examination of what underlay Comte's design for a Temple of Humanity, Kemple concludes with a reflection on the continuing significance of Comte's concerns and on the need to expand his understanding of the "estates" (women, workers and intellectuals) crucial to a revitalization of civic culture.

One of the least commented-on aspects of Comte's work concerns the role of art and artists. And yet, as Stephanos Geroulanos notes in his chapter, it is a prominent theme in Comte's later writings and is particularly emphasized in the manifesto-like *Discourse on the Whole of Positivism* that Comte rushed out during the revolutionary upheaval of 1848. In Comte's utilitarian vision of the place of art in social regeneration, art and the imagination it unleashes lose the autonomy claimed for art in modern practice; and, yet, through its idealizing capacity, and in the form of futural utopias, art would become the creative and goal-setting inspiration for social regeneration itself. In his examination of this theme, Geroulanos shows the links between Comte's aesthetics, his interest in architecture, and the Wagnerian idea of *gesamtkunstwerk*. Geroulanos also shows how the linkage between Comte's regenerative art links his ideas forward to the social regeneration and "New Man" ideologies of the twentieth century, as exemplified by socialist realism, on the one hand, and De Corbusier's architecture on the other.

Comte's patriarchal and gender-dimorphic approach to the "woman question" of his day—including his insistence on the intellectual inferiority of women—repelled John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor and is among the most dated and derided facets of his thinking. Strangely, though, as Mary Pickering demonstrates in her chapter, Comte's thought, including his social program, proved to be of great appeal to several of Victorian England's most important women intellectuals. Pickering's essay caps her pathbreaking intellectual biography of Comte with this study of his influence in the thought

and politics of Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, Annie Besant and Beatrice Webb. In her examination of these figures Pickering not only traces, in the lives and works of each, the appeal of Comte's thought and the selective uses they made of it, but also shows how, refracted through their influence, Comte's positive sociology, politics and religion had a formative impact on important currents of radical and reformist thought.

Another set of paradoxes in the politics of Comte's reception is the focus of Mike Gane's essay. For Comte, liberal economics and doctrines of individual freedom were intrinsic to the crisis that positivism, with its sociocratic polity and religion, aimed to over-come. Against that background, Gane examines the counter critique mounted by liberal theorists against Comte's vision for the new industrial order. Gane's examination moves from Herbert Spencer to the demonizing critiques of Friedrich Hayek, Karl Popper and Eric Voegelin, to contemporary neo-liberalism, and counterpoints these with the more ambiguously placed positions of Durkheim and Marx. In addition to noting family resemblances between critics and their object—for example, with respect to ideas about social science and theories of historical development—Gane argues that historical devel-opments since the nineteenth century, in the shape of the USSR, post-Communist China and the post-democratic regimes of global capitalism, have given a renewed relevance to Comte's own predictions regarding the (illiberal) emergence of positive-industrial society.

This volume concludes with an essay by Robert Scharff who, like Gane but from a different direction, argues for Comte's continuing relevance in the critical self-understanding of our own epoch. Against the conventional wisdom in philosophy that positivism is dead and that "we are all post-positivists now," Scharff contends, first, that Comte's positivism is not at all the same as the narrow form that came to bear that name; and, second, that regardless of the obsolescence of such positivistic thinking in philoso-phy, a form of empiricist and expert-centered scientism has become culturally dominant as the shared and taken-for-granted ground of experience and judgment. That being so, Comte's three-stage historical model, with its prediction of a positivist future, is not easily dismissed; however, for those disquieted by his idealization of such a future, a new quasi-Comtian question emerges of whether it is plausible to imagine for humanity a fourth, and better, stage.

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Chapter One

AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE SECOND SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

Johan Heilbron

Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–42) is a classic in the more ambiguous meaning of the term. As a canonical text in philosophy and social science it is widely referred to as the founding statement of positivism and sociology, but the *Cours* belongs to the category of classics that, although routinely referenced, are no longer read. Very rarely is it discussed in any detail, and references to it tend to be limited to the stereotype of positivism as a kind of generalized, somewhat naive, and in any case outdated, belief in the models and methods of the natural sciences.

In the specialized literature on Comte, furthermore, surprisingly few authors have explicitly raised the question of how to assess the content and status of the *Cours*. The most common qualifications amount to general assertions about positivism but remain vague as to how the six volumes of the *Cours* are structured, what kind of material they contain and what arguments are actually made. Moreover, what Comte aimed to achieve is most frequently described in terms that are borrowed from his later writings, if not from neo-positivist thought that emerged only decades after his death.

One of the major obstacles to understanding the *Cours* is that in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the theory, history and sociology of science have parted ways. Each one has become a specialized endeavor, with its own degrees, departments and journals, and exchanges across their boundaries have become increasingly difficult. In the current academic division of labor properly historical questions tend to be relegated to historians, social aspects of science to sociologists and epistemological issues to philosophers. Such a partitioning of tasks, however, produces more problems than it solves. In textbooks for the philosophy of science, for example, Comte has virtually disappeared. Positivism is identified with a later version, "logical positivism," which has supplanted Comte's historical approach to scientific knowledge.[1] In sociology Comte is mentioned as having introduced the word sociology, and some textbooks briefly discuss

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1   Reference works in the philosophy of science typically mention "positivism" in the index, while adding "see logical positivism." For one example among many, see the *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Science* (2008).

his sociological ideas, but his more encompassing theory of science is ignored. As to the history of science, Comte's writings are widely held to be outdated and are referred to seriously only by specialists of early nineteenth-century science.[2]

In large part because of the current division of academic labor and the dominant views within each of the relevant disciplines, Comte's main work, *Cours de philosophie positive*, is, I believe, profoundly misunderstood. The general reason for this misunderstanding is that the prevailing perception of the *Cours* is thoroughly anachronistic. It is anachronistic in the sense that it tends to separate epistemological, sociological and historical considerations that, for Comte himself, were inseparable. And it is anachronistic in another, more specific, sense as well: it is generally based on later conceptions of positivism, either on Comte's own later writings and teachings, or on the work of neo-positivists of the early twentieth century.[3]

Against this widespread anachronistic view and reading practice I will present two arguments. Drawing on earlier work, I will first argue that the *Cours de philosophie positive* proposes a *historico-differential theory of science*.[4] Comte was, I think, the first to systematically elaborate such a conception of science. In the second part of this chapter I will propose an historical interpretation of this theory, arguing that Comte's magnum opus is best understood as a theory of the *second scientific revolution*. Historians of science have occasionally evoked a "second" scientific revolution, but the expression has not caught on, and both its meaning and its implications have remained diffuse. A growing body of historical scholarship has, however, convincingly documented that between roughly the 1770s and the 1830s a profound transformation of the scientific field occurred. The core of this transformation was that national academies lost several of the functions they had previously fulfilled to a range of new scientific institutions that were based on more specialized disciplines. As a consequence of this change, unitary frameworks such as the conception of "natural philosophy" declined and gave way to more disciplinary arrangements. This deep-seated transformation, I argue, was the background for many of the

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2   Unlike superficial dismissals of Comte's understanding of the sciences, Gillispie concludes his monumental overview of the sciences in France around 1800, by remarking that Comte drew his insights from the "practice of science" rather than from theories, and that in doing so he was an "acute, attentive, and informed critic of the science of his time." In contrast to contemporary reports by prominent scientists such as Delambre and Cuvier, Comte "penetrates beneath the surface to what was fundamentally at issue with respect to both methods and results" (Gillispie 2004: 654). Gillispie, however, refrains from commenting on Comte's epistemology, implicitly leaving that to philosophers and restricting his appreciation to what he considers to belong to the history of science proper.

3   In what sense and to what extent there is (dis)continuity between the *Cours* and Comte's later work is an issue I have to leave aside here. Mary Pickering has highlighted the most important elements of continuity. I am inclined to attach more weight to the differences between the *Cours* and Comte's later writings, Annie Petit has a more nuanced view; see Pickering (1993, 2009), Petit (2016) and Wernick (2001).

4   For a more detailed elaboration, see Heilbron (1995, 2003, 2015). Originally based on a lecture I gave in Ghent, an earlier version of this chapter was published in *Sartoniana*, Vol. 27, 2014, 149–68.

questions Comte grappled with during the 1820s and 1830s, and to which his *Cours* provided a systematic and detailed answer.

What Is the *Cours de philosophie positive* About?

According to the predominant view, the *Cours de philosophie positive* somehow demonstrated that positive or scientific knowledge is, can or should be distinguished from metaphysics or, more broadly, from other forms of knowledge. Comte's *Cours* would allow a demarcation of scientific from nonscientific statements—whether metaphysical or theological. If such an analytic device exists, it follows that it can be applied to all sciences, so that the social sciences can finally become a truly scientific endeavor as well, and the sciences as a whole can be—(methodo)logically—unified. This view is well established. It is, of course, the view of the Vienna circle and other proponents of logical positivism. But this conception has very little to do with what Comte actually advanced and, in reality, it is an astounding misreading of what the *Cours* contains.

The *Cours de philosophie positive*, like most of Comte's writings, has a clear and unambiguous structure. It contains two introductory lessons on "positive philosophy" or rather on "philosophy of the sciences" as Comte would have preferred to call it.[5] The *Cours* was indeed about the sciences and not about the "philosophy of mind" or any other philosophical specialty.[6] What follows this introduction are six parts on the fundamental sciences which, according to Comte, need to be distinguished from applied knowledge.

In the first and best-known lesson Comte presents a *historical theory of knowledge*.[7] Human knowledge evolves from the theological or fictitious mode of understanding, to the metaphysical or abstract mode, and from there to the positive or scientific mode. After having understood reality as being governed by deities and abstract principles, knowledge in the positive stage refrains from inquiring into the intimate nature of reality (essences) and abandons the search for first or final causes. The theological and metaphysical mode of understanding is replaced by the search for law-like regularities—that is, for durable "relations of similarity and succession" (Comte 1830–35: 22) of the phenomena under study.

Unlike what is often stated, Comte does not claim any originality for this conception of positive or scientific knowledge. Quite to the contrary. He asserts that this conception

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5   Comte uses the expression "philosophie des sciences" in the four-page *Avertissement*, which is omitted in the commonly used recent edition of the *Cours*. Prepared under the responsibility of Michel Serres and proudly presented as the "first scientific edition," this volume has many other deficiencies aside from the omitted "avertissement": notes abound in anachronistic comments, misleading (sub)titles are used and, contrary to earlier editions, there is no index.

6   Philosophers have often been tempted to discuss Comte's *Cours* in relationship to philosophical specialties while, miraculously, ignoring his analysis of the sciences. A recent example is Karsenti (2006).

7   For Comte's historico-critical outlook, which is at odds with the interpretations of John Stuart Mill and later neo-positivists, see Scharff (1995).

emerged over a period of almost two centuries and is common knowledge among scientists. What he did claim originality for was his identification of three successive stages in the development of human understanding. In the tradition of Turgot and Condorcet, Comte designed his own scheme of the historical progress of human understanding, which is indeed in several respects distinct from the ones proposed by his "illustrious predecessors."[8]

The second lesson presents what I prefer to call a *differential theory of science*. Observing that there is not one science, but a plurality of sciences, Comte asked how they are related to each other. Recognizing that any classification is more or less arbitrary, he argued that one could not do with less than six fundamental sciences. These sciences have historically become distinct; they cannot be reduced to one another, nor can they be understood as expressions of the same basic type or as realizations of some general method or model.

The oldest and most distinguished science, mathematics, consists of two branches: abstract and concrete mathematics. Abstract mathematics is a purely rational or logical endeavor, basically analysis. Concrete mathematics consists of geometry and mechanics. Both have an empirical basis but have evolved into mathematical techniques rather than empirical sciences. Astronomy is directly related to concrete mathematics. Astronomers study the geometry and mechanics of celestial bodies. By combining systematic observations of planetary movements with mathematical techniques, astronomy became a science of its own. Physics is already a more complex and less unified science: it cannot be reduced to mechanics, although physical phenomena (light, heat, electricity, magnetism) are simple enough for mathematical description. Chemists study matter at a more composite level, that of molecular composition and decomposition. In addition to the laws of mechanics and physics, these processes are subject to a specific type of regularity, namely "chemical affinities." Biologists study the conduct of beings—conduct that cannot be explained by physical forces and chemical affinities, since it depends on the anatomy and physiology of living bodies. Human beings, finally, represent an even more complex order of phenomena, because they have the capacity to learn and have acquired a mastery of their environment that no other species has.

The sciences, Comte argued, thus form a series of *increasing complexity* and *decreasing generality*. The laws of mechanics and physics are relatively simple and valid for all natural phenomena, large and small, animate and inanimate. Chemistry is a more complex and less general science: there are many physical phenomena with no chemical effects, but no chemical phenomena without physical effects. The laws of biology are again more complicated and are valid only for life forms. The laws of human societies are still more

8   About this tradition of thought, see especially Jean Dagen (1977) and Frédéric Rouvillois (2010). Dagen concludes his study in the following manner: "The eighteenth century has not formally discovered the Comtean law of the three states, but it seems to have readily accepted this dynamic principle of intelligence according to which mythical and religious thought irresistibly evolves into positive knowledge. More or less clearly, Fontenelle, d'Alembert, Turgot, and Condorcet sensed it. We are very close to positivism here." (539)

complex and less general; human beings thus represent the smallest subset of natural phenomena.

As a consequence of the increasing levels of complexity, different methods prevail in the various sciences. In addition to the mathematical and observational methods of astronomy, physicists developed the experimental method, biologists the comparative method and social scientists the historical method. Increasing complexity implies that a greater variety of research methods can be used, although certain methods lose their significance. In chemistry, for example, mathematics is still of some use, whereas in biology the "enormous numerical variations" of the phenomena and the "irregular variability of effects" make mathematical techniques virtually useless (Comte 1830: 35, 78–79). This last argument applies even more to the social sciences, and Comte accordingly rejected the "social mathematics" of Condorcet and Laplace, as well as Quételet's social physics, which in his view was nothing but "simple statistics" anyway.

The sciences study distinct and irreducible classes of phenomena—relatively autonomous levels of reality as we would now say—and in order to do justice to their varying degrees of complexity they have their own procedures of inquiry and specific modes of conceptualization. This differential conception of science was an ingenious way to transcend the dichotomies and conflicting positions that existed at the time. On the one hand it proposed a rigorous alternative to the reductionist views and strategies advocated by representatives of the mathematical and physical sciences, such as Condorcet, Laplace and Quetélet, who conceived of the social sciences as yet another branch of mathematical physics. On the other hand, it provided an alternative for the spiritualist philosophy of Victor Cousin and his associates at the official Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (founded in 1832). In their opposition to the legacy of Condorcet and other scientists, they had resurrected a conception of social science as a form of moral philosophy, a conception that was fundamentally opposed to the assumptions and procedures of the natural sciences (Delmas 2006, Heilbron 2015, Leterrier 1995).

Comte's scheme of increasing complexity and decreasing generality allowed him to reconceptualize the social sciences as being neither a derivative of, nor opposed to, the natural sciences. Instead of founding the social sciences on one of the natural sciences, as Condorcet, Pierre Jean Cabanis and Adolphe Quételet had advocated, he demonstrated that it was more fruitful to indirectly follow the example of biology. As a distinct science of life, biology had suggested a new understanding of nature and natural science. This new conception was based on the distinction between matter and life, between inanimate and animate bodies. Instead of conceiving them in dichotomous terms, however, as vitalists tended to do, Comte distinguished the life sciences from the sciences of matter in terms of increasing levels of complexity. Comte was, as I have argued elsewhere (1995, 2003), the first to realize that this interpretation of the natural sciences allowed a reconceptualization of the social sciences as well: sociology could be conceived as being to biology what biology was to physics.

The *Cours* thus simultaneously proposed a historical theory of knowledge (Lesson 1) and a differential theory of the sciences (Lesson 2). The first lesson pertains to the evolutionary pattern that the different branches of knowledge have in common, the

second lesson to how the positive sciences differ from one another.[9] Many commentators, who have more or less accurately summarized the introductory lessons of the *Cours*, have curiously refrained from raising the question of how to characterize the remaining parts of the work.[10] But the question cannot be escaped. Is the *Cours* primarily an elaboration of the first lesson, specifying how the different branches of knowledge have gone through these three successive stages? Or is the emphasis on the second lesson, and are the six volumes a specification of the differential approach? Or, another possibility: Are the remaining volumes perhaps primarily concerned with spelling out what the social, political and moral consequences should be of Comte's conception of science?

In contrast to the stereotypes of positivism, the *Cours* is a rigorous and detailed elaboration of the second lesson, *not* of the first. What follows after the introductory lessons is no attempt at demarcating science from theology and metaphysics. The *Cours* is no inquiry into "the positive method"; it is not a treatise about the logic of positive science, nor an undertaking to unify the sciences. Quite to the contrary. What the *Cours* offers is not a unified, but a *historico-differential, theory of science* based on the question how the most recent advances in the sciences could be interpreted in view of the increasing complexity and decreasing generality of their subject matter.[11]

Physics, Biology, Sociology

The *Cours* consists of detailed elaborations of this differential approach for each of the fundamental sciences. Although this is rarely done, any serious discussion of Comte's main work would therefore have to assess his specific interpretation of the various sciences. Although this is not possible in a single chapter, at least some indications may be given as to how Comte developed his approach.

In his analysis of physics, for example, Comte primarily opposed the Laplace school and their attempt to model all branches of physics on celestial mechanics (Fox 1974). Even here, in the domain of a single science, Comte explicitly rejected the urge to unify, and he advocated a differential approach. It was important, he argued, to recognize that physics was a more complex and more varied science than astronomy. The astronomical view of nature—that is of a universe consisting of interacting particles governed by the

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  9 Norbert Elias is one of the rare twentieth-century scholars to have expressed his appreciation for both tenets of Comte's theory of the sciences (Elias 2012).

10 See for example Macherey (1989).

11 For Comte the positive sciences share a certain number of characteristics, and there is obviously a certain unity of science in this sense. But since the structure of the *Cours* is derived from the second lesson, not from the first, there is an unambiguous priority. The intention, structure and message of the *Cours* were indeed directed at presenting a historico-differential theory of science, and neither a unitary theory nor a program for unification. Whereas this interpretation has been contested (Petit 2016: 153), it has been recognized that the whole structure of the *Cours* is contained in the second lesson (Petit 2016: 239). But if the last assertion is correct, it follows that its main result must be a differential, rather than a unitary, theory of science.

laws of Newtonian mechanics—had to be abandoned. Not all physical phenomena can be modeled as forces between particles. Although this Laplacean view had been dominant in France around 1800, it was confronted with various new approaches between 1815 and 1825: Fresnel formulated his wave theory of light (Frankel 1976), Fourier his theory of heat (Friedman 1977), Ampère his theory of electromagnetism (Caneva 1980). Comte praised all these new developments and discussed them in detail in the lessons he dedicated to the respective branches of physics.

In his opposition to the Laplacean program, Comte had a marked preference for Joseph Fourier's style of physics. Fourier's mathematical theory of heat conduction, Comte argued, could very well serve as a model for theories of electricity, magnetism and light.[12] Much as Lagrange had provided a mathematical theory of mechanics without calling upon geometry, Fourier had constructed a mathematical theory of heat conduction without calling upon a single principle of mechanics. In the introduction to his *Théorie analytique de la chaleur* (1822), Fourier explained that, since "first causes" could not be known, he confined his study to a mathematical description of the conduction of heat through solids. In addition to first causes, Fourier also refrained from considering the nature of the phenomenon: heat was a general property of matter, and his work pertained only to its conduction.

In his lesson on optics, Comte wondered why Fresnel, in his critique of the Laplace school, had assumed that light consisted of waves rather than particles. Had he followed Fourier's approach Fresnel would not have had to make any assumption about the nature of the phenomenon. Comte's skeptical stance pertained even more strongly to physicists who postulated the existence of ethers. Since such entities were held to be unobservable and imponderable, hypotheses about their existence were better abandoned.[13] Instead of conceiving the various branches of physics as following the uniform model of mechanics, it had to be acknowledged that sound, light, electricity and magnetism were "phenomena sui generis" and had to be treated as such. And in the concluding lesson on physics, Comte stated: "The human mind should finally abandon the irrational pursuit of a vain scientific uniformity, and recognize that radically distinct categories of heterogeneous phenomena are more numerous than is assumed by a vicious systematization" (Comte 1830: 35, 534).

Comte's interpretation of physics is a good example of his epistemological stance. He rejected conceptions he considered to be remnants of metaphysical thinking (ethers), but he was no less critical of Laplace's Newtonian program, which transposed the principles of celestial mechanics to all branches of physics and chemistry. Comte sided with the newest forms of physics, arguing more specifically that his scheme of increasing complexity was the best way to make sense of not only the relations between the sciences, but also of the internal differentiation of each one of them.

While Comte's interpretation of physics concerned a well-established science, this was not the case with the life sciences. At the time, they formed a fragmented domain

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12 On Fourier and Comte, see Bachelard (1928: 33–72).
13 For Comte's conception of hypotheses, see Lesson 28 (Comte 1830: 35, 441–67).

divided into specialties such as botany, zoology, natural history and medicine. Comte's writings in this area were primarily concerned with working out how to conceptualize the life sciences as a relatively autonomous and fundamental science. For Comte, it was Xavier Bichat who had formulated the first positive conception of life, be it still an inadequate one: "Life is the sum total of functions that resist death." Bichat's reasoning was, however, affected by the vitalist assumption of an antagonism between life and death. Quite the opposite was the case. Biological processes could not be reduced to chemical and physical ones, as vitalists had rightly stressed, but contrary to another of their assumptions, life forms were dependent on the "environment." The relations of organisms to the environments they lived in thus needed to be part of the subject matter of biology. In response to mechanists, Comte emphasized the unity and specificity of life forms; in response to vitalists, he stressed their dependence on the environment. This proved a fruitful and ingenious way to move beyond the main controversy that characterized the life sciences in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In accordance with the greater complexity of life forms, biologists could use more varied methods than both physicists and chemists. As in chemistry, each of the five senses had a role in observations. And even more than in chemistry, instruments could heighten the sense of sight (the microscope) and hearing (the stethoscope). Biology also provided opportunities for experimentation—be it that, in general, the greater the complexity and dependence of the phenomena, the more limited are such opportunities. As physical phenomena were independent of higher levels of complexity, the experiment was especially well suited for that science. This was less true of chemistry and, in biology, the interdependence of the phenomena was such that controlled experiments could only have a limited role. Biology, however, did have an equivalent to the experimental method: pathology. Pathological phenomena can be viewed as "spontaneous experiments" that provide insight into the normal state of organisms. The comparative method, however, was the most widely used procedure in biology. What could be compared ranged from parts of organisms, generations and developmental stages to variants of the same species and different species. In biology, concept formation was based primarily on such comparisons.

When Comte was writing his *Cours*, the life sciences formed—neither theoretically nor institutionally—a coherent field of study. There was no section for biology in the academy of sciences, biology was not taught in universities, and no learned society existed. The term *biology*, which suggested a more coherent conception of the life sciences, had been coined in the 1790s, but was very rarely used in the early nineteenth century. Comte had a marked preference for it, and he used the term to refer to a general and fundamental science of life. According to historians of biology, it is largely thanks to Comte and his students that the term came into more general use (Coleman, 1). Among the founders of the Société de biologie (1848), which was the first learned society for biology, there were two physicians who were former students of Comte. One of them, Charles Robin, wrote the articles of the society and proposed its theoretical statement, basing his views on Comte's theory of science and his conception of biology (Canguilhem, 61–74; Gley, 168–312).

From 1848 to 1880 there was, according to Georges Canguilhem, not a single French biologist or physician who was not directly or indirectly affected by the Comtean interpretation of biology (Canguilhem, 71). Biologists were the first, and for quite some time the only, academic group to appreciate Comte's work. This recognition was related to the function Comte's epistemology fulfilled for an emerging science such as biology. Comte effectively countered reductionist claims of physicists and chemists with arguments in favor of an autonomous science of biology. Confronted with the clinical orientation of Parisian physicians, Comte simultaneously emphasized that biology needed to be conceived as a fundamental science and not merely as a corpus of clinical knowledge. And in response to the institutional and cognitive heterogeneity of the life sciences, Comte provided a systematic taxonomy. The program Charles Robin designed for the Société de biologie was based upon these three interrelated features.

After biology, Comte devoted the last volumes of his *Cours* to sociology. He introduced the term in Volume Four, and its use became ever more frequent. The word *sociology* was coined by analogy to biology. Just as biology had to be conceived as the fundamental science of life that would integrate heterogeneous specialties such as botany, zoology and medicine, sociology would become the fundamental science of human societies by integrating the study of politics, the economy and the family within a common historical framework.

The basic notions of the last three volumes of the *Cours* are relatively familiar to sociologists. Comte began his analysis by defending the necessity of social science. In the following lessons, earlier efforts were critically evaluated, and Comte explained in more detail than he had done before why his predecessors had either not been scientific enough or had erroneously tried to conceive the social sciences as derivative of physics (Condorcet, Laplace, Quételet) or physiology (Cabanis). Volume Four closed with an overview of the two main branches of sociology: statics and dynamics. Volume Five and the beginning of Volume Six expanded upon dynamics and contained detailed elaborations of historical developments based on the law of the three stages. The Sixth and final volume opened with a personal foreword, in which Comte drew attention to the injustice that had been done to him. In 1838, shortly before he began working on the sociological part of his *Cours*, he had gone through another crisis. He was overworked and tense, and somber prospects for the future put him off balance. He viewed the chances of gaining recognition for his sociology as even slimmer than for his writings on the other sciences. For the first time, he now stated that "any hope of support from scientists […] has to be abandoned." (Comte 1839: 42, 78). Scientists "distrusted" questions that went beyond the boundaries of their own discipline, and they were merely interested in their careers. If they engaged in politics at all, it was only to take the side of the established powers. Later on, Comte noted their "blind opposition" to his positive philosophy and commented that scientists, "exactly like priests," exhibited a tendency toward mental "oppression," and were therefore "unworthy" of any "high social mission" (Comte 1839: 42, 652; Pickering 2007).

When, in 1838, Comte lost the hope of gaining the necessary support of scientists, he felt isolated and weak and stopped reading anyone else's work. This infamous "cerebral hygiene" symbolized his new attitude toward the intellectual world and can be seen as

the beginning of his "second career." Comte was about to turn his back on the group he had hitherto addressed. When, in 1844, his dismissal as entrance examiner at the École Polytechnique was followed by another crisis, his life conclusively took a different turn. He met a young woman, Clotilde de Vaux, and after a "year without precedent," he devoted his remaining years to what would become the religion of humanity, for which he now vested all his hopes in the least educated groups in society: women and workers. The theory of the sciences he had grappled with now seemed very distant, although few readers have been able to resist the temptation of commenting on the *Cours* without alluding to the prophetic figure that the author would become.

And yet, the six volumes of the *Cours de philosophie positive* contained neither a quasi-religious world view nor elaborated a theory about how "science" should be demarcated from "metaphysics," or how a logical or methodological foundation might be constructed for the unity of science. Comte's analysis had a quite different purpose. Instead of inquiries into scientific unification or prophesies about modernity, his analysis was concerned with making sense of increasing scientific differentiation—that is, how the fundamental sciences were related to each other and why different methods prevail in each one of them: the experimental method in physics, the comparative method in biology, the historical method in sociology. The contemporary significance of this differential theory is most salient in the passages Comte dedicates to the newest scientific developments. Wherever such issues come up Comte is more incisive and polemical. Time and again, he defends the newer and more complex sciences against the claims of the more established ones. Monist views of nature and reductionist research programs are often vividly attacked. Comte was well aware that there is a tendency in every science to annex the following science in the name of an "older and more established positivity" (Comte 1851, Vol. 1: 50–51). Countering these tendencies toward "usurpation," his differential theory of science proposed a well-argued and systematic defense of the relative autonomy of the different sciences, without giving up the idea that the sciences, in all their heterogeneity, share the aspiration of being or becoming a positive body of scholarship, that is a body of knowledge that produces empirically testable propositions that pertain to the relations of similarity and succession of the specific class of phenomena under study.

The *Cours* in Context

In order to fully understand Comte's *Cours*, more is needed than just a careful reading of the text itself. It is indeed quite illuminating—also if one is primarily interested in ideas—to relate the text to the peculiar position Comte occupied in the scientific world of his time, and to the far-reaching transformation of the scientific field that had become apparent to him. As a student of the École Polytechnique, Comte shared many of the aspirations of his schoolmates, but he was tempted neither by engineering nor by specific research issues in the mathematical and physical sciences. Being interested in more general questions of science and society, Comte became increasingly critical of the unlimited claims some of his fellow scientists made. When, during the conservative regime of the Restoration, Comte and some of his fellow pupils were expelled from the École Polytechnique, he involved himself with oppositional groups, worked for the prophetic

figure of Saint-Simon, and wrote his first articles and essays. What distinguished Comte from Saint-Simon and other reformers was that he continued to pursue his study of the sciences in order to find a truly scientific basis for reform. Decisive in this quest for a new science of society was his appreciation of the life sciences. There, thanks to early theorists of biology such as Bichat and Blainville, he encountered different methods of inquiry and other modes of thinking than those of the mathematical and physical sciences in which he was trained. His understanding of the life sciences would eventually provide the intellectual impetus for both his theory of the sciences and his reconceptualization of the social sciences.

Nonetheless, the main reference group Comte acknowledged for his "philosophy of the sciences" consisted of the mathematicians and physicists at the academy of sciences and the École Polytechnique. Comte made no effort to secure a chair anywhere else and insisted that biologists and sociologists ought to study mathematics and physics before embarking upon the study of more complex matters.

Comte reproached his former colleagues for unjustly claiming a monopoly on scientific knowledge. There were positive sciences other than mathematics and physics, sciences where methods of research and conceptualization prevailed that were different from the ones they were accustomed to. In his criticism of the practice of mathematicians, Comte used arguments of theorists from the life sciences, although he had reservations about several of their claims as well. Biology studied a specific order of phenomena but, contrary to arguments of vitalists, this was not an "independent order." On the contrary, a central feature of more complex levels of reality was their dependence on less complex ones. While biological theories gave Comte insight into the limitations of mathematical and physical models, his links with the École Polytechnique and his own training stimulated him to appropriate them in a critical fashion, so that the result was a reassessment, not a rejection, of the significance of mathematics. Comte's departure from "intellectual absolutism," as he called it, was made possible by the fact that he had a different attitude toward the sciences than did the practitioners of each of them. His differential theory of science was based upon a differential relation to the sciences. As a critical mathematician, he became interested in the life sciences; as an admirer of biological theorizing, he once again turned his attention to mathematics and physics, constructed a more general theory of science, and then presented this theory to the same mathematicians and physicists.

The result of this inseparably social and intellectual dynamics was a more comprehensive, differential theory of scientific knowledge. Comte's distance from the scientific establishment enabled him to see what insiders did not, and outsiders could not, perceive with sufficient precision. By elaborating upon the insights acquired in this fashion, he hoped to win back what he had been deprived of since he was expelled from the École Polytechnique. His differential model limited the established sciences' claims to what Comte considered their proper domain of validity, thereby liberating mathematical physicists from the illusion of possessing a universal kind of knowledge, a *mathesis universalis*, while stimulating newly emerging sciences such as biology and sociology to properly circumscribe their own domains and develop an appropriate conceptual apparatus and research methods.

A Second Scientific Revolution?

While Comte's theory was based on the peculiar position he occupied with regard to the different sciences, the scientific field had itself undergone a profound transformation. From the 1770s to the 1830s the sciences in France had acquired unprecedented prominence. Scientific institutions expanded rapidly, research fields diversified and scientific careers became professionalized.[14] Together, these developments produced a major transformation of the scientific world. The core of these interrelated and far-reaching changes was the transition from a relatively small world that was dominated and controlled by the Academy of Sciences, to a larger and more diversified universe in which disciplines were becoming the primary units for the production and reproduction of knowledge. The various branches of natural philosophy split up into more autonomous disciplines, biology emerged as a distinct and fundamental science of life and, for the first time, the social sciences were institutionalized as a scientific domain in its own right with the separate class of "moral and political sciences" at the national Institut de France (1795–1803). Analogous to the disintegration of the overarching conception of "natural philosophy," moral philosophy, which was the general framework for the human sciences in the early modern period, went through a similar process of decomposition. The Second Class of the Institut de France (1795–1803) and, somewhat later, the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (1832), was divided into separate sections for philosophy, morals, history, political economy, law and geography. Taken together this process of discipline formation may be interpreted as a broad-ranging and profound transformation, a second scientific revolution, and Comte's *Cours* is best understood as one of its first and most systematic theoretical accounts.

Although the interpretations vary, the first scientific revolution is traditionally associated with the mathematization of the physical sciences and the systematic introduction of experiments that became, not the only, but the preeminent and most authoritative forms of scientific knowledge. At the same time the sciences were institutionalized in national academies such as the Royal Society (1660) and the Académie des Sciences (1666). Whereas the "scientific revolution" has been understood in very different ways, and the concept itself has fallen into disrepute, there is not much doubt that during the seventeenth century the sciences underwent a profound cognitive, social and institutional transformation.[15]

In the sense of a structural, far-reaching and transformative change, historians of science have occasionally spoken of a second scientific revolution. But the meaning of the

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14 This process of expansion, diversification and professionalization is well documented: see Gillispie (1980, 2004), Brian (1994), Crosland (1992), Dhombres (1989), Ivor Grattan-Guinness (1990). For the social sciences, see Head (1982), Heilbron (1995), Heilbron et al. (1998), and the special issue "Naissances de la science sociale 1750–1850," *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, no. 15, 2006.

15 For interpretations of the scientific revolution, see Lindberg and Westman (1990) and Cohen (1994). The notion of the scientific revolution is contested on various grounds: see Shapin (1996). Arguments about the actual variety of scientific practices and the relatively long time span, which would invalidate the notion of a revolutionary change, have also informed a reconceptualization of the scientific revolution: see Cohen (2010).

notion has not been properly elaborated, it is rarely discussed, and neither the expression nor the idea behind it have caught on. While often situated at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, even the relevant historical period is quite variable (see, for example, Brush 1988). In his study, *Revolution in Science* (1985), I. Bernard Cohen briefly discusses a few studies that evoke the concept of a second scientific revolution (1985, 91–101). Thomas Kuhn, in his 1961 article on mathematical and experimental traditions in physics, seems to have been the first to use the expression (Kuhn 1961). A few others have followed, most notably Roger Hahn and Enrico Bellone, but more than half a century after Kuhn's initial suggestion the main characteristics of the second scientific revolution—its time frame, location, cognitive content and scope, social dynamics and institutional underpinning—are still very diffuse.[16]

While a proper debate about the second scientific revolution still lies in the future, there is sufficient historical evidence that a profound restructuration of the scientific world took place in the period between the 1770s and the 1830s. While Kuhn's notion was limited to the physical sciences, Hahn broadened it to the various domains over which the academy of sciences had jurisdiction. Hahn observed, although only in an extremely brief passage, that the organization of the natural sciences around 1800 was marked by "the eclipse of the generalized learned society and the rise of more specialized institutions, and by the concurrent establishment of professional standards for individual scientific disciplines" (Hahn, 275). At the very end of the historical period he studied, it seemed that "professionalized science cultivated in institutions of higher learning and perfected in specialized laboratories was replacing the age of academies that had dominated the scene since the middle of the seventeenth century" (Hahn, 275).

There are good reasons to substantially broaden Hahn's characterization by including the social sciences and parts of the humanities.[17] The second scientific revolution, then, can be seen as a process that—however unevenly—concerned virtually the whole spectrum of science and scholarship. At the core was the formation of disciplines as the primary units for the production and reproduction of knowledge.[18] Discipline formation is above all an institutional process. It can be defined as the process through which research and teaching in a broad variety of domains became significantly more independent from, on the one hand, research and teaching

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16 To some historians, for example, the second scientific revolution is associated mainly with the emergence of romantic modes of understanding nature, German *Naturphilosophie* in particular: see Cunningham and Jardine (1990). Cunningham and Williams (1993) have insisted on the importance of the changes during a slightly longer time span (1760–1848), interpreting it as the "modern origins of science" rather than as a second scientific revolution. John Pickstone (2007, 2015), who does refer to a second scientific revolution, considers the period 1776–1848 as one in which scholarly practices emerge that he qualifies as "substantive analytical practices."

17 The position of the humanities requires more attention than I can give them here; see the discussion in Solleveld (2014).

18 On discipline formation, see Heilbron (2004) and Stichweh (1984, 1992). For an historical overview of discipline formation in the sciences, see Cahen (2003), and for France, Gillespie (1980, 2004).

in other domains and, on the other hand, from supradisciplinary structures such as the national academies. Since France rather than Germany seems to have been at the center of this development, it is necessary to briefly indicate the most significant aspects of the transformation.[19]

Early modern France had a dual system of higher learning. Universities with a monopoly on granting degrees coexisted with state academies for new domains of learning and the liberal arts (literature, science, fine art, music). Academies and other learned societies rather quickly overshadowed conservative universities, which were dominated by the clergy. Academies received state support in exchange for assuring useful activities in the service of the kingdom: conserving the clarity and elegance of the French language; mapping the heavens and the seas; surveying flora, fauna and mineral resources; and vetting mechanical inventions. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, academicians were increasingly called upon for teaching purposes as well. Newly founded state-run schools such as the École des mines (1783) recruited members of the academies and, during the Revolution, this tendency triumphed and swept away the old system. The sciences gained unprecedented prestige, universities were abolished and the new educational system was dominated by elite state-run schools such as the École Polytechnique (1794), the École normale supérieure (1794) and the Écoles de santé (1794). Many scientists, whose careers had previously centered on the academy of sciences, now also taught courses, published textbooks and adapted this work to the professional requirements of their students, who were to serve the French republic as engineers, scientists, doctors and teachers.

Under the new institutional and political conditions, mathematics, physics and chemistry became more separate domains of knowledge and more independent from the supradisciplinary frames of reference in which they previously had been embedded. Chemists and physicists formed groups of their own, each with its own institutional arrangements (journals, sections, chairs, curricula) and profiting from the opportunities to expand their respective domains. A small and selective circle, the Société d'Arcueil, played a pivotal role in the new conception of physics. It was largely through its members' research, textbook production and academic politics that physics underwent a major change: it no longer generically referred to empirical natural science, but became a more strictly defined mathematical and experimentally constituted discipline (Crosland 1967, Fox 1974, Smith 1976). Something similar happened in the case of chemistry, which was transformed by the work of Lavoisier and his associates. Innovations in the life sciences came from natural history—which in France was concentrated at the Jardin des plantes—as well as from the newly founded Société de médecine (1776), which challenged the conservative faculties of medicine.

The single best indication of the process of discipline formation was the emergence of disciplinary journals. Prior to the 1770s scientific journals were general publications such as the *Journal des sçavans*, the *Mémoires* of the Academy or the *Philosophical Transactions*

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19 For indications of the centrality of France in the process of discipline formation, see Heilbron (2004).

of the Royal Society.[20] The first specialized journals appeared in the 1770s, and their number multiplied quickly, especially during the revolutionary and Napoleonic period, when the *Annales de chimie* (1789), *Journal de l'École polytechnique* (1794), *Annales du Muséum d'histoire naturelle* (1802) and the *Annales de mathématiques* (1810) were founded. Because the more disciplinary mode of working implied not only research publications but teaching as well, mathematicians, physicists and chemists could recruit their own students, some of whom would continue their work. The so-called French schools of chemistry (Lavoisier) and physics (Laplace) are good examples of the process, becoming widely known in Europe and beyond and serving as primary examples of the new mode of disciplinary science.

The emergence of disciplinary journals, chairs and learned societies, as well as the creation of scientific schools and the concomitant transformation of the universities, brought about a much stricter division of labor between mathematics, physics and chemistry while simultaneously including biology as an emerging general science of life and the formation of the social sciences as an organized field of inquiry of its own. Around 1800, one of the consequences of the rapid intellectual and institutional differentiation of science and scholarship was the undermining of the unitary conceptions of natural as well as moral philosophy. Not only did physics, chemistry and the life sciences become more strictly disciplinary endeavors, but the same tendency can be observed in the social sciences, although undoubtedly to a lesser extent. During the Enlightenment, political, moral or economic considerations were generally considered to be part of natural law, or moral philosophy. Adam Smith studied and taught moral philosophy and considered political economy to be one of its branches. To Smith's most prolific and widely translated follower, Jean-Baptiste Say, who in 1819 occupied the first chair in political economy, economics needed to be clearly separated from the study of politics. In his *Traité d'économie politique* (1803) he argued that, whereas economic science was concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of wealth, it should not be confused with politics, which was to deal with the relations between the government and its citizens and the relations of states to one another (Say 1803: 8–9).

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, then, a shift occurred from unified conceptions of natural and moral philosophy, each with its various branches, toward a division into more autonomous disciplines. Encompassing terms such as "nature" and "reason" lost some of their appeal, and the overarching conceptions of both "natural philosophy" and "moral philosophy" declined or disappeared altogether. The notion of philosophy underwent a similar change: it tended to become a discipline as well, a superior one perhaps, but a discipline nonetheless. From being a general notion of systematic knowledge, philosophy was redefined as a specialty for transcendental analysis (Kant) or for analyzing ideas. Destutt de Tracy's project for a new science of ideas, an *idéologie*, is less well known than that of Kant's critical philosophy, but it was no less typical. In his four-volume *Eléments d'idéologie* (1801–15) Tracy observed that the progress of the sciences

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20 See Gispert (2001) and the special issue on scientific journals (1800–2002) of the *Revue de synthèse*, Vol. 135, nos. 2–3, 2014.

had been so swift and so broad in scope that traditional metaphysics should be replaced by a "science of science" or a "method of methods" for which he coined the term *ideology* (Tracy 1803/2013, 34). Philosophers, as Comte observed, were inescapably becoming specialists as well: specialists in generalities.

The process of discipline formation is well illustrated not only by changes in specific scholarly domains or in the decline of general frameworks; it is perceptible also in the development of encyclopedias. Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedia* had been the emblem of the Enlightenment; it was published in the vernacular, covering the entire domain of human knowledge, and its articles were often the work of generalist compilers, men of letters and *philosophes*. Its successor, the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1781–1832), however, was no longer ordered alphabetically, but methodically, that is by domain and discipline. The *Encyclopédie méthodique* was planned to consist of 26 coherent treatises, all of them under the responsibility of specialists. The treatises included a range of disciplines (from mathematics, physics, astronomy, medicine, anatomy and chemistry to history, theology, philosophy, grammar, jurisprudence and political economy) to which some of the most important arts and crafts were added (commerce, finance, military arts, fine arts and mechanical arts). By 1832 the enterprise had resulted in 102 volumes consisting of some 50 specialized treatises (Blanckaert et al. 2002). Slightly later than the new French encyclopedia, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* also adopted the format of more or less standardized and self-contained disciplinary treatises. These would typically consist of a historical introduction, a statement of the methodological principles of the discipline, claims about its domain and its boundaries, and a celebration of its heroes and their part in making it a modern scientific discipline (Yeo 2001).

Conclusion

Discipline formation transformed the legacy of the Enlightenment and raised the question of unity and difference in the sciences in an entirely new manner. That process was the central issue of the *Cours de philosophie positive*. Comte's historico-differential theory of science was an original and positive response to the differentiation of the scientific field of his time. It historicized knowledge, attacked monist and reductionist views of science, opposed dichotomous conceptions according to which the life sciences were opposed to the mechanical sciences, or the moral sciences to the natural sciences, while at the same time avoiding the fragmentation that would result from a merely empirical inventory of scholarly specialties.[21]

While modern science aspires to produce empirically founded knowledge and to establish law-like regularities, the sciences could no longer be thought of as all being realizations of the same basic type but, on the contrary, had to be differentiated, specifying for each fundamental science the particularity of its object-matter and its proper mode of inquiry and conceptualization. Comte thus discussed the most recent developments in the physical sciences, assessed the new status that chemistry had acquired and

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21 For the last type of writings see, for example, Ampère (1834–1843).

paid particular attention to newly emerging fields, such as biology and the social sciences. Comte's enterprise is best seen against the background of what is here referred to as an enlarged conception of the second scientific revolution. Much of this conception needs further elaboration and debate, but there is more than sufficient evidence, both more specialized and of a more general character, to underpin the idea of a profound transformation of the scientific world in the decades around 1800. Although the establishment of an institutional regime based on disciplines was an uneven and long process, the period between the 1770s and 1830s may be considered to have marked the critically important transformative phase.[22]

In elaborating his insights into a general theory of the sciences, Comte relied on the scientific capital he had accumulated, and profited from the fact that he did not belong to any scientific group or institution in particular, neither in the physical sciences nor in the life or social sciences. But as the reception of his work tragically shows, that independence also proved to be quite vulnerable. Within the academic field of his time, Comte's theory was too broad in scope for the increasingly specialized scientists at the Academy of Sciences, while being too scientific for the members of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences. Gradually, Comte turned away from the academic establishment and during his "second career" mobilized his theory of the sciences for quite different purposes, soliciting other groups and seeking gratification other than the academic recognition he had aspired to earlier.

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22 The establishment of individual disciplines generally follows a pattern that implies three stages: the formation of an intellectual practice that is accompanied by some sort of disciplinary program (chemistry, sociology, etc.), disciplinary institutionalization (founding of chairs, disciplinary journals, professional associations), and the establishment of a fully fledged discipline of which autonomous degrees and departments are the key elements.

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Chapter Two

"STRUCTURE" AND "GENESIS," AND COMTE'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Derek Robbins

Introduction

In 1888 at the University of Bordeaux, Durkheim gave the opening lecture of what is normally regarded as the first university course in social science. Comte had published what was billed as the "fourth and last" volume of his *Cours de philosophie positive* (Course of Positive Philosophy) in 1839. Two further volumes were published. Of the total of 60 lectures of his complete course, Volume 4 contained lectures 46 to 51, detailing "preliminary political considerations on the necessity and opportunity for social physics, according to a fundamental analysis of the contemporary situation" (Lecture 46) and "a summary appreciation of the main philosophical attempts undertaken up to now to constitute social science" (Lecture 47). Lectures 50 and 51 considered, respectively, "social statics" and "social dynamics." Prior to his appointment at the University of Bordeaux, Durkheim had spent a term abroad in Germany in the academic year 1885–86 at the universities of Berlin, Marburg and Leipzig. On his return to France, he published two articles in 1887, one of which was entitled "La science positive de la morale en Allemagne" (The Positive Science of Morals in Germany) in which he criticized the position adopted by Wilhelm Wundt in his *Ethik* (Ethics), published in 1886. Wundt had opened the first laboratory devoted to psychological research at the University of Leipzig in 1879, and his contribution to ethical philosophy derived from his experimental work in psychology.

Husserl's earliest philosophical work—his Habilitation thesis—appeared in 1887, entitled *Uber den Begriff der Zahl. Psychologische Analysen* (On the Concept of Number. Psychological Analyses), and, four years later (1891), he published his *Philosophie der Arithmetik. Psychologische und logische Untersuchungen* (Philosophy of Arithmetic. Psychological and Logical Investigations). He had studied mathematics at the universities of Leipzig, Berlin and Vienna, and had studied philosophy as a subsidiary subject with Wundt during his time at Leipzig. After gaining his PhD in Vienna in 1882, Husserl moved to Berlin to pursue a career as a mathematician, but he was soon back in Vienna attending the lectures of Franz Brentano between 1884 and 1886. Although he moved to the University of Halle to study under Carl Stumpf and submitted his thesis there, Husserl's first

publications were "conceived and executed within an almost entirely Brentanian frame-work" (Bell 1990, 4). The key texts of the period in respect of the understanding of psy-chology with which Husserl would inevitably have been familiar were Wundt's *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (The Principles of Physiological Psychology) and Brentano's *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunk* (Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint), both pub-lished in 1874. In the same year, another mathematician by training, Gottlob Frege, gained his Habilitation at the university of Jena where he remained for the rest of his career. He turned to the study of logic and, in 1879, published *Begriffsschrift, eine der arith-metischen nachgebildete Formelsprache des reinen Denkens]* (Concept-Script: A Formal Language for Pure Thought Modeled on that of Arithmetic), which was followed in 1884 by the publication of his *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (The Foundations of Arithmetic).

   The point of these introductory remarks is to indicate briefly that there were three (at least) philosophical positions in contention in Germany at the time when, in France, Durkheim was beginning to articulate a philosophy of social science that was, to some extent, an extension of the blueprint for the new discipline introduced by Comte. Both Frege and Husserl would have been opposed to Wundt's tendency to deploy psychological research as a means to understanding ethical behavior and the acquisition of knowledge. They shared a common goal which, as David Bell puts it, was "to provide a philosophically rigorous analysis of, and warrant for, the most basic concepts, assertions, and methods whose employment is constitutive of objectively valid arithmetical practice" (Bell 1990, 31). The difference, however, was that Frege totally rejected the role of intuition in con-stituting arithmetical knowledge whereas, following Brentano, Husserl insisted that "No concept can be grasped which lacks a basis in concrete intuition" (Husserl Hus XII: 79, quoted in Bell 1990, 32). Husserl rejected the "psychologism" of thinkers such as Wundt, but he also resisted the attempt advanced by Frege to maintain the autonomy of arith-metical logic, divorced from experience or intuition. It was Brentano's notion of "inten-tionality" that enabled Husserl to argue that logical investigation requires the pursuit of how phenomena present themselves to us. A positivist logic is needed, one which studies our consciousness without reference either to the psychological conditions of its produc-tion or to a supposedly represented reality but which, equally, is not prepared to restrict its concern only to the study of non-referential language or logic. Both Frege and Husserl opposed "psychologism," but Frege's work led to the "analytic" tradition in Western European philosophy, whereas Husserl founded the phenomenological movement.

   On the assumption that "psychologism" was one kind of empirical orientation and that logical positivism involved an absolute autonomization of language, the early work of Jacques Derrida was dominated by his attempt to situate Husserl's thinking in relation to these extremes, conceived as an opposition between the "genesis" and the "structure" of ideas. Derrida's mémoire for his diplôme d'études supérieures of 1953–54 was enti-tled "Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl" (The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy). This was not published in French until 1990 (Derrida 1990), but a paper he gave at a colloque at Cerisy in July 1959, entitled "'Genèse et structure' et la phénoménologie" ("'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology") was published in the proceedings that appeared in 1965 under the direction of Maurice de Gandillac (who had supervised his diplôme), Lucien Goldmann and Jean Piaget as "Entretiens

sur les notions de genèse et de structure" (Conversations on the Notions of Genesis and Structure) (de Gandillac et al. 1965). The publication of these pre-1960 texts post-dated the publication of Derrida's translation of, and introduction to, Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*, which appeared in 1962 (Husserl, Derrida ed. 1962, [1989]).[1]

It is clear from the titles of Derrida's texts of this period that he was interested in both the conceptualization of "genesis" and "structure" within phenomenology and also the genesis and structure of phenomenology. His interest was both historical and philosophical and, at the outset of his diploma dissertation, he recognized an "essential inseparability of these two worlds of meanings: history of philosophy and philosophy of history" (Derrida 1990, [2003], xvii). On the one hand, he continued, "We will seem to be working on the philosophical problem of genesis, considered as such […]" (Derrida 1990, [2003], xvii), while, on the other hand, "The interest that we will take in the problem of genesis, in its philosophical significance, […] will be what links together research of a more immediately historical style: should we conclude that there is a unity or a discontinuity in Husserlian thought as we find it presented to us in its becoming?" (Derrida 1990, [2003], xviii). Derrida recognized that there were "two vast movements, one forward, one back" (Derrida 2003, xix) in Husserl's thinking. The first movement entailed the "refusal of psychologisms, of historicisms, of sociologisms" (Derrida 1990, [2003], xix), in short, of "worldly" genesis, by means of a process of transcendental reduction, but this was followed by "a kind of return, the outlines of a movement of broad reconquest: it is the notion of transcendental genesis […]" (Derrida 1990, [2003], xix). Derrida argues that this shift in philosophical position was achieved within a historical progression—that, in other words, the mode of analyzing this shift is itself under scrutiny as a substantive element in the achieved philosophy.

Derrida situated his consideration of the relationship between philosophy and history in the thought of Husserl resolutely within the discourse of philosophy. Derrida and Bourdieu were contemporaries at the École Normale Supérieure in the early 1950s. Derrida's diplôme on Husserl was early supported by Jean Hyppolite (see Derrida 1990, [2003], xiv), who had done much to lead the interest in France in the 1940s in the philosophy of Hegel, whereas Bourdieu's diplôme—a translation of, and critical commentary on, Leibniz's Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum (Remarks on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes) of 1692—was supervised by Henri Gouhier, who was primarily a historian of philosophy who had published, amongst much else, several books on the work of Comte.[2] Bourdieu later recalled that, as a student, he

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1   Husserl's text was a manuscript from 1936, which bore no title. After Husserl's death, Eugen Fink published an elaboration of it in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 1, 2, (January 15, 1939), pp. 203–25, under the title: "Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem" (The Question of the Origin of Geometry as an Intentional-historical Problem). Husserl's text was published as appendix III of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, Walter Biemel ed., in 1954.

2   The main works of Gouhier on Comte are*: La vie d'Auguste Comte*, 1931, Paris, Gallimard; *La jeunesse d'Auguste Comte et la formation du positivisme* in three volumes: *Sous le signe de la liberté*, 1933, Paris, Vrin; *Saint-Simon jusqu'à la Restauration*, 1936, Paris, Vrin; *Auguste Comte et Saint-Simon*, 1941, Paris, Vrin; and *La Philosophie d'Auguste Comte*, 1987, Paris, Vrin, which assembles ten articles mainly published in the 1950s.

had been interested in the history and philosophy of science. This recollection occurs in an interview Bourdieu gave in 1985 in which he described his first researches in Algeria in the late 1950s as "Fieldwork in Philosophy" (see Bourdieu 1987, 13–46, [1990]). In the same interview he also commented that he had read some Husserl, particularly his work on Time. In 1956, Bourdieu registered to undertake research on "Les structures temporelles de la vie affective" (The Temporal Structures of Affective Life) under the supervision of Georges Canguilhem, but his conscription into the army supervened, and the project was never pursued. At the time when Derrida was giving his paper at the colloque at Cerisy in 1959, Bourdieu was still in Algeria. He returned to France in 1960, cured of any intention he may have had to carry out philosophical research, but not at all cured of his interest in the relations between the genesis and structure of thought and actions. Bourdieu's research of the 1960s within the Centre de sociologie européenne might be thought to have indicated an exclusive concern with "worldly" genesis, with, in Husserlian terminology, advancing a sociology of the "natural attitude." Having adopted the style of anthropological analysis in his Algerian studies, Bourdieu returned to a Paris that was enthralled by Lévi-Strauss's "structural anthropology." Just as Derrida recognized philosophically that Husserl was simultaneously interested in genesis and structure, so Bourdieu tried to develop a sociological methodology that would recognize that social structures are generated, but that generative dispositions are themselves socially pre-structured. Notably, Bourdieu contributed, in 1966, an article entitled "Champ intellectuel et projet créateur" (Intellectual Field and Creative Project) to a number of *Les Temps Modernes* devoted to the problems of structuralism (Bourdieu 1966, [1971a]). Bourdieu attacked detached structuralism, instead insisting that the creative work of individual artists and intellectuals acquires meaning within immanent social structures that they are themselves instrumental in constructing. He opposed Chomsky's notion of a "generative grammar" and he developed a conceptual system that enabled him to suggest that all individuals possess a "habitus" that is their particular incorporation of their inherited structures of beliefs and attitudes, and to suggest that all individuals modify or adapt their inherited dispositions so as to constitute new structural contexts or "fields" that, in turn, as objectified constructs, impose themselves on other subjectivities. He illustrated this point historically by arguing that, after the "classical period," "Intellectual life […] gradually became organized into an intellectual field as creative artists began to liberate themselves economically and socially from the patronage of the aristocracy and the Church and from their ethical and aesthetic values" (Bourdieu 1966, [1971a], 162). Bourdieu deployed the "historical epistemology" advanced by Gaston Bachelard to articulate a methodological distinction between "structuring structures" and "structured structures" (see "Sur le pouvoir symbolique" (On Symbolic Power), 1973, in Bourdieu 1991b, 163–70). Like Derrida, Bourdieu explored the problem of genesis and structure but, unlike Derrida, Bourdieu attempted to analyze the relationship sociologically. In 1971, Bourdieu wrote "Genèse et structure du champ religieux" (Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field) (Bourdieu 1971, [1991a]), and, later in his career, both "Espace social et genèse des 'classes'" (Social Space and the Genesis of 'Classes') (Bourdieu 1984, [1985a]) and "The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field" (Bourdieu 1985b). These titles indicate that a constant theme underlying Bourdieu's work was the attempt

to reconcile engagement with explanatory scientific discourses operating with their own rules and conventions with sociological analysis of the social conditions that generated them and were affected by them.[3]

The purpose of this chapter is to endeavor to analyze the genesis and structure of Comte's social science. In attempting a socio-historical analysis, therefore, my intention is to deploy an approach that itself derives from the object of study. I use an approach to social science derived from Bourdieu to scrutinize aspects of its historical genesis. The process necessarily leads me to make some concluding comments, both about the work of Comte and about the legacy of his thought in the French sociological tradition. I attempt to examine the genesis and structure of Comte's social science by focusing on both the sociopolitical or socio-economic conditions of its production and the intellectual structure of its articulation as these developed at three key moments—the years 1822, 1830 and 1842. At each historical moment, I try to produce a "socio-genetic understanding" (see Bourdieu 1993) of works that are also analyzed in terms of their "intrinsic" structures. The "socio-genetic" analysis relates to Comte's individual trajectory as well as to the socio-political context within which this trajectory occurred. The structural analysis involves some reconstruction of the intellectual field within which Comte's texts were situated. The separation of modes of analysis is a heuristic device to impose meanings on interconnected phenomena. I divide each of my commentaries on each of the specified years into sections labelled a, b, and c, in which I focus, respectively, on the context, content and "field" of Comte's work.

The Three "Case-Study" Years

1822a

Starting in April 1821, Comte worked intermittently on what was to be called his *Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société* (Plan of the Scientific Work Needed to Reorganize Society). He later regarded January 1822 as the date of commencement of the "direct composition" of the text. He finished it in May 1822 and only 100 copies were printed that month under the name of Saint-Simon and under the title of *Système de Politique Positive* (System of Positive Politics).[4] The work was not properly published and distributed until April 1824. Comte had begun to work for Saint-Simon in 1817 and proceeded to write much of the copy of the journal *L'Industrie*, which his mentor had established in 1816. Comte was 19 years old when he started to work for Saint-Simon. At the age of 16 (in 1814) he had registered at the École Polytechnique, which had been founded by the Convention in 1794–95 to encourage education in the sciences. It was republican in spirit, but Comte was one of the student leaders who supported Napoleon's return from Elba during the "100 days." Comte's enthusiasm had been for a reformed and reforming Napoleon. When the École Polytechnique was closed down after the

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3   For a philosophical discussion of the intellectual problem that Bourdieu sought to resolve sociologically, see Norris (2000).

4   For details of the timetable of writing, see Pickering, vol. 1, pp. 192–94.

defeat of Napoleon and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, Comte founded an Association des Élèves de l'École Polytechnique with cells throughout France and wrote an anti-government manifesto, dated June 1816 and addressed to the "French people." Comte set himself a mission in which he would attempt to integrate the curricular orientation of the École Polytechnique, as established, with his interpretation of its specific sociopolitical function. The government reopened the École in August 1816, reorganized along religious lines, and offered an amnesty to previous students. Comte found the terms of this amnesty unacceptable. Hence, his shift to journalism and his association with the entourage of Saint-Simon.

So much for a summary of the private background to Comte's *Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société*. I turn to John and Muriel Lough's *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century France* (Lough, J. and M. 1978) for a summary of the public context within which Comte's career developed. They introduce a chapter on the "Restoration and July Monarchy" with the following overview:

> If France underwent a drastic transformation in the social and institutional sphere during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period, she emerged from these years of turmoil very little changed from the economic point of view. (Lough, J. and M. 1978, 25)

The period of war of over twenty years had crippled some industries and caused a loss of manpower. The country remained predominantly agricultural, and movement from the countryside to the towns was slow to develop, maintaining a rural peasantry and creating only a small urban proletariat. In spite of the fact that the exiled Bourbons were "almost forgotten in France" (Lough, J. and M. 1978, 39), the Allies decided to restore the brother of the executed Louis XVI to the throne. In accordance with a condition made by the Allies at the Congress of Vienna, Louis XVIII drew up a constitutional charter on June 4, 1814, which attempted to reconcile revolutionary ideology with monarchy and introduced chambers of deputies and peers on the model of the British Parliament. However, Louis was childless, and his reign was disturbed by the presence of his younger brother, the Comte d'Artois, who was an extreme royalist (an "Ultra") and was to succeed him as Charles X in 1824.

Much of France was occupied by Allied troops in the early part of Louis's reign, and there was a ruthless backlash against republicans—the "*Terreur blanche*"—in the unoccupied areas. In the period from September 1815 to the end of 1818, power was in the hands of the relatively moderate Duc de Richelieu. The chambers were dominated by royalists to such an extent that Louis was forced to dissolve them in September 1816 under pressure from the Allies. In the elections of 1818, liberals made gains. This coincided with the withdrawal of the Allies' troops on November 30th. Constitutional monarchists were in the minority in the chamber, with the result that Louis's minister, Élie Decazes, oscillated between seeking support from, first, the Left, and then the Right to maintain stability for the monarchy. The situation was transformed by the assassination of the Duc de Berry, the second son of the Comte d'Artois. Decazes was held to be complicit in the assassination by the Right and he was removed from power, to be replaced by the Duc de Richelieu for a second term. Richelieu was unable to curb the move

toward the Right. After elections of November, 1820, the Ultras held twice as many seats as the Left. The Duc de Richelieu was succeeded in December 1821 by the Comte de Villèle, an Ultra. Reactionary measures were introduced, including giving authority over the Université to the bishops, reversing the emphasis of the Napoleonic Concordat. The École Normale Supérieure was closed, and some lectures at the Sorbonne, including those of Guizot and Cousin, were suspended. The counter-revolutionary agenda was also advanced in foreign policy. In 1823, a French force crossed the frontier into Spain and overcame the armies of the liberal government to restore the absolute power of another Bourbon monarch, Frederick VII of Spain. An underground movement of opposition, called the "Charbonnerie," attempted an abortive uprising against government measures in December 1821. In elections to a new chamber in February and March 1824, the liberal opposition was crushed. Villèle remained in office through the period of Louis XVIII's death in September, 1824, succeeded by the Comte d'Artois as Charles X until January 1828.

Such was the "sociopolitical context" of the production of Comte's *Plan des travaux*. That context can be generally characterized as one in which there was a clear opposition between "revolutionary" and "counter-revolutionary" ideas, correlating to some extent with an opposition between the interests of, on the one hand, emergent industrial and commercial classes aspiring to power and influence and, on the other, defenders of a pre-existing hierarchical class structure in the organization of church and state. What can we say about Comte's text in terms of its genesis and structure?

1822b

The *Plan des travaux* represents a historical reflection on the present, articulated in terms of a general principle of the nature of human progress. In his "address to the people" of 1816, Comte had reflected on the similarities between the regime of 1793 and that of 1816, insisting that analyses that had traditionally been undertaken retrospectively about past events (ex post facto) should now be developed productively about current events with a view to achieving beneficial policy applications. In the introduction to the *Plan des travaux*, Comte asserts that the present time is characterized by an opposition between two different natural movements, "one of disorganization, the other of reorganization" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 235). The opening sentence argues that "the fundamental character assigned to the present epoch by the general march of civilization" is of "a social system which is becoming extinct and a new system come to full maturity which is tending to constitute itself" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 235). Comte's historical analysis is ideological and schematic, an attempted application to human history of the thinking about evolutionary adaptation developed by Lamarck while a professor at the *Musée national d'histoire naturelle* (Natural History Museum) and first advanced in his *Recherches sur l'organisation des corps vivants* (Researches on the Organization of Living Bodies) of 1802. Precisely because human history is not a manifestation of biological determinism but, rather, the consequence of adaptive self-constitution, Comte is able to present his *Plan des travaux* as a manifesto for a program of work that will contribute to a conscious process of social engineering. The first priority, he claims, is to embed

constructive attitudes, and he at once proceeds to summarize the ways in which earlier social reorganizations, undertaken both by "peoples and by kings," had failed because their future projections had been predicated on a tacit acceptance of the parameters of the status quo ante rather than on unprejudiced confrontation with the phenomena of the present. One notable case in point is the ongoing attachment of social reformers to the notion of "freedom of consciousness." "There is no freedom of consciousness in astronomy, in physics, in chemistry, in physiology" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 243) and this is not yet the assumption in respect of politics because the old way of thinking has collapsed but has not yet been replaced by new principles of behavior and organization.

Comte's introduction is followed by a "general exposé" of his Plan. Two kinds of work are projected to bring about the total elimination of the dependent conceptualization of new social systems on the moribund remnants of past formations. The first task is to fix the new, "organic" disposition in the minds of the whole population. This is a "theoretical or spiritual" mission. The second task requires the administrative operationalization of the new system of thought. This is a "practical or temporal" project. Success in the first task is the prerequisite for achieving the second. Comte spends time demonstrating that the failure of earlier reforming endeavors has been the consequence of reversing this sequence—of initiating practical changes without first establishing general intellectual consent to new propositions.

This constitutes a self-justification on Comte's part as he announces that "scientists occupied with the study of the sciences of observation are the only people whose capacities and intellectual culture meet the necessary conditions" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 265) to carry out the preliminary theoretical task. Comte concludes the section emphasizing the role of scientists in social reorganization with the summary statement that "scientists today must raise politics to the level of the observational sciences" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 272). It is only at this point that Comte introduces his famous contention about the three different theoretical states:

> By the very nature of the human mind, each of our branches of knowledge is necessarily constrained in its movement to pass successively through three different theoretical states; the theological or fictional state; the metaphysical or abstract; finally the scientific or positive state. (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 272)

Comte claims that this progression can readily be verified in respect of astronomy, physics, chemistry and physiology, and that it can be deduced that politics is ready to move into the third state. It is ready on two counts. Firstly, because it was a precondition that other sciences, as "natural" sciences, should first have reached the positive stage in their logical or autonomous development and, secondly, because it was also a precondition that sufficient social change should have occurred to ensure the acceptance of the new science. The establishment of a positive political science is dependent on the sociopolitical attainment of the conditions within which the science can be applied. The introduction of a positive science of society entails a convergence of genetic conditions and the establishment, by analogy with other sciences, of a discourse of explanation.

Comte concluded this section of the *Plan des travaux* with an outline of three series of tasks to be undertaken, but he only elaborated the first of these in the final section of the opuscule. This elaboration was an analysis of the development of political thinking through the three historical stages. This was the section in which Comte assessed the work of earlier analysts, particularly Montesquieu and Condorcet. In spite of his fine efforts, Montesquieu was far from raising politics "to the rank of the positive sciences" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 309), mainly because he had no sense of historical progression. The achievement of Condorcet was preferable precisely because his orientation was historical as was evidenced by the title of his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (Sketch of a Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind). However, Comte ended his outline of the first series of tasks to be undertaken by specifying that the historical orientation on which he insisted entailed the advancement of a new kind of scientific historical analysis. All the historical works produced up until that time, he claimed, have only "had the character of annals, that is to say of description and chronological arrangement of certain successions of particular facts, more or less important and more or less exact, but always isolated from each other." (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 345). The character of this writing has been literary and what is lacking is true history writing "conceived in a scientific spirit, that is to say having as goal the search for the laws which preside over the social development of the human species" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 345). Comte's vision for "social physics," expressed here, was for a socio-historical anthropology that, ideally, would enable us "theoretically to conceive exactly, from its origin, the thread of progress from one generation to another, whether for the whole of the social body, or for each science, each art, and each part of the political organization; and, practically, to determine rigorously, in all its essential detail, the system which the march of civilization must render dominant." (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 347). Comte outlined a historicist vision that would enable humans to participate adaptively and immanently in social change by virtue of analyzing each historical moment positivistically.

Clearly the *Plan des travaux* was a piece of journalism that was also more a statement of intellectual intent rather than being itself a scientific product. In part, it offered an outline of a tendentious sociopolitical history and, in part, it projected a contribution to the history and philosophy of science. It endeavored to suggest that the two were integrally related. The paradox, of course, is that Comte's recommendation that historical analysis should become positivist was grounded in suppositions about historical change—suppositions that were themselves far from positivist. Comte identified a need in historical writing, but he did not himself satisfy his own requirements. Several examples of the contemporary structure of the field of historical writing indicate that Comte's position was anomalous.

1822c

Augustin Thierry (b. 1795) preceded Comte as secretary to Saint-Simon. He made contributions to the anti-Bourbon *Le Censeur européen* between 1817 and 1820 and published *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (Letters on the History of France) in 1820. Based on research in primary sources, in 1825 he published *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands*

(History of the Conquest of England by the Normans), which outlined the origins of British parliamentary monarchy. Thierry's work had a partisan political agenda against the attempt of the Ultras to restore the Bourbon monarchy to its full pre-revolutionary status, but this early research was a prelude to his subsequent historical scholarship rather than an attempt to adumbrate a philosophy of history.

René de Chateaubriand decided to write his memoirs in 1803, but his first manuscript was not completed until 1826. He gave readings of his work in progress at salons during the 1830s, and elements of his composition were released after 1836, when he gave the rights of publication to a society. What is known as his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* was published in two volumes in 1849 and 1850, soon after his death. Books 6 to 12 are presented as having been written when he was ambassador in London, between April and September 1822, some of them revised in December 1846. At the time when Comte was completing his *Plan des travaux*, Chateaubriand was recollecting in London his first arrival there in 1793, en route to America. As an Ultra who was shortly to be largely responsible, as minister of foreign affairs, for the French intervention in Spain in 1823, Chateaubriand took advantage of his six-month stay in London to record his reminiscences of his visit to North America. He seized the opportunity to compare Washington and Bonaparte. Both had been born in liberty, but "the first was faithful to it while the second betrayed it" (Chateaubriand 1951, I: 241). He expatiated on the condition of the American Indians, noting that a conflict between two rival colonial trading companies in Hudson Bay in association with rival Indian tribes occurred at the same time as the battle of Waterloo in Western Europe and that "the miseries of humankind were the same" in both cases (Chateaubriand 1951, I: 265). He commented that the "artistically constructed political constitutions" of the Indian tribes—"the monarchy of the Hurons, the republic of the Iroquois"—which had been observed by travelers and missionaries in previous centuries, no longer existed. The destruction of political order that had occurred amongst the Indian tribes was mirrored by the anarchy developing in Europe "before our eyes" (Chateaubriand 1951, I: 265). He asked whether the United States would be able to preserve its form of government, threatened internally by the dissimilarities between the northern and southern states, and externally by the proximity of South American democracies, as well as by the invasive spirit of commerce (Chateaubriand 1951, I: 290–91). In short, Chateaubriand offered a reflective commentary that made no claim to historical scientificity but which, nevertheless, was informed by his observations of cultural difference as well as by his diplomatic experience.

1830a

Villèle was succeeded, in January 1828, by Jean-Baptiste de Martignac, who endeavored to restrain the inclinations of Charles X to suppress the liberty of the press and support the power of the Catholic Church. Martignac failed and was replaced, in August 1829, by the Prince de Polignac, who was an out-and-out reactionary. In spite of growing opposition, the king expressed aggressively autocratic sentiments in a speech at the opening of Parliament in March 1830. The chamber voted in favor of a reassertion of the principle of the accountability of the monarch as outlined in the Charter of 1814, with the result

that the king dissolved the chamber and called new elections. Held in June and July, these confirmed that the opposition to the king was in the majority, but Charles chose to prepare a coup d'état rather than to compromise or resign. On July 26, he issued four ordinances. These restricted the freedom of the press, imposed new limitations on eligibility to vote and suspended the chamber. In reaction, within three days ("les trois Glorieuses"), July 27, 28, and 29, 1830, the Bourbons were finally driven from the throne. The victory was achieved by the republican masses of Paris, but the consequence was not the establishment of a republic. The Duc d'Orléans, a descendant of the younger brother of Louis XIV, was presented as the new king on July 30. The 1814 Charter was revised, re-emphasizing the essence of constitutional monarchy, and the new king—Louis Philippe—swore to observe it at a ceremony in the presence of both houses of Parliament on August 9.

In his preface, dated December 18, 1829, to the first volume of his *Cours de philosophie positive*, published in mid-1830, Comte indicated that his course had commenced in April 1826, and was the result of all his work since leaving the École Polytechnique in 1816. The course had begun on April 2, 1826. It was delivered before members of the scientific elite, particularly François Arago, who had succeeded Gaspard Monge as professor of analytical geometry at the École Polytechnique in 1809, and Henri de Blainville who had published *De l'organisation des animaux, ou Principes d'anatomie comparée* (On the Organization of Animals, or Principles of Comparative Anatomy) in 1822 and would shortly succeed Lamarck in the chair of natural history at the Natural History Museum in Paris. Comte did not appear for the fourth lecture on April 12. As Mary Pickering puts it, "He had quite literally gone mad" (Pickering, 1997, 371). After nearly two years, he regained his sanity, and resumed his lectures, given at his own apartment, on January 4, 1829. He printed a synopsis of the course in December 1828, before its commencement, and a final summary in November 1829, after its completion. We have no record of the content of these lectures since he spoke from memory. In late 1829, Comte was given permission to repeat his course the following year at the Athénée, an anti-religious and anti-monarchical institution. By November 4, 1829, Comte had written his opening discourse and, on December 16, he reached an agreement with a publishing firm to issue the 72 lectures, none of which had yet been written. The plan was that the lectures would be issued weekly and then bound to constitute four volumes. The first two lectures appeared that December. By February 1830, only seven more had been published, but the publication of the first volume in July consisted of 11 brochures, covering 18 lectures. Subsequently, Comte was to state that the whole of the first volume had been written in the first semester of 1830. Between December 1829 and November 1830, Comte delivered the series of lectures, which was reduced from 72 to 50 because of time constraints. More than 200 people attended, but he was not invited to repeat the course again. By 1833, only 170 out of 1,000 copies of Volume 1 had been sold.

1830b

Having announced in his *Plan des travaux* in 1822, when counter-revolutionary forces were gaining momentum, that a new form of social organization would be necessary,

based on positive science and implemented by positivist scientists, how, in 1830 (at the time of the establishment of the bourgeois July Monarchy), did the structure of Comte's discourse relate to the changed genetic context? As we have seen, the orientation of the *Plan des travaux* was historical and bore some relation to the contemporary field of historical reflection. In his Preface to Volume 1 of the *Cours*, Comte seems to have been most concerned about defining his work in relation to the field of philosophy. He first provides a historical notice of the provenance of his own orientation, insisting that his approach, prefigured in the *Plan des travaux*, was prior to, and different from, that taken by contemporary Saint-Simonians. It appears almost to have been part of a strategy of differentiation from the Saint-Simonians that Comte devotes space to a definition of his use of the expression "philosophie positive." He regrets that, for lack of an alternative, he was obliged to use the term "philosophie": "which has been used in such an abusive way with many diverse acceptations" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 45). He declares that he uses the word "*philosophie*" with the meaning given to it by the ancients, particularly Aristotle, to signify "the general system of human conceptions" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 45), and adds the word "*positive*" to specify that the mode of philosophizing he recommends involves the "coordination of observed facts" distinct from theological and metaphysical modes of thinking which, by implication, were differently referential. Comte goes on to argue that he avoided the designations of both "natural philosophy" and "philosophy of the sciences" because these fields operated with a tacit separation of natural science from general human knowledge whereas he wanted to convey the sense that he was concerned with a "uniform manner of reasoning applicable to all subjects about which the human mind can be exercised" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 45). For this same reason, he had adopted the term "*philosophie positive*" as opposed to "*sciences positives*" because his focus is on "the proper study of the generalities of the different sciences, conceived as subject to an unique method" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 46). In short, Comte was seeking here to define his conceptual position within the current range of possible forms of philosophy. At the beginning of his first lecture, he admitted that there were two possible approaches to the task of outlining the argument of an extensive case such as he was contemplating. General arguments, he thought, can either be advanced as glimpses of a doctrine to be established or as summaries of an already established doctrine. His endeavor required the former approach because his analyses did not fit with pre-existing structures of thinking. Using the word "*champ*," he claimed therefore that "the general circumscription of the field of our researches […] is, to our mind, a particularly indispensable preliminary to a study which is as vast and undetermined as the one with which we are to be concerned" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 51–52). It is clear from Comte's opening presentation, however, that his contribution to philosophical thinking derives from an historical perspective on science which, in turn, is derived from an application to history of new thinking in the biological sciences. He struggled to create a new genre of analysis. *The Plan des travaux* had announced the theory of the three stages of knowledge after a long introductory assessment of the recent history of ideological conflict in France in the political sphere. By contrast, the first lecture of the *Cours* announces this conception at once as a prerequisite for understanding the nature of "philosophie positive." The stages are no longer presented in terms of changes in social and political institutions but, rather,

as moments in a history of human cognition, or of "*l'esprit humain*" (the human mind). Comte indicates that the ultimate goal of his course of lectures is that he will conclude in making a case for the introduction of a "physique social" operating according to the same investigative principles as all other sciences, but he insists that this final goal can only be achieved through a preliminary and systematic consideration of the development of other sciences through the three cognitive stages. The intention of this consideration of all sciences is to expose the general characteristics of "philosophie positive" and not to give an account of particular positive sciences as such. Although the establishment of social physics is the ultimate goal of the *Cours*, Comte emphasizes that it is crucial to understand that he is offering "a course on positive philosophy, and not just a course on social physics" (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 65). In emphasizing the history of cognition, Comte was attempting to offer a philosophy of knowledge that deliberately ignored traditional philosophizing about knowledge and also a history of science that denied that this was synonymous with a history of empiricism. There is a necessary connection between the study of philosophy and science at all historical periods, which denies the autonomization of the two fields of study:

> [I]f, on one side, every positive theory must necessarily be founded on observations, it is equally the case, on the other side, that, to attend to observations, our mind needs a theory of whatever kind. (Comte, ed. Grange 1996, 55)

The challenge, which was deferred, was to explain how positive philosophy can constitute a "theoretical" framework for positive science as a surrogate for the frameworks previously offered by theological and metaphysical systems. To respond to this challenge, as we shall see, Comte was forced to sketch the outlines of a specific epistemology for the social sciences in spite of his disinclination to do so.

1830c

The "field" of philosophy in France in 1830 was in the process of reconstruction after a period of disarray in the previous 30 years. The key figure was Victor Cousin (1792–1867) who, in the early days of the Restoration had been attracted to philosophical work by the lectures at the École Normale Supérieure of Pierre Laromiguière (1756–1837). Cousin was also influenced by the work of Pierre Paul Royer-Collard (1763–1845), whose teaching assistant he became in 1815–16, and by the work of Maine de Biran (1766–1824). Royer-Collard lectured at the Sorbonne from 1811 to 1814 but, after 1815, sat in the chamber of deputies, was president of the commission for public instruction from 1815 to 1820 and, in 1828, became president of the chamber of deputies. Maine de Biran served as treasurer to the chamber of deputies for the last years of his life during the Restoration. Few of these named philosophers, who now have a place in the history of French philosophy, were able to sustain careers as professional philosophers. As counter-revolutionary forces began to prevail through the two reigns of the Bourbon Restoration, liberal philosophizing and the institutions within which it might flourish were suppressed. Cousin was expelled from the École

Normale Supérieure in 1820–21, and was only restored to a professional position in 1828. He spent his period in exile in Germany, publishing his earlier lectures—his *Fragments philosophiques* (Philosophical Fragments) (1826) and his *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie* (Course in the History of Philosophy) (1827)—and publishing editions of Proclus (6 volumes, 1820–27) and of Descartes (11 volumes, 1826) as well as beginning translations of Plato. On his return to France Cousin delivered lectures on Kant at the Sorbonne in 1828, which secured him a huge following. These were published in 1842. Partly as a result of his awareness of the status of academic philosophy in German universities, Cousin became instrumental in institutionalizing philosophy in his own country after 1828. He revived the work of some of his mentors, publishing, for instance, a collection of the work of Maine de Biran in 1841. At the time Comte was writing the first volume of his *Cours*, nevertheless, the situation of philosophy and of philosophers was still in the melting pot. The trajectory of a minor philosopher of the period—Claude-Joseph Tissot (1801–76)—is indicative. Resisting the wish of his parents that he should study for holy orders, Tissot left a seminary in Besançon, where he had studied theology, to study, instead, medicine in the school of medicine there. He moved to Paris, where he studied law and chemistry (following the lectures of Gay-Lussac). Qualified in law, he became a trainee barrister in Paris but, shortly after the recall to France of Cousin, he was appointed professor of philosophy at the royal college of Dôle, from where he moved to Bourges and then Dijon, where he remained for the rest of his career. Between 1830 and 1845, Tissot published five volumes of translations of the work of Kant as well as many original texts. Described as a "dissident Cousinian" (Gerbod 1965, 75, n.85), Tissot's career shows that he was implicated in the renewal of the traditional field of philosophy, distributed institutionally across France and substantially orchestrated from Paris by Cousin.

1842a

Pamela Pilbeam has acutely analyzed the enduring influence of the ideologies that were in competition in 1830 and were rapidly articulated in competing histories of the revolution of July 1830, which brought Louis-Philippe to the throne. She identifies three factions, which she calls "the clerico-legitimist, the Orleanist, and the republican" (Pilbeam 1991, 2). The position of the legitimists sustained that of the Ultras of the 1820s. In their view, it was the failure of Charles X to repress liberalism that was responsible for the revolution. The Orleanists were in favor of constitutional monarchy, but there were two factions within this group. There were those "who wanted the July Days to herald as little change as possible—the résistance—and those who wanted a more liberal regime, a broad-based electorate and a less powerful monarch—the mouvement." (Pilbeam 1991, 5). For Étienne Cabet, a convinced republican and socialist and spokesperson for the third main faction, the July revolution had been "an artisan, popular revolt, smuggled away by the liberal élite in its own interest, leaving the actual fighters with no improvement in their condition" (Pilbeam 1991, 8–9).

Resistance to Louis-Philippe's rule came from both extremes of these factions during the 1830s. In 1832, the Duchesse de Berry, mother of the Comte de Chambord who was

Charles X's grandson and in favor of whom he had abdicated, attempted to orchestrate a legitimist uprising in the traditionally royalist Vendée region. The attempt was a fiasco. From the other extreme, disaffected silk workers in Lyon occupied the Hôtel de Ville there in November 1831, and the revolt was quashed through the intervention of government troops. There were insurrections in Paris as well with the result that, in 1835, the "*lois de Septembre*" were passed to counteract subversive movements. The historian Adolphe Thiers was prime minister from 1834 to 1836 and, again, briefly, from 1840, but the dominant politician became François Guizot, another historian. He belonged to the "resistance" Orleanist party and retained power until 1848, when a Parisian insurrection forced Louis-Philippe to abdicate. He abdicated in favor of his grandson, the Comte de Paris, but, instead, the Second Republic was proclaimed.

The Rouen Frères publishing house, which had been responsible for the publication of the first volume of Comte's *Cours*, was ruined by the 1830 revolution. It withdrew from its contract with Comte in February 1833. Comte signed a contract with a new publishing house within a month, but the second volume of the *Cours* did not appear until April 1835. The third volume was published in March 1838. As in 1826, the effort induced a period of mental illness, with the result that Comte did not resume further writing until December 1838. Adhering to Mary Pickering's account, the chronology of the production of the subsequent volumes was as follows: Comte "completed the 200 page introduction to social physics on 6 April, 1839. Then in four days wrote the sixty pages of the next chapter. […] During the next three months […] he managed to write another 450 pages (lessons 48 to 51) describing social physics" (Pickering 1997, 487). The fourth volume appeared on July 25, 1839. "Between April 21 and July 2 [1840], he wrote 500 pages, lessons 52 through 54, […]" (Pickering 1997, 495). He wrote Lesson 55 in January and February 1841. The fifth volume appeared in 1841. As soon as that had appeared "he started lesson 56 of the next volume […] he completed it in a month, on June 17, 1841. […] During the following month, he wrote the first half of lesson 57" (Pickering 1997, 505). "Finally, on May 17, 1842, he began lesson 58 on the positive method and finished it a month later" (Pickering 1997, 541). He wrote a "Personal Preface" to the whole *Cours* in three days between July 17 and 19, 1842, and the sixth (and last) volume was published on August 18, 1842.

1842b

According to Comte's summary, Lecture 46 offers "preliminary political considerations on the necessity and the opportunity for social physics, according to a fundamental analysis of the contemporary situation." In the *Plan des travaux*, Comte had represented the need for a positive philosophy as a way of inculcating a new social attitude in opposition to the negativity of theological and metaphysical thinking. In the introductory lectures of the *Cours* he had suppressed the political dimension of his project in order to advance a new cognitive orientation. As he embarks upon his direct consideration of "social physics," Comte presents his positivism as a potentially irenical tool in contemporary politics. Having outlined the essence of positivism, Comte continues:

Such is, therefore, the main property which must characterise this new political philosophy. […] Alone today it can truly speak to each class of society, to each political party, the most appropriate language to implant true conviction and maintain, nevertheless, in face of all differences, the invincible superiority of its fundamental character. (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 67)

He supported this contention with a personal footnote in which he admitted that, in spite of his intrinsically "revolutionary spirit," he had benefitted from the "salutary influence of catholic philosophy" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 67). He proceeds to argue that "positive politics is certainly alone capable of conveniently containing the revolutionary spirit, […]" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 68) because it induces an attitude of "resignation." By its nature, he continues, "it tends forcibly […] to consolidate public order through the rational development of a wise resignation" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 69).

According to Comte's summary, Lecture 47 provides a summary of earlier attempts to constitute a social science. Here, he repeats the critiques of the work of Montesquieu and Condorcet, which he had developed in the *Plan des travaux*, but they are now offered more systematically as critical contributions leading toward the positive articulation of the character of social science rather than as examples of the inadequate endeavors of thinkers trapped in metaphysical mindsets. In Lecture 48, Comte at last approaches, as he summarizes it, a "fundamental characterization of the positive method in the rational study of social phenomena." The first defining characteristic Comte wants to emphasize is that positive philosophy "is distinguished principally from theologico-metaphysical philosophy by a constant and irresistible tendency to render necessarily relative all the notions which were at first, on the contrary, necessarily absolute" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 103). In moving from this general assertion toward the particular characteristics of social science, Comte importantly argues that there are two resources to be deployed in defining social science. The first, a direct resource, involves defining the "diverse means of exploration which are peculiar to this science," whereas the second, an indirect resource, involves recognizing the "necessary relations of sociology with the system of previous sciences" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 137). The first involves confronting the distinctiveness of social phenomena, while the second involves understanding the common characteristics of all scientificity. Comte devotes the remainder of Lecture 48 to the first resource and promises to attend to the second in Lecture 49. Subsequent lectures return to the more general theme of the progression from theological to metaphysical to positivist modes of thinking (51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, and 57) while the three final lectures (58, 59, 60) offer a summary appreciation of the importance of "philosophie positive." It is the second half of Lecture 48, which moves into new territory in seeking to define the characteristics of social scientific practice. Comte asserts that "In sociology, as in biology, scientific investigation uses concurrently the three fundamental modes […] in the general art of observing: that is to say pure observation, proper experimentation, and finally the comparative method […]" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 137). As he proceeds, Comte cannot resist exposing the adverse consequences of philosophical skepticism—"the absurd theory of historical pyrrhonism" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975,

137)—which discredited observation. However, this is not to say that "pure observation" alone is sufficient. The lack of a positive theory guiding observation is what now "renders social observations so vague and incoherent" (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 140). Comte elaborates this point in a footnote:

> It is often thought that social phenomena must be very easy to observe, because they are so common and because the observer usually participates in them more or less. But it is precisely these common and personal characteristics which necessarily contribute, with heightened intricacy, to make these kinds of observations more difficult by pushing the observer away from the intellectual dispositions suitable for a truly scientific investigation. (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 140)

The distinctive character of positivist social science must be that the objective disposition necessary for the construction of any science must no longer be provided by theologico-metaphysical speculations about reality but, instead, wholly relationally by the cross-referencing of phenomena. Comte puts this cogently:

> No social fact will know how to acquire truly scientific meaning without being immediately related to some other social fact: purely isolated, it inevitably remains in the state of a simple anecdote, susceptible at most to satisfying vain curiosity but incapable of any rational use. (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 141)

In considering the second of the three modes of social scientific enquiry, Comte admits that it is not readily amenable to experimentation, but he draws upon his earlier argument with respect to biological science to suggest that pathological cases can offer experimental instances of normality. By analogy, he suggests:

> Since therefore fundamental laws always subsist essentially in whatever state of the social organism, there are grounds for rationally drawing conclusions, with appropriate precautions, from the scientific analysis of disturbances to the positive theory of normal existence. (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 143–44).

In social evolution, Comte comments, such "perturbations" (disturbances) have "unfortunately never been lacking."

In considering the last of the proposed modes of social scientific analysis, Comte again makes an analogy between biological and sociological research. He argues that previous theologico-metaphysical assumptions inhibited the comparison between human and animal characteristics, and he also argues that comparison will be fruitful between societies in different parts of the globe that have reached different levels of social development. Comte adds to this point in a footnote in which he comments that this kind of social anthropological comparison is pertinent within France:

> Without leaving one same nation, it would be possible up to a certain point to compare […] the principal phases of human civilization by considering the social condition of different classes which are very unequally contemporary. (Comte, ed. Enthoven 1975, 146)

It is possible to make two main points about Comte's representation of a methodology for the social sciences in Lecture 48. The points are mutually reinforcing. Firstly, Comte constantly introduces the idea of a social science without engaging with the kind of social engagement that the implementation of his idea would seem to entail. As such, Comte's idea of social science is an extension of the idea of positive philosophy, which inculcates an attitude of mind that guides the construction of objective science on new terms. The detachment Comte recommends suppresses the ordinary social perceptions of lower classes. It also conservatively asserts the bourgeois norms of social organisms, seeing social science as an instrument for articulating laws of social order through the analysis of "perturbations" or deviations as manifested, perhaps, in revolutionary political subversion.

1842c

By 1842, new elements in the field of intellectual discourse were emerging. These were challenging the dominance of philosophy in new ways. John Ehrenberg has presented Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–65) as the spokesperson of the "petite bourgeoisie." The petite bourgeoisie

> was in deep trouble throughout the July Monarchy, for it was subject to the pressure of steady industrialization and it became progressively less able to defend itself without assistance. Yet when it appealed to the state for help it often found that the government and bureaucracy were as hostile to it as they were to the working and nonworking poor. (Ehrenberg 1996, 14)

Born in Besançon, Proudhon received no formal education. He worked in the tavern owned by his father. While working in a printing press in Besançon after 1827, he read and taught himself Latin and, during the 1830s, was supported in his self-education by a scholarship provided by the Academy of Besançon. He spent some years in Paris in the 1830s but returned to Besançon in 1838. Stimulated by essay competitions announced by the Academy, Proudhon developed a position about Christianity and social life which he famously published in a pamphlet of 1840 entitled *Qu'est-ce que la propriété? Recherche sur le principe du droit et du gouvernement* (*What Is Property? Research on the Principle of Law and of Government*). In 1846 Proudhon published his *Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère* (*System of Economic Contradictions or Philosophy of Suffering*) and, in 1847, he settled finally in Paris.

During 1843, Ludwig Feuerbach published his *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie* (Introductory Theses to the Reform of Philosophy), which influenced the young Karl Marx (1818–83), who was then still editing the newspaper, *Rheinische Zeitung*, in Cologne. Before the end of the year, the journal had been banned, and Marx had moved to Paris, where he began to co-edit the *Deutsche–Französische Jahrbücher*. During the summer of 1844, he read through the main corpus of British political economy—Adam Smith, David Ricardo and James Mill. His notes—the Paris manuscripts—were not published until the 1930s. He met with Engels in Paris in the summer of 1844. Engels was still based in Manchester, and his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* was published in

1845. Marx was expelled from Paris (by Guizot's ministry) in 1845. He moved to Brussels and then to London. In the spring, he wrote his "Theses on Feuerbach." He was composing *The German Ideology* and, in 1847, he published his critique of Proudhon's book, with the title: *The Poverty of Philosophy* (See Wheen 1999, chapters 2 to 4).

From these bald notes, it is possible to suggest some crucial shifts in the nature of the structure of the intellectual field as it was emerging around 1842. Most importantly, Proudhon, Marx and Engels were united in concentrating both on the actual social conditions of working people and in relating their analyses to the discourse of political economy, disparaging the perspective of the tradition of German philosophizing.

Conclusion

At about the same time as Derrida was developing his philosophical study of the work of Husserl, suggesting that Husserl had overcome the apparent impasse between genetic and structural analyses of consciousness by searching for the transcendental genesis of concepts, and that Bourdieu was suppressing his phenomenological disposition in order to pursue empirical enquiries in the sociologies of education and culture, Jacques Rancière made his presentation in the series of seminars of 1964–65 given at the École Normale Supérieure under the direction of Louis Althusser. The first edition of the series was to be published in 1965 as *Lire Le Capital*. Rancière's contribution, which was to be withdrawn from subsequent editions of the volume, was entitled: "*Le concept de critique et la critique de l'économie politique des 'Manuscrits de 1844' au 'Capital*'" (The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy from the "1844 Manuscripts" to *Capital*). Rancière's contribution was offered in two parts. In the first, he asked what was the status of "political economy" in Marx's "Manuscripts of 1844." He suggested that Marx neither specified the nature of economic reality nor the status of existing economic discourse. Feuerbach had criticized Hegel for alienating man from himself. Philosophical abstraction involves "placing the essence of nature outside nature, the essence of thought outside the act of thinking" (Feuerbach, thesis 20 of *Thèses provisoires pour la réforme de la philosophie* (Provisional Theses for the Reform of Philosophy), quoted in Althusser ed. 1965, 89). Marx had accepted the discourse of the British political economists as if it were a mirror reflection of reality. He had recognized that the elaboration of a critique of the description provided by political economists required the development of a new perspective of understanding. In Rancière's view, in 1843–44 Marx still followed Feuerbach in launching his critique of descriptive abstraction by generating an anthropological perspective. As Rancière puts it, "Pauperisation–economic–became alienation–anthropological" (Althusser ed. 1996, 94). Rancière argues that this is an instance of what he calls "amphibology"—the process "which allows economic law to become anthropological law" (Althusser ed. 1996, 95). In the work of the young Marx, according to Rancière's interpretation, the basis for the critique of phenomena provided by political economy was contaminated by the assumptions of humanist subjectivism. To put this in Comtean terms, the critique of political economy of the young Marx was predicated on remnants of theologico-metaphysical assumptions about essential humanity. In the second part of his contribution, Rancière turned to a discussion of Marx's *Das*

Kapital, finally published in 1867. The period from 1843–44 to 1867 contained the reorganization of Marx's conceptual field "which constitutes the passage from the ideological discourse of the young Marx to the scientific discourse of Marx" (Althusser ed. 1996, 111). Rancière went on to conclude that Marx's *Das Kapital* still contained elements of a "residue of the historicist ideology characteristic of the German Ideology" (Althusser ed. 1996, 198) and lacked the capacity to develop a "vulgar economics" derived from everyday experience. On renouncing his commitment to Marx and also his association with Althusser after 1968, Rancière subsequently turned to an analysis of the "autodidactic discourse" of French laborers in the period between 1830 and 1848, in a quest for the vulgar working-class discourse that Marx had intellectualized.[5]

Rancière's account of the progression of Marx's thought between 1843–44 and 1867 was offered without any reference to the changing social, economic or political contexts in which his works were published. As such, Rancière's critique in 1965 was essentially philosophical. He was to launch an attack on Bourdieu's sociology on the grounds that, by analogy with the work of the young Marx, it was essentially Feuerbachian.[6] I have tried to suggest that there was a progression in Comte's thinking between 1822 and 1842, one which was comparable with that detected by Rancière in the work of Marx between 1843–44 and 1867 in that Comte endeavored to create a social science divorced from traditional philosophy but only succeeded in recommending an abstract sociological methodology that legitimated detachment from vulgar social reality. On the basis of a periodization of Comte's production, which is, perhaps, dubious in that it rests on the dates of publication without reference to the dates of conception of his work, and also by reference to a selection of vignettes of contemporary intellectual productions which is, perhaps, tendentious in that it omits consideration of the work of contemporary scientists as well as of literary and political writers of the period such as Balzac or de Tocqueville, I have tried to suggest an interpretation of the progression of Comte's work, deploying Bourdieu's conceptualization of the genesis and structure of "intellectual fields." I suggest that, in 1822, Comte was still writing in the context of the ideological debates between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries during the early years of the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. His notion of "positive" philosophy then was that there was a need to supplant the negativity and deconstructive disposition of the thinking of the previous generation by a new, constructive social attitude. His attack on previous philosophy was historical, but he did not aspire to emulate the kind of scientific history that was emerging (unlike Thierry), nor were his historical insights based upon any tangible experience of political events (unlike Chateaubriand). His attack on philosophy was based on an abstract ideology of history. By 1830, I suggest, the field of philosophy in France was in the process of reconstruction. Comte seems to have been concerned to represent his orientation as philosophical more than historical, and tacitly to situate his work as a new genre of philosophy that was essentially scientific and hostile to any concern with the traditional problems of philosophical speculation. By 1842,

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5   See, particularly, Rancière (2012,[1981]).
6   See Rancière (2007,[1983]). For a defense of Bourdieu against the criticisms of Rancière, see Robbins (2015).

Comte's writing for the publication of his *Cours* involved a specific confrontation of the problem of the exact nature of the kind of positive social science that had always been presented as the culmination of positive philosophy. The new concentration on the methodology of social science involved an emphasis on the value-neutrality of positive investigation such that social science would be an instrument for safeguarding the bourgeois social order. Comte's proposed methodology seems to have renounced the dualistic ideological confrontation of the Restoration period and to have become, instead, sensitive to the potential threat of working-class revolution to the bourgeois supremacy on which his social science was predicated.

This summary of the substantive argument of this chapter forces a return to the consequences of the formal mode of argument adopted, as outlined in my introductory comparison of the positions of Derrida and Bourdieu in relation to the legacy of Husserl. We can say that both Husserl's anti-psychologism and Frege's logical positivism were different consequences of the influence of positivist thinking at the end of the nineteenth century. Husserl's inclination to insist on "intentionality" ensured that his "logical investigations" would not be self-referential or tautological but would assume that our knowledge is always shaped by the fact that it is knowledge "of" something. By attempting to deploy Bourdieu's appropriation of Husserl's perspective in analyzing the work of Comte, I suggest therefore that Comte's work can be seen to have been in a changing dialectical relationship with the conditions of its generation. The question arises, therefore, whether the positivist orientation that pervaded Western European scientific practice at the fin-de-siècle between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries developed from an articulation of positive philosophy which, in the work of Comte, can be seen to have been the product of pathological sociopolitical historical conditions. The further question, therefore, is whether current practice in sociology should locate itself within the structure of social science discourse that is the legacy of Comtean social physics, or should seek to recover a genetic orientation appropriate to our contemporary social condition.

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Chapter Three

THE SOCIAL AND THE POLITICAL IN THE WORK OF AUGUSTE COMTE

Jean Terrier

Introduction

Politics and society are two central modern categories, in the sense that the reflection on the meaning of these terms, as well as the exploration of the phenomena for which they are taken to stand, are recurrent features of modern philosophy and social science. Politics and society are also central "categories of practice" (Brubaker 1994), since they are used by historical actors to make sense of their own world. By contrast, "the political" and "the social" will be used in this chapter as "categories of analysis" (Brubaker 1994), that is, more abstract and more encompassing concepts that scholars define in the process of constructing their own objects of inquiry. In what follows, I will understand "the political" as anything that pertains to collective rule-setting and rule-enforcement (Wagner 2001: chap. 10), and "the social" as any kind of practice involving an interaction between human beings (cf. Terrier 2015). In this understanding, political phenomena are a subset of social phenomena, so that "the social" is clearly the super-ordinate concept. In the history of social and political thinking, however, this subordination of politics to society is far from having been adopted by all. Many have tended to separate these two dimensions of collective life, some even declaring politics to be something distinct from and opposed to society. This chapter seeks to establish that Comte's thought can be understood as a long struggle against this "independentist" conception of the political as the truly sovereign element. Yet his understanding of the social and the political was not the same as the one I have just delineated. His categories were narrower: as a first approximation, we can say that he understood society as human interrelationships ordered in a way that is conducive to the convergence of opinions, beliefs and feelings; and politics as the art of steering the action of others by way of physical coercion, material incentives and moral inspiration. In the present chapter, broad "categories of analysis" are chosen in order to avoid being trapped in an analysis of Comte's own terminology. The goal is to locate him within a more general history of social and political thought. As an undertaking, this requires definitions sufficiently wide as to allow for an inclusion of various figures, including some whose concepts of politics and society may, at first sight, appear to be unfamiliar.

I begin with an analysis of Comte's approach to the problem of social order, in the abstract sense of predictable regularities in social life. The first questions that the present chapter will address, thus, are: What were Comte's views, especially as expressed in his later texts,[1] on the establishment of order in society? What were his views on the onset of disorder in history? What position did Comte adopt in the debate between those who took continuous (especially political) action to be a condition of social order, and those who believed in the spontaneous ordering of social relations? As I will indicate below, this debate, which has a long tradition,[2] was central to the nineteenth century, and Comte played an important role in it. Moreover, Comte defended a position that was original: he blurred the boundaries between the various political positions in existence during his lifetime. As a result, he joined a group to which many later thinkers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber, also belonged: the group of politically ambiguous thinkers. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to this question of the place of Auguste Comte in social and political thought and to his fundamental political ambiguity.

Social Order and Political Order in the Work of August Comte

Social Order as Common Representations and Dispositions

The simplest way of thinking about social order, minimally defined as social regularities, is to envisage societies as homogeneous wholes—that is to say, as units composed of identical subordinate entities. If all members of society think and feel in the same fashion, they will also undertake the same actions, thereby creating a form of order. There is no doubt that this image of society as something compact and tightly integrated was important to Comte. In Raymond Aron's concise rendering, for Comte "society can exist only insofar as all its members have the same beliefs" (Aron 1996: 86; see also the similar formulation in Schmaus 1982: 257). Illustrations of Comte's conviction concerning the need for common ideas and beliefs can be found in numerous texts. In one of his early works, the "Philosophical Considerations on the Sciences and Scientists" (1825), he wrote that "no real and compact society could be formed and maintained without the influence of some kind of system of ideas capable of overcoming the opposition between individual propensities, which are so pronounced at the outset, and making them co-operate in a stable order" (Comte 1998: 152). The same notion was repeated about five years later at the beginning of Comte's first major work, the *Cours de philosophie positive*, Volume 1:

> I do not need to demonstrate to the readers of this work that ideas govern and transform the world, or in other words, that the entire social system rests on opinions. […] As long as all individual minds have not adhered, by a unanimous agreement, to a certain number of general

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1   In this chapter, the focus is on the *Système de politique positive*, with indications of commonalities and differences with the earlier writings, especially the *Cours de philosophie positive*. I have used the English translations wherever possible, but I could not avoid referring to the original texts in some cases, especially when discussing terminological issues.

2   Some interesting remarks concerning this point can be gathered from Lacroix (1985); Riley (1973); Viroli (1987).

ideas capable of constituting a common social doctrine, the state of nations will remain rev-
olutionary […] and they will comprise only provisional institutions. (Comte 1830: 49–50; a
different translation is in Comte 1896a: 15–16)

The formulations of this passage are typical of Comte's early period. What is empha-
sized here is the relationship between social order and ideas, understood in an intellectu-
alist sense—in the sense of "opinions" or a "doctrine": that is to say, a coherent system of
conceptions. In the *Cours de philosophie positive*, Comte (1896b: 185; translation modified)
asserted that the method to regenerate society would consist in "a fundamental renova-
tion of social ideas and, by way of consequence, of public morals."

   To characterize Comte's thought as a whole as an advocacy of intellectual or doc-
trinal homogeneity, however, would be a simplification. To begin with Comte did not
deny, as we shall see in more detail below, that unanimity is always difficult, and perhaps
impossible, to achieve: the individual members of society have the tendency to act in idi-
osyncratic, often divergent, ways. Moreover, especially in some social settings, individual
particularity is central to the functioning of society: under the influence of Adam Smith,
among others (Comte 1896b: 204–6), Comte became an admirer of the division of labor
and welcomed the general diffusion of this principle during the modern era, in the form
of an industrial system with numerous specialized functions. He was aware that the divi-
sion of labor strengthened dispersive tendencies in society, but considered that they could
be kept in check, given the appropriate moral and intellectual system.

   Second, Comte's complete system went beyond the intellect. Without dropping his
notion that social order rests on the existence of appropriate dispositions within the
minds of persons, the later Comte emphasized the importance of shared beliefs and
sentiments as opposed to rational convictions. In *Catéchisme positiviste*, he described again
"unity" and "harmony" as the main goals and criteria of "our real progress towards per-
fection, as individuals, or as societies" (Comte 1853: 47). He also reiterated his conviction
that harmony derives from shared representations, but added "the heart" (a metaphor
by which he referred to the emotional dimension of the mental life of humans) as a
supplementary level on which individual and social convergence needs to take place. In
Catechism, Comte staged a dialogue between a Woman and a positive Priest and let the
more sentimental character of the two, the Woman, explain the importance of feelings
in the following terms:

[The] Positivist principle of the gratuitousness of labour gives a systematic consistency to
feelings universally felt. […] I have been brought to see that it is possible to stamp on our
whole existence, even on its material part, an altruistic character. All that is requisite for this
holy transformation is, that we all, without attaining to a state of habitual enthusiasm, should
have a deep sense that we have our share in the common work. Now such a conviction can
certainly be produced by a system of wise education in which all should participate–an educa-
tion in which the heart will dispose the intellect to grasp truth as a whole, not in some details.
(Comte 1853: 241–42)

Third, Comte made clear that for most people the mental representations, dispositions
and affects on which social life is supposed to rest (the "unanimous agreement," the

"feelings universally felt," and the "deep sense" of the above quotes) are neither the product of individual rational reflection nor the result of spontaneous, intrinsic tendencies.[3] Shared representations and affects emerge in social contexts, in social "milieus" (cf. Karsenti 2006: 67–69): They are created during the process of education; stabilized by the existence of common experiences; and reinforced by way of repeated interactions with other members of society. In other words, the convergence of opinions and beliefs requires a specific institutional setting.

For all these reasons, it is more appropriate to describe social order according to Comte as an equilibrium or, to use a term that surfaces regularly in his work, as an "harmonious" complex. While common ideas, feelings, habits and ways of life are central, no society can ever be a complete monolith: the desirable state of society is always characterized by a centripetal movement, but counter-forces are at work most of the time, which must kept in check.

When these anti-social forces prevail, "anarchy" sets in. Anarchy is the opposite of social order. It is a situation characterized by the absence of shared rules, that is to say the proliferation of rules valid only for individuals or very small groups. Comte defined anarchy as "a profound divergence […] of all minds concerning all fundamental maxims whose fixity is the first condition of a true social order" (Comte 1830: 48–49, Comte 1896a: 15–16). While complete anarchy is a relatively rare phenomenon, there are periods of crisis in which diversity and rapid change come to the fore, and in which it becomes a necessary but difficult task to bring society back to a situation of order.

Order, Disorder and Human Nature

What are the exact mechanisms that trigger the "divergence" of individual opinions? In order to understand this, we need to consider Comte's theory of human nature. This theory is fairly complex, and the detailed exposition of Comte's anthropology, the general features of which can be found in the "Systematic tableau of the soul" (Comte 1875a: 540–94), would bring us too far.[4] For the needs of the present chapter, it is sufficient to distinguish between three dimensions of the human mind. First, there are "personal instincts," also sometimes referred to as "natural instincts" or "egoistic instincts" (Comte 1875a: 563). These cover, to begin with, the impulsive urge to satisfy immediate physical needs (food, shelter, sex), without much reflexive deliberation or planning. The more general interest in one's own material well-being, the pursuit of which does require at least some reflection and calculation, also has personal instincts as its primary motor

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3   As we shall see below Comte *did* argue that some "sympathetic feelings" are part of human nature, but he also emphasized that they were permanent and unconditional only toward small numbers of persons (e.g., one's relatives). In other words, sympathy is automatic within small social circles, but it is *not* automatically felt toward all members of society.

4   See, for brief introductions, Aron (1996: 105–10); Laval (2012: 176–89). For a longer one, Wernick (2003). Also, as in many other cases, Comte's anthropological theory comes in various versions: see, for instance, the 50th lesson of the *Cours de philosophie positive* (Comte 1839: 537–621, Comte 1896b: 275–98).

(Laval 2012: 161). Also, especially in his later writings, Comte made clear that the desire for material predominance and social authority, which he called pride and vanity, respectively, should be counted as egoistic tendencies as well (cf. Wernick: 2003: 123–24).

Second, there are the "sympathetic instincts" (Comte 1875a: 565), also called the principle of sociability. This is primarily a feeling of affection, a spontaneous interest for the interests of others. The principle of sociability, as Comte repeatedly emphasized, is not a strong as the principle of personality: it does not dominate spontaneously, since its specific force is not as effective as the one exerted by physical instincts. However, at least in the case of mammals, the existence of some form of attachment to others is inevitable. As Comte wrote:

> The being, whether man or animal, who loves nothing outside himself, and really lives for himself alone, is by that very fact condemned to pass his life in a miserable alternation of ignoble torpor and uncontrolled excitement. (Comte 1875a: 566)

In the special case of humans, the continuity of the human species would be unthinkable, given the weakness of human newborns, without an attachment of parents to children, and without an attachment of both parents to each other, which is a condition for efficient parenting. Comte depicted these forms of affection as weaker than personal instincts, but it is crucial to his entire reasoning that sympathetic instincts can be strengthened by experience and training. In the *System*, Comte (1875b: 155–60) explained that sympathy could be felt toward equals, toward superiors and toward inferiors. When family life, because of its general recognition and institutionalization, is stable, the training of all sympathetic instincts occurs within the family itself, which is the reason why Comte considered this institution as fundamental to the preservation of social order (cf. Nisbet 1993: 59–60). He emphasized its "paramount importance for all as the best security for public order, and the great source of private happiness" (Comte 1877: 259). In the family, each member develops a form of long-lasting respect and affection toward the other ones: parents learn to love inferiors—the children (Comte called this feeling "benevolence" or "goodness"); children and wives learn to love their superiors—the father ("admiration" and "veneration"); lastly, children make the experience of solidarity and affection among equals (a feeling, as Wernick 2003: 127 rightly observes, that played a less important role in Comte's work than the other two).

The strengthening of sympathetic tendencies is connected with the experience of dependence. The more individuals depend upon others for their well-being, the more they develop a spontaneous feeling of gratitude and affection toward their caretakers. In particular, small children are almost completely dependent beings, so not only their attachment is initially very strong, but it also self-perpetuates and remains a feature of their relation to their parents well after they have become independent from them. While weaker, the same feelings of attachment emerge in the mind of adult interdependent beings. Since, according to Comte, interdependence increases as societies evolve through history because of the division of labor and the specialization of functions, it is to be expected that sympathetic feelings should become more and more prevalent. Correspondingly, Comte believed that attachment would eventually become a feature of

social life as a whole, as opposed to remaining confined to the family or the kinship group. He thought the members of society would experience a form of love, not only toward people with whom they are directly acquainted but, more abstractly, toward the group in its entirety. This is the foundation of the eminent moral faculties of patriotism (the love of country) and humanism (the love of humanity) (Comte 1875a: 567–68). While the notion of an almost universal prevalence of sympathy is a fair approximation of Comte's vision of the final stage of social development, we will see that the path leading to it is far from being linear.

The third dimension of the mental life of humans consists in the intellectual functions. Comte called them the means (*moyens*) of instincts, insofar as the satisfaction of biological needs is more efficient, at least in humans, when some planning is involved (Comte 1875a: 571), which in turn depends upon a combination of knowledge, reflection and judgment. No one can undertake an action without some kind of theory about the way in which the environment, both natural and social, will react. This "theory" is a mental model about the regularities that are inherent in nature and society, and the knowledge about such regularities ultimately derives from observation (though not necessarily first-person observation: the knowledge in question can have been transmitted by others). Comte's emphasis on the fact that humans, historically speaking, do not immediately arrive at a proper understanding of the laws of nature is a central and well-known feature of his work. One of the obstacles to positive knowledge is the fact that humans can never start from pure observation, but only from observation mixed with preconceptions. This is because, in the anti-empiricist epistemology of positivism (cf. Schmaus 1984: 254; Laval 2012: 158–60), the discovery of regularities by way of observation "requires some kind of theory" (Comte 1830: 8). Without a theory, any observable phenomenon remains "isolated" and disconnected, and cannot be seen as the instance of a more general rule. What is needed first, thus, are approximate theories to guide observation. It is to be expected that their precision should improve with time, through the confrontation with more and more cases. But where does the first theory come from, if not from observation? Comte's answer is that it comes from pure speculation. As Comte wrote (1830: 9), in their early history humans have "spontaneously" developed "theological conceptions": the first theory about observable phenomena, natural as well as social, is that all of them are forms of purposeful action. This is "projective anthropomorphism" (Wernick 2003: 42). Rivers flow, stones fall, and stars move because it is their conscious plan to do so. Nature, in other words, is entirely composed of living entities: this is the fetishist frame of mind, which corresponds to the first period of the theological stage of human history. Later on, the capacity to cause natural phenomena by way of purposeful action is restricted to a smaller number of divinities (polytheism) and to one single god (monotheism). It is only in the final stage of history that human beings are in a position to use their intelligence to discover the real laws of nature without having to use the notions of meaning or purpose.

According to Comte, the motor of historical development is the "movement of ideas" (Bourdeau 2006: 29): historical progress, as Christian Laval (2012: 162) observes, is to a large extent coterminous with epistemic improvement: "It is the progress of

observation, within the limits set by the theoretical framework specific to each stage, which brings humanity from one stage to the next, and which also modifies each stage by causing the passage through each step of its evolution." As Gane (2006: 25–28; 105) has rightly emphasized, this process is complex and, contrary to some readings, not absolutely linear. However, the existence of continuous and necessary intellectual progress is in the nature of things: philosophers, scholars and scientists propose more inclusive and more precise theories to explain new, *prima facie* anomalous observations. A major transformation is the progressive abandonment of the anthropomorphic tendency to explain natural phenomena by assuming the existence of conscious purposes. This abandonment is rendered inevitable in view of the progressive discovery of a central tension in anthropomorphic reasoning: while conscious entities can change their mind, natural phenomena are absolutely regular (cf. Schmaus 1984: 256). Comte (1853: 218) spoke of the "irreconcilable opposition between actual laws and supernatural will." This tension can vanish if the very idea that nature exists and changes according to a subjective plan is relinquished. At the beginning of the positive stage, it has vanished from the mind of most (though not all) scholars, and is doomed to disappear completely from society as a whole. This will be the basis for a new convergence of ideas, leaving behind "the metaphysical era" (roughly, from the Middle Ages to the aftermath of the French Revolution) characterized by strong disagreements within society between the proponents of various social, political and religious doctrines (cf. Wernick 2003: 33–34).

The significance of Comte's views on intelligence for the question of order is this: we may expect that logic, as well as knowledge deriving from observations, may be a second centripetal factor in society, next to sympathetic instincts. We may even be tempted to assume that they are *more* conducive to homogeneity than these instincts: while affection, as we saw, is at first confined to small circles, the rules of logic are universal, and reality is everywhere subjected to the same natural laws, so that observation should yield similar results the world over. However, this was not the position Comte adopted: societies, as illustrated by the existence of various religious practices and beliefs, do not immediately develop the same understanding of nature in all places; even within the same society theological, metaphysical and positive conceptions can sometimes coexist (Gane 2006: 26).

The primary element that ties individuals together, that brings them to adopt identical views and develop identical feelings, thus, is sympathy. However, sympathy is constantly threatened by the disorderly, dispersive, centrifugal action of personal instincts. As a rule, because the personal instincts are felt more immediately and more strongly, they tend to have more influence on the conduct of individuals. This explains why they have a hard time controlling them on their own: The struggle against the principle of personality must be a collective effort of society as a whole to establish an equilibrium between the various forces. It is the role of *les pouvoirs* to modify the action or thinking of persons by way of material force (based on physical coercion or material rewards), moral force (based on affection and admiration), or intellectual force (based on rational persuasion) (Comte 1875b: 223–35 and chapter V more generally). Equilibrium is achieved when the moral and intellectual forces join to keep in check the stronger influence of egoistic instincts, without completely annihilating them.[5]

However, intelligence had an ambiguous role during most of human history before the final spread of positive knowledge. On the one hand, the intellect can sometimes strengthen sociability by endowing individuals with reasons to act in a way contrary to the spontaneous perception they have of their own interest. Religious dogmas or moral theories, for instance, are (among other things) systems of persuasion that offer a repertoire of shared, intersubjectively intelligible motives for altruistic behavior. On the other hand, intelligence could also be used by individuals and small groups to subtly devise arguments in favor of, not altruistic, but egoistic action. In short, from the point of view of social order, knowledge and reflection are double-edged swords (cf. Brahami 2007: 53).

Power and Politics

In the previous sections, Comte's views on social order and social change have been presented, and the role of *le pouvoir* in the maintenance of social stability has been mentioned. But we need to deepen our understanding of this aspect of Comte's thought. In French, the term "power" can be used to describe two kinds of things. On the one hand, it can refer to a specific kind of social relation involving the attempt of one or more persons to bring others to act in a certain way.[6] On the other hand, it can stand for the "powers that be": a specific group or institution known or believed to wield a particularly high capacity to direct the behavior of others (that is, to exert over them power in the first sense). Even though Comte's use of terms was not always consistent, it is possible to detect some revealing tendencies in his vocabulary. Especially in the *System*, the term power is often used in the second sense: when speaking of *le pouvoir* he usually wanted to describe an instance, a "site," or an institution with the capacity to influence or direct the action of others by way of *la force* or *la puissance*. Concerning these terms, too (which were used as rough synonyms), Comte's usage must be clarified. He did not restrict the term "force" to physical coercion or the threat thereof, but used it to describe any kind of means that can bring people into behaving, thinking or feeling in a certain way.[7] Comte also used the term *government* in the broad sense of rule or direction, to refer abstractly to the controlling functions extant within society. Such a use of the term *government* can be observed in the following quote from one of Comte's early texts: "In proportion as moral government is weak, material government must be strong, in order to prevent the entire decomposition of the social body" (Comte 1877: 626; translation modified). Similarly, at the beginning of the *System of Positive Polity*, Comte singled out

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5   It is important at this stage to emphasize that Comte did *not* envisage "politics" as being coterminous with "power," in the sense of the collective effort to achieve an equilibrium between the various forces. I develop this point below.

6   I am using here Max Weber's famous definition, e.g. in Weber (1994). See also, on the question of the nature of power, Popitz (1969); Bachrach and Baratz (1970); Lukes (2005).

7   In other words, Comte spoke of "force" to describe what Weber would call *Macht* (power).

women and the proletarians as the best allies of the "spiritual regeneration" aimed at by positivism. This is because, he argued,

> having but little influence in political government, they are more likely to appreciate the need of a moral government, the special object of which is to protect them against the oppressive action of the temporal power. (Comte 1875a: 3)

As these quotes suggest, control—or force—comes in two forms: the material one, also called here "political," wielded by the *temporal power*, and the moral and intellectual one, wielded by the *spiritual* power. Temporal power rules over bodies by maintaining a system of explicit rules and imparting immediate material sanctions (of a financial or physical kind): it "control actions without regulating the will" (Comte 1875a: 171; translation modified). By contrast, spiritual power governs the soul. Among the main instruments used by the holders of spiritual power we find the control of educational institutions, direct religious preaching and the dissemination of ideas in society by way of theoretical publications.[8]

As civilization develops, it becomes more and more essential, according to Comte, that the two powers should be kept separate. While temporal power and spiritual power were in a relative equilibrium during the Middle Ages, the modern era has been characterized by the growth of the former at the cost of the latter:

> Of all the revolutionary prejudices engendered during the last three centuries by the decay of the old social system [the Middle Ages, JT], the oldest, the most entrenched, the most widespread, and the general foundation of all the others, is the principle by virtue of which no spiritual power should exist in society; or, what amounts to the same thing, the opinion that completely subordinates this power to temporal power. (Comte 1998: 192)

This growth of temporal power took the following shape. At the institutional level, there was an increasing primacy of the state over the church. With the advent of the modern state (roughly, in the sixteenth century) and the rise of the doctrine of the reason of state, rulers started to justify their action independently of religion. Later, with the principle of *cujus regio, ejus religio*, the political increasingly went as far as to assert its right to determine the faith of its population, thereby subordinating religion to the state, that is, the spiritual to the temporal power.

At an intellectual level, new antisocial theories were developed, which either legitimized the new role of political power or rejected it by way of an advocacy of the rights of individuals against the state (Gane 2006: 79–85). In other words, the tragedy of modernity was that the growing power of the state over society was combated not by a defense of the ideals of collective faith and common purposes, but by an emphasis on the autonomy of individuals relative to social and political institutions (family, state, religion). The result

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8 Very critical of journalism and the press, Comte recommended the use of short placards to be displayed on the walls of villages and cities (for the general public), on the one hand, and on the other hand the recourse to systematic treatises (for the educated public). Cf. Comte (1877: 275–76) and, for a commentary, Reynié (2007).

was that the force of the intellect was assisting, instead of limiting, the egoistic tendencies in society. During the Enlightenment, the dominant theory was heavily influenced by legal reasoning and political philosophy (as opposed to the human sciences such as history or anthropology). Its central notion was that individuals have fundamental rights against the state, and that collectively binding decisions result from the aggregation of individual wills, so that "each of us has the duty to set himself up as a legislator" (Comte 1998: 1).

At the level of social theory, the vision of many *philosophes* of the Enlightenment was that the shape of social relations could be easily and quickly modified by mere political fiat (that is, by the use of material force). For instance, the way in which the French revolutionaries turned so many traditional arrangements upside down—not only political institutions, but also regional boundaries, weights and measures, the calendar, and so forth—showed that they envisaged social relations as amenable to a quick transformation by decree: for them, "society is indefinitely modifiable" (Comte 1842: 384); it is envisaged not as an organic whole but as a "malleable stuff" (in the formulation of Laval 2012: 153–54). This was the most dramatic aspect of an erroneous social theory, on whose basis no enduring social transformation could be undertaken. Comte pointed out, with sarcastic undertones ("ten constitutions in thirty years [...] all declared eternal and irrevocable"), the repeated failure of French statesmen to establish stable institutions. In a short passage, he singled out the erroneous social theory of the French Revolutionaries:

> Society does not progress like that, nor can it do so. The conceit of building, in one go, in a few months or even in a few years, the whole economy of a social system in its complete and definitive development, is an extravagant chimera, which is absolutely incompatible with the weakness of the human mind. (Comte 1998: 63–64)

Comte, of course, was supportive of many aspects of the French Revolution (cf. Baker 1989; Brahami 2007; Wokler 1990): in particular, at the social level, he welcomed the attack against aristocratic and monarchical privilege; and at the intellectual level, he appreciated the belief in scientific progress and the critique of theology. Moreover, it is also true that Comte, especially in his later work, took up the revolutionaries' ambition to introduce new traditions, and in particular a new immanent religion with society and science as alternative gods. However, he believed his method to be fundamentally different from the one which prevailed during the French Revolution. First of all, Comte's alternative approach took the factor time into account (on this point, see Karsenti 2006: 15–33): he emphasized that the transformation of social relations could only occur progressively and by small, careful steps. (In the fourth volume of his *System*, in which he presented his views on what he called the "extreme transition," Comte spoke of approximately a few decades to reach the final stage of a universal society organized along positive lines.) Second, social transformation was to be achieved by educational and moral means, not by political ones.

The Positive Political System

One of Comte's most fundamental intellectual motivations is his desire to overcome the anarchy which, he believed, was characteristic of his own time. The social and political

crisis that was unfolding before his eyes was acute due to a grave discrepancy: on the one hand, there were various phenomena with strong dispersive effects—in particular the growth of the division of labor in the industrial system and the decomposition of traditional religions due to the influence of science, which was spreading unbelief; on the other hand, no adequate social theory was available to explain and counter the dispersion. This resulted in permanent social-political conflicts, accompanied, especially in France, with a rapid succession of political regimes, none of which was able to establish a new consensus in the population. Comte believed that a profound transformation of social theory was necessary to inspire a new social and political system, based on the marriage of "order and progress" (Comte 1875a: 2).

Social theorists had to abandon the individualism of the metaphysical era, with its emphasis on the "rights of man" and autonomy, in order to adopt instead a new solidaristic, consensus-oriented social theory: positivism itself, with as its foundation a new science, which Comte called first "social physics" (Comte 1896a: 8), and later sociology (Comte 1896b: 201; see the footnote in Comte 1839: 252). At the beginning of the *System of Positive Polity* Comte delineated his plan for a restoration of social order in the following way (Comte 1875a: 2; translation modified). To begin with, he declared "the most urgent of our social needs" to be "a satisfactory synthesis of all human conceptions"—by which he meant the identification of "fixed principles of judgment and of conduct" that should become part of "every department of public and private life." The elaboration of this synthesis would be the task of a "new moral power," a "true spiritual power." This power would progressively gain influence thanks to the establishment of "general system of education for the adoption of all civilized nations." Social transformation should be an "intellectual movement" and the role of politics in the narrow sense should remain a subordinate one: Comte described as "impossible any political reorganization without the previous remodeling of opinions and customs." In other words, Comte took it to be essential for the restoration of social order that the spiritual power and its typical instruments (teaching and preaching) should progressively acquire a growing influence over the temporal power, and society more generally.

Comte made clear that only social scientists (as opposed to lawyers, political philosophers and the population taken as a whole) are in a position to really know which precepts and regulations a given society needs. Already in his early work, he had observed that only scientists can have a truly in-depth knowledge of the "particular state of the society" (Comte 1998: 159). The political authorities in the strict sense (the holders of material power) are in a poor position to imagine appropriate policies: this is because "the more one is immersed in practice, the less one is able to have a clear view of theory" (Comte 1998: 1). Similarly, Comte insisted that the majority of the members of the society do not know which regulations and precepts should be adopted to stabilize the social order. In his short reflection on the "General Separation between Opinions and Desires" (1819), he argued that there is no logical relation between the awareness of one's desires or needs and the knowledge of the objectively best means to fulfill them (cf. Comte 1998: 1–4). Comte envisaged a kind of division of political labor in which individuals express needs, spiritual power-holders indicate what are the objectively appropriate regulations and precepts, and political rulers enforce them:

The public alone should indicate the goal, because, if it does not always know what it needs, it knows precisely what it wants, and no one should take into his head to will on its behalf. But as for the means of attaining this goal, it is for political scientists alone to concern themselves with this, once it has been clearly indicated by public opinion. It would be absurd for the masses to seek to reason about it. It is for the public opinion to form a will, publicists to suggest means of execution, and rulers to execute. (Comte 1998: 3)[9]

Comte was to remain faithful to this general appreciation of politics during his entire career. In the *Cours de philosophie positive* (Comte 1839: 126), he reiterated that "most social rules that should become customary should not be abandoned to the blind and arbitrary decision of an incompetent public." In the *System of Positive Polity*, he argued once more, contrary to the "metaphysical doctrine of the Sovereignty of the people," that social rules should not be the expression of explicit collective preferences (Comte 1875a: 107; cf. on this point Bourdeau 2007: 9). Rather, they should be established on the basis of a scientific (historical and sociological) analysis of social needs. This amounts to saying that government can take the form of a science and (as a matter of consequence) that the power-holders should remain relatively independent of the people and their preferences. With this, Comte was in a position to justify one of the central components of positivist politics: the power of enlightened experts. At the beginning of his career, he indicated that an association of scientists should be in charge of the spiritual power. In his later work, he advocated the creation of a new religion of Humanity, whose priests (at the same time scientists, moralists and philosophers) should be the representatives of *puissance spirituelle*. Comte, however, always insisted that spiritual power should be exerted by way of an exchange of opinions with state administrators, as well as through public argumentation, as opposed to be being materialized immediately in political prescriptions and prohibitions. Already in the *Cours de philosophie positive*, Comte made this perfectly clear:

The spiritual reorganization must result from purely intellectual action, providing for a final voluntary and unanimous assent, without the disturbing intervention of any heterogeneous [material or political, JT] power. (Comte 1896b: 163)

What would happen to the other force, the material one, and to temporal power in Comte's society of the future? Its role, Comte suggested, would diminish—but *how much* it would diminish is heavily debated in the literature on this question. Clearly,

9 In this early quote from "General Separation between Opinions and Desires" (1819), Comte's vocabulary was different from the one he adopted later. His understanding of politics was broader: basically, he considered the exercise of both material and spiritual force as pertaining to the political. This is the reason why he spoke of the political role of scientists and scholars and went as far as calling them, in this passage "savants en politique" (here translated as "political scientists"). Also in the *Cours de philosophie politique*, Comte's concept of politics still was slightly broader than the one adopted in the later *System*: this is indicated by the fact that he qualified both the temporal *and* the spiritual power as "political" (e.g., in Comte 1839: 348). In the *System*, Comte often made an opposition between temporal, material and political, on the one hand, and spiritual, intellectual/moral, and social, on the other.

Comte emphasized that no society could exist without the possibility of resorting to material force, due to the weakness of altruism and the natural preponderance of egoistic tendencies. In Raymond Aron's reading (1996), this Hobbesian dimension is central to Comte's entire vision of the social. According to Christian Laval (2012: 142–46), Comte argued for an equilibrium between the two powers, since both moral persuasion and the threat of material sanctions were needed to check egoistic tendencies. Richard Vernon (1984) interprets Comte as one of the proponents, together with Marx and most of his followers, of the concomitant notions of a withering away of the state and an almost disappearance of the political (see also Bourdeau 2007: 11). I agree with Vernon that, according to Comte, the role of politics (in his own narrow sense) would be strongly reduced in the society of the future. For instance, he wrote in the fourth volume of the *System of Positive Polity* that "the Positive regime will make government more and more spiritual and less and less temporal, thus systematizing the natural progress of human association" (Comte 1877: 268; translation modified). In my view, however, it is hard to speak here of a complete de-politicization of society, since Comte (1877: 292; translation modified) clearly affirmed that "material intervention [i.e., politics, JT] will never entirely cease to be required." He emphasized, however, that in the future material force would typically take the form of rewards instead of physical coercion, in conformity with the passage from the military to the industrial stage of society.

Granted that temporal power does not subside with the advent of the age of positivism, what will be its institutional features? In each region of the planet in official existence, in each *cité*,[10] there should be a triumvirate of patricians—three bankers of at least 42 years of age, one connected with commerce, one with industry, and one with agriculture (Comte 1877: 301–2)—who could, in exceptional cases, make use of material force to punish those whose minds remain closed to the influence of the positive doctrine and repeatedly fail to *vivre pour autrui*. Not election, but co-optation, should regulate the access of the triumvirs to power, after an initial selection by the head of the positive church, the High Priest of Humanity. Comte insisted that the state should consist of only two strata: the temporal power-holders, on the one hand, and their administration, selected by the triumvirs themselves, on the other. In the positive state, there is no need for a representative assembly or a parliament, an institution Comte abhorred (Comte 1877: 342). The only thing resembling an instance capable of controlling the action of the triumvirate is a "financial assembly," responsible for voting the budget and revising the accounts of the past (Comte 1877: 342). Of course, this assembly would not have legislative power—in fact, Comte argued against the separation of powers, typical of the metaphysical politics of legal philosophers, and asserted that the triumvirate is responsible for both the establishment and the execution of rules and laws, as well as for the administration of justice (Comte 1877: 406).

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10 These regions or *cités* are not nations, which according to Comte should be broken up into smaller entities. Comte recommended smaller units the size of Tuscany or Belgium (Comte 1877: 267; cf Gane 2006: 5; 109). As Vernon rightly emphasizes (1984: 550, 554), this proposal to overcome the national form represents a difference between the early and the later Comte.

Despite the relative lack of control, Comte was confident that the holders of material force would not abuse their power. Here, too, he emphasized indirect moral and social control over direct political control. He conceded that the patricians, as a minority class of proprietors, are spontaneously less altruistic than the proletarians. Comte accounted for the stronger solidaristic leanings of the latter by mentioning their greater awareness of the fact of cooperation, since they directly partake in it and are constantly exposed to it. However, the patricians are also enmeshed in a web of solidaristic practices. First of all, they depend on the proletarians to achieve their economic goals. This is especially the case of the class of entrepreneurs. Second, they are of course an integral part of the solidaristic institution of family life. Moreover, the members of the patrician families have in their households a number of domestic servants coming from the proletarian class. This instills in them an attitude of benevolence toward the subordinate social strata. Third, the patricians are submitted, like the proletarians, through their membership in the positive Church, to the regulating influence of the proper social doctrine. And fourth, Comte described how the patricians and the proletarians will entertain social relations outside of the economic and domestic spheres: he especially emphasized the role of weekly inter-class *salons*, through which the patricians and some "eminent" representatives of the proletariat would be in regular contact. If, despite all those elements bringing the various classes and groups of society together, there was a case of power abuse on the part of the triumvirate in charge of temporal power, Comte recommended that public opinion exert a strong pressure upon them to force them to resign (Comte 1877: 302).[11]

Comte's Place in the History of Social and Political Thinking

As we saw at the outset, Comte's goals was to explain social phenomena and historical processes by showing that they derive, in the last analysis, from specific representations and dispositions. During historical transitions, mismatches between the actual needs of society and the conceptions that are predominant in public opinion may occur. This is the case, for instance, during the "terrible crisis" (Comte 1998: 62) of European societies, depicted above. Under closer inspection, it is possible to detect a recurrent theme in Comte's description of intellectual errors: they often consist in a false hierarchization of separate principles or in the denial of any hierarchy (this worst of all mistakes explains, incidentally, why "anarchy" is Comte's supreme theoretical insult). Proper thinking, on the other hand, consists in the discovery or restoration of the correct hierarchical order: it takes the form of a correct hierarchization, that is to say of a subordination—or, as Comte also wrote, "subalternization" (e.g., in Comte 1839: 27)—of the inferior elements to the superior ones. For instance, the positive method consists in the subordination of imagination to observation (in the theological era, the reverse was the case). "Positive

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11 As a side note, the weapon of public pressure, in the form of a refusal of religious cooperation, can also be used to counter the abuse of *spiritual* power. Comte also mentioned a possible revocation of clerics by the pontiff and, when even the pontiff is corrupt, the suspension of financial transfers from the state to the clergy (cf. Comte 1877: 294).

politics" re-establishes a proper hierarchy between temporal and spiritual power, putting the latter on top: as Brahami (2007: 47) writes, "The function of spiritual power is to subordinate politics to morality." Positivism also subordinates the individual to society, interest to morality and the state to society. By restoring the proper hierarchy, positivism marks a break with the critical/metaphysical era, during which the emphasis on individual interest (in the economic sphere) and on individual will (in the political sphere) led to a decline of morality and, consequently, to a weakening of society.

While it is true that a "separation of the social and the political would be antithetic to Comte's final ambition" (Leterre 2007: 80), it is important to realize that the meaning of this sentence obviously varies according to one's definition of the political. Comte's concept of "politics" was twofold. Roughly speaking, we can say that sometimes it refers to the (re-)organization of society through the action of spiritual power (that is to say, social control by way of moral influence), backed up, in a subordinate position, by temporal power: this is the meaning of the term in the title of Comte's multi-volume work *System of Positive Politics*, which entails, in the formulation of Karsenti (2006), the complete program of a "politics of the spirit." In other cases, however, "politics" is used to describe only the (temporal) actions that involve the use of material force: this is "politics in the proper sense" (a recurring phrase, e.g., in Comte 1852: 178).[12] When "politics" has this narrower meaning, the strengthening of spiritual power can no longer be described as a political project. I make these observations as a *caveat* at the beginning of this last section dedicated to Comte's place in the history of social and political thinking: despite all the good reasons to read Auguste Comte as a political philosopher and to situate him within the history of political thinking, we must remember that he envisaged society first and foremost not as a political, but as a moral project.

Auguste Comte and the "Language of the Social"

Comte's overall project, in a nutshell, can be interpreted as an attempt to subordinate the political to the social. This is a core theme in what I call the "language of the social" (Terrier 2015; Terrier 2011). Since the first decades of the nineteenth century, this language has constituted a distinctive area of discourse, a "language game" with its "own vocabulary, rules, preconditions and implications, tone and style" (Pocock 1990: 21). At the core of this language lies the theme of a relative thickness and robustness of social relations. The notion is that there exist distinct social settings or contexts in which specific ways of doings things and thinking about them can be observed to be widely diffused. This leads to the suspicion that the overall configuration of social relations conditions, and in some cases determines, the action and thinking of individuals. Thus, society is typically envisaged as something pre-given, in the sense that it exists prior to individual

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12 Consider, for the sake of illustration, the following quote (Comte 1875a: 72): the "Positivist doctrine" emphasizes the necessity of "separating political from moral government. The latter should be understood to rely exclusively on the forces of conviction and persuasion; its influence on action being simply of counsel; whereas the former employs direct compulsion, based upon superiority of physical force [*ascendant matériel*]."

interrelations and thus provides them with a specific shape: if anything, society is more a cause than an effect of human decisions. As J. G. A Pocock (1987: xliv) wrote in his commentary on Edmund Burke, it is a fundamental notion of the language of the social that "the social order antedates the human intellect and sets the moral and practical conditions under which both theory and practice must be carried on."

In other words, the language of the social operated a transformation of the categories of society and social order (a semantic shift whereby "society" was increasingly associated with notions such as inertia and constraint and separated from notions such as friendship and purpose). This required a change in the category of individuality. Instead of being envisaged as self-sufficient monads, individuals were now increasingly envisaged, not as factors, but as functions of social order. This could either mean that the thought and actions of individuals were determined by society, or, less extremely, that individual autonomy was not part of human nature but a product of social developments.[13]

These various elements represent a reversal of the notion of society heralded by the thinkers of social contract and natural law. They typically worked with a concept of individuality characterized by the faculty of autonomous volition and thus tended to view society in nominalistic fashion (cf. Kaufmannn and Guilhaumou 2003), as an association resulting from the voluntary agreement of free individuals. This was the case, to a large extent, of an author such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Contrat social* is one of the first published works bearing the term "social" in its title. Thus, as Keith Michael Baker (1989: 86) wrote, "society" initially "carried a range of essentially voluntaristic meanings, clustered around two poles: association of partnership for a common purpose, on the one hand; friendship, comradeship, companionability, on the other." Of course, the discourses emphasizing law, will and politics entailed a recognition of the stability of social forms. Yet, this stability was attributed not to the inherent inertia of social relations, but to the continuous (especially legal, ideological and educational) action of some guardian of social order—especially the monarchy and the church.

Because it de-emphasized law and state action and insisted upon the impact of collective factors distinct and independent from individual and collective will (such as tradition, the requirements of economic organization, climate or even race), the language of the social included in its rhetoric the notion that the political (narrowly defined as the conscious imposition of formal obligatory rules) should be subordinated to the social. This rhetoric of subordination is transversal to the entire history of the language of the social (cf. Terrier 2011) and even in recent times, it resurfaces regularly. For instance, the American historian of sociology Robert Nisbet criticized the notion, inherited from the Enlightenment, that the state could entirely reshape social

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13 This was the position of Emile Durkheim: in the rendition of Philippe Steiner (2009: 48), "instead of Comte's and Spencer's anthropological views, Durkheim saw egoism and altruism as the result of the work of society upon itself. In the current terminology, they are social constructs."

relations by decree. In opposition to this emphasis put on the political, he advocated a "rediscovery of the social" (which Nisbet understood as voluntary association and local self-government) and even a "liberation of the idea of the social from the political" (Nisbet 1976: 241).

It is useful to distinguish between at least two dialects within the language of the social. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, an array of authors followed the path traced by de Maistre, Bonald and other conservatives and adopted an anti-individualistic and often deterministic type of social reasoning with strong naturalistic leanings (cf. Brooks 1998; Nisbet 1952; Nisbet 1949; Mucchielli 1998). Authors such as Gobineau, Taine and Gustave Le Bon typically identified a *natural* cause external to human action and even to society itself—such as race or climate—that was taken to having exerted an influence upon all members of the collective, thereby rendering them similar in customs, character and opinions.

By contrast, the second dialect in the history of the language of the social is critical of naturalistic reasoning (without necessarily avoiding all biological, and especially organicist, metaphors—see Barberis 2003). In the summary offered by Brian Turner, classical sociology (in which the anti-naturalistic dialect within the language of the social came to the fore) possessed several distinctive characteristics. Like all other representatives of the language of the social, the social scientists of the second dialect offer "explanations of the social" that "assume a particular form—they typically eschew variables that are characteristic of individuals (their motives, psychology, needs or beliefs)." (Turner 2006: 135) In other words, they emphasize the relative "thickness" of social relations and their relative independence from individual choice. Second (and this is the important point here), they "understand and define 'the social' as opposed to 'nature.'" (Turner 2006: 135) Classical sociology rejected naturalism in both its dominant forms. To begin with, explanations focusing on the influence of natural factors such as race or climate were rejected. For example, Durkheim, in his *Suicide*, offered one of the clearest, most systematic attempts at showing that social phenomena could not be explained by "heredity" or "race" (Durkheim 1994: chap. 2) nor by "cosmic factors" (i.e., climate—Durkheim: chap. 3). On the other hand, the other kind of naturalistic explanations that the representatives of the second dialect of the language of the social were trying to undermine was the one that relied on the notion of *human* nature. In the vocabulary of Norbert Elias (1991: 35), sociology denies the existence of natural, intrinsic human tendencies, since human reality is characterized by "the high degree of malleability and adaptability in human relation-functions." As Durkheim (1955: 142) wrote: "man is a product of history [...] there is nothing in him which is defined in advance." Overall, these representatives of the second dialect within the language of the social, because of their critique of naturalistic determinism, adopted a view of society as a more open and more fluid entity than their opponents. Not only did they acknowledge the capacity of society to evolve, but they even envisaged sociology as the science of social transformation—the science that should explain (and legitimize) the passage to modernity (see Wagner 1994). At the same time, they emphasized that this passage could not be administratively summoned: It should result from piecemeal historical developments. In other words, they remained to a large extent faithful to the rhetoric of a necessary subordination of the political to the social.

To come back now to Auguste Comte, in his work there are several peculiarities, considered from the standpoint of the history of social and political thinking, of which I would like to discuss two—one regarding his social theory properly speaking, and the other regarding his political theory.

As we saw, it is possible to distinguish between at least two dialects in the history of the language of the social—the naturalistic one and the anti-naturalistic one. The main feature of the second of these dialects is its principle of seeking the explanation for social phenomena not outside of society (in the autonomous decisions of rational individuals, in a uniform human nature, in race or climate), but inside of it, and especially in the relations between social groups as they unfold through history. With respect to the long history of the development of the language of the social, Comte can be described as a "hybrid," or perhaps "transitional," figure.

Some aspects of Comte's social theory seem to clearly belong to the second dialect of the social. Generally speaking, the explanatory factors of collective phenomena, in Comte's view, must be found not in nature, but in the overall configuration of social relations, and in particular in the equilibrium (or lack thereof) of the different social functions. For instance, Comte's "epistemic theory" of social change, delineated above, uses as its starting point the idea of human beings trying to cope with their environment and, to achieve this, progressively establishing a division of labor (e.g., between producers, rulers and scholars). In this attempt, and despite some similarities, different societies develop different religious views, different cultural practices, different ways of organizing power. In other words, despite Comte's reputation of having developed a linear, deterministic philosophy of history, he left open some theoretical space for a specific sociological analysis of institutional forms and social practices. As in the case of Max Weber, Comte put a lot of effort into establishing a system of sociological categories that could be used to classify and compare social arrangements: What kind of religious views are dominant in a given social setting at a given time? How are dispersive tendencies kept in check? What is the role of the material, the spiritual and the intellectual forces? How is the material reproduction of collective life organized? In classical taxonomic fashion, Comte's social theory seeks to demonstrate that there exist specific affinities between the various answers that can be provided to all these questions.

Also, like other social scientists of his time, Comte took as his starting point the rejection of one kind of explanation of social phenomena: the one that envisages social relations as the result of conscious individual decisions. This brought him to distance himself from law and political philosophy (and also from economics, as emphasized by Laval 2012 and Steiner 2006) as disciplines valid for elucidating social phenomena. There was at the time within these disciplines, as well as in political practice, a tendency, inherited from classical contractarianism, to idealize politics—understood as the domain of individual and collective will—and to neglect the role of social relations, reduced to the status of mere "malleable stuff." Comte rejected such assumptions. In order to mark a break with them, he attempted to demonstrate that the role of politics and will would diminish in the future, thereby implicitly describing the political philosophy of his time as an anachronism. In a gesture of provocation, he threw the gauntlet down before his contemporaries (liberals and socialists alike) by asserting that the future would be

characterized, not by emancipation but by "obedience";[14] not by a progress of individual reason and will, but by the diffusion of stronger solidaristic sentiments. These are the motivations behind Comte's conception of a necessary subordination of individual will to moral exigencies, and of the political to the social.

While all the elements I have described so far are themes of the anti-naturalistic language of the social, the founder of positivism remains ambiguous since there are strong "biological tendencies in the sociology of Auguste Comte" (Guillin 2012). Comte worked with a theory of the existence of permanent tendencies, inherent to human beings, which he borrowed from Franz Joseph Gall and other biologists (cf. Gane 2006: 8–9, 72–73; Guillin 2012; Wernick 2003: 51). Comte believed, for instance, that women are essentially (naturally) different from men; that the sustained contact with caretakers essentially (naturally) produces feelings of indebtedness, admiration, and love and so forth. At the same time—and this is the point that needs to be stressed here—Comte differed from other theorists of human nature because of his emphasis on the variety of relationships human instincts can entertain with one another. While interest, intelligence and sentiment all belong to human nature and are active at all times, their exact hierachization is not set by nature, but by society. At the normative level, this opens a theoretical space for the notion of perfectibility: while human nature cannot be altered, the respective weight of each component can be modified, so that the "better part of our nature," in Benjamin Constant's phrase (1991: 327), can be strengthened. These are the assumptions behind Comte's (1875a: 317) definition of humanity as the "most relative and the most perfectible of all beings." Here we see some convergence with Durkheim and Elias, which is another reason behind my depiction of Comte as a hybrid, ambiguous figure.

Comte in the History of Political Thought

Comte's political thinking has been variously interpreted.[15] Some, such as Raymond Aron (1996: 90–91) read Comte as a "liberal," but of the "organizational" kind, as opposed to the "Manchesterian," *laissez-faire* kind. Aron even detected some socialist leanings in Comte's thinking (see also Brahami 2015 on this point). Many more authors, however, emphasize the conservatism of Auguste Comte. Marx, who was born one generation after Comte, seemed to be willing to firmly anchor him in the conservative camp, describing him in the first draft of the *Civil War in France* as

> the prophet in politics of imperialism (of personal *dictatorship*), of capitalist rule in political economy, of hierarchy in all spheres of human action, even in the sphere of science, and as the author of a new catechism with a new pope and new saints in place of the old ones. (Cited in Farr 1984: 228)

Similarly, while Nisbet (1993: 57) acknowledged Comte's search for a synthesis of the insights from both the Enlightenment and reaction, he thought that Comte's

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14 In Comte's (1877: 239) formulation: "Positive instruction systematises submission."
15 My thanks go to Martin Beckstein for his enlightening comments on this section.

spontaneous leanings were for the conservatives. Mike Gane, while recognizing Comte's early liberal, and even left-wing leanings (Gane 2006: 5, 52; see also Heilbron 1995, part III), writes that Comte ended up being a representative of the "puritanical right" (Gane 2006: 91).

A third widespread position consists in considering Comte a unique, ambiguous figure. Vernon, who describes Comte in terms reminiscent of those of Marx ("He was an authoritarian, a rationalist, a believer in hierarchy"—Vernon 1984: 550) denies Comte's conservatism, since he had no sympathy for the goals of reactionary politics, as his rejection of aristocracy and his advocacy of industrialization show. For Vernon, the founder of positivism is hard to classify politically, a reading also shared by Brahami (2015; 2007) and by Wernick (2003: 119), who mentions "Comte's eccentric blending of Catholic-conservative with liberal-progressive visions of love and community."

In this final section, the ambiguity of Auguste Comte will also be emphasized, but not because of his midway position between conservatism, liberalism and socialism, but because of the transitional nature of his thought in the history of European conservatism.

In a certain way, the classification of Comte as a conservative may seem relatively obvious because of the broad area of overlap between his thinking and the typical positions of conservatives like Burke or de Maistre. Very critical of the French Revolution, these authors emphasized collectivity over the individual: Political reason is located in society, in history, and not in the will of individuals. In the absence of a constraining social structure, individuals tend to act emotionally: They are incapable of identifying their own long-term interests, not to mention the interests of society as a whole. This is the reason why individuals should have duties, not rights. In particular, *political* rights are dangerous, for they transfer power from those who possess experience and wisdom to a crowd deprived of the leisure, the knowledge and the intelligence required for politics. At the same time, the constraint that must be exerted over individuals should not take the form of physical force. Rather, what is needed at all levels are benevolent moral authorities whose means of action are sentiments, and in particular familial, patriotic and religious feelings.[16]

At first sight, Comte's thinking would fit rather well in this picture. However, there also are in his thinking several elements that are incompatible with conservatism. While conservative thought emphasizes the need to respect traditional authorities, be they political or religious, Comte rejoiced at the destruction of monarchy, which he saw as a legacy of the theological past. He asserted that the real holders of power should be a new class of scholars and scientists. While he gave great importance to the sacred as a binding social force, his religion completely dispensed with God and any divinity. Moreover, as is well known, Comte was a strong believer in progress, and the conviction that the future will of necessity be better than the past is one of the characteristics of liberalism (cf. Gray 1995, Geuss 2002). In a similar vein, Comte rejected the emphasis on national solidarity, which is so often associated with conservatism, and advocated instead a form of

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16 I gather these elements from Hirschman (1991); Huntington (1957); Muller (1997); Pocock (1987).

cosmopolitan political organization, the champions of which have usually been found in the liberal camp (cf. Nussbaum and Cohen 2002; Waldron 1992). At the level of social structure, one of Comte's goal was to elevate the lower classes by ensuring their material well-being and recognizing their moral value, while at the same allowing for clear dispari- ties of wealth. This could be regarded as reminiscent of the classical liberal argumenta- tion which, on the one hand, declares formal equality and equal dignity as fundamental principles (cf. Rawls 2001: 18–24), and at the same time denies that material inequalities endanger them (cf. Cohen 1992).

This depiction of a thinker who escapes the categories of liberalism and conservatism is not far from the image Comte had of himself. After all, he explicitly sought to distance himself from the "école rétrograde" of counter-revolutionaries such as Bonald or de Maistre, and from liberalism, especially of the utilitarian kind: "In fact we, Sociocrats, are as little democratical as we are aristocratical" (Comte 1853: 2). If we consider the context in which he was living (cf. Heilbron 1995), and the attacks he received from both the Catholic/conservative camp and the liberal one, it is easy to see why Comte adopted this self-image. However, it is my contention that a broader historical perspective allows us to draw conclusions on the existence of clear affinities between Comte and the con- servative attitude.

The characterization of conservatism given above is adequate as a description of only one of its historical manifestations, namely early post-revolutionary reactionary politics. But a more abstract and general understanding of conservatism should be preferred: In the scholarly debates on this question, various "core components" of conservatism have been identified, such as "the preference for the status quo," or the emphasis on "pru- dence in politics" (cf. Beckstein 2014; Brennan and Hamlin 2004). In his well-known definition of conservatism, Samuel Huntington (1957) singled out as main characteristics the conviction that rapid social transformation causes utter chaos. This, in turn, rests on the negative anthropology typically heralded by conservative thinkers. Conservatives, depending on the historical contexts, might defend *various* institutions as the best vehicles of order (family, state, nation, religion, science, art, etc.). In other words, according to Huntington, it would be wrong to associate conservatives with a fixed set of institutions; rather, what they emphasize, more abstractly, is the need for a stable institutional frame- work relatively independent of individual preferences.

A way of making sense of the peculiarities of Comte's thought thus would consist in suggesting that he attempted to bring conservatives to adopt a new historical position on the institutions capable of guaranteeing order. This new positioning was rendered nec- essary by the piecemeal transformation of society itself, the analysis of which was cen- tral to Comte's project. In order to further bring to light Comte's conservative affinities, we may use the following line of reasoning. What liberalism and conservatism have in common is the idea that there should be no absolute power in society. This is the posi- tion expressed by Burke in his famous assertion that an "[a]bsolute democracy, no more than absolute monarchy, is to be reckoned among the legitimate forms of government" (Burke 1999: 225). In liberalism, the rejection of absolute power is especially clear in the debate with the theorists of sovereignty. One of the most important representatives of French liberalism, Benjamin Constant, argued in his critique of Rousseau and Hobbes

that "with the word 'absolute,' neither liberty, nor […] peace, nor happiness, is possible under any institutional arrangements" (Constant 2003: 22). In lieu of absolute power, liberals and conservatives alike believe that social relations should be characterized by the existence of an *equilibrium* between various powers. And this is precisely where the central difference between the two schools of thought appears. To achieve an equilibrium, liberals argue that *individuals* should be guaranteed equal powers: this is the foundation of the discourse on equal rights and equality of opportunity. By contrast, conservatives seek an equilibrium between *overarching social institutions*, at the cost, if need be, of individual freedom.

Because of his emphasis on the need to tame individualistic tendencies, a clear expression of which is his categorical rejection of the discourse of rights,[17] Comte is here closer to the conservative side. The rejection of absolute power appears in his arguments about the need to distribute authority among various institutions within society, to establish a "system of institutional counterweights" (Gane 2006: 6), which brings us back to the question of the *subordination* of the political to the social, as distinct from the *absorption* of the former into the latter (which is the position adopted by Marxists). Comte, as we saw, is adamant that power should be divided between a function of execution and command, on the one hand, and a counseling and educational function, on the other hand. If the two functions were to be mixed up, if one of the powers became absolute, the result would be, by order of appearance, intellectual confusion, moral uncertainty, political anarchy and material misery. In a word, the *chaos* that is the primary fear of conservatives.

Still, from the perspective of the history of political thought, the ambiguities of Comte's position remain numerous. The choices he made in his attempt to bring about the *aggiornamento* of conservatism (especially its reconciliation with industrialization, science and technique) were, in the last analysis, highly idiosyncratic—in this regard, Comte's immanent religion of Humanity, but also his radical cosmopolitanism, are unique. Now, there seem to be two possible fates for politically ambiguous thinkers. Either, as the cases of Machiavelli, Nietzsche or Weber indicate, this ambiguity motivates scholars to engage in passionate debates about the "real" position of the author considered.[18] Alternatively, as in the case of Comte, ambiguity has a discouraging and off-putting effect on researchers. This is yet another way of answering one of the classical questions posed by the scholars who work within the field of Comtean studies: the relegation of Comte to the margins of the great Western canon.[19]

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17 "Positivism only recognises duties, of all towards all" (Comte 1853: 332; translation modified).

18 For some general reflections and some further references on the question of whether these authors were proponents of democracy or aristocracy, progressives or reactionaries, liberals or conservatives, see, respectively, Barthas (2010); Losurdo (2002); Hennis (1988).

19 See Wernick (2003: 14–24) for a reflection on the historical reception (and rejection!) of Comte's thought. Wernick mentions as especially *passé*, among other things, Comte's systematic ambition, his view of women, and his demiurgic attempt at creating a religion *ex nihilo*, complete with rituals and liturgy.

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Chapter Four

THE COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY COMTE: THEORIST OF THE TWO POWERS AND ENTHUSIASTIC MEDIEVALIST

Carolina Armenteros

It has been long and well known that Auguste Comte owed a debt to the Counterrevolution. Comte's notion of society as a positive *datum* (Milbank 1995, 51), his insistence that a common belief must organize human relations, his idea of spiritual and temporal powers, his interest in the social primacy of education, and his critique of psychology all have origins in the thought of Louis de Bonald (Macherey 1987 and Milbank 1995, 51–74) and Joseph de Maistre, the two major Francophone theorists of the early conservative group that he dubbed the "retrograde school." The character and extent of Comte's debt, however, remains the subject of a controversy that has polarized scholarly opinion for three quarters of a century as Comte scholars have claimed him for either Enlightenment or Counterrevolution.

The debate began in 1941, when Henri Gouhier noticed that Comte first read Maistre around 1825, soon after breaking with Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, with whom he had worked for seven years as disciple and secretary. Given the thematic and conceptual similarities between Maistre and Saint-Simon's thought, Gouhier believed that Maistre might have served Comte as an intellectual corrective for his former mentor's influence (Gouhier 1933, 41, III [1941]: 405). This thesis appears plausible in light of Comte's later insistence that he owed a great deal to Maistre (Comte 1968, 71, VII [1969]: 64) and nothing to Saint-Simon, and when remembering that Comte broke with Saint-Simon to gain intellectual independence and be able to publish under his own name.

Pierre Macherey has pursued Gouhier's line of argument further to maintain that Comte actually borrowed no ideas from Maistre, that he conceived of "retrograde" thought as "negative" and devoid of content and that he used Maistre's work solely to confirm a theory he had originally derived from Saint-Simon, namely the separation between spiritual and temporal powers (Macherey 1991, 41–7). A radical contribution to an interpretive tradition tending to disengage Comte from conservatism, Macherey's opinion is notably approximated in the English-speaking world by the work of Anthony Giddens, for whom the continuity Robert Nisbet first observed between conservative and sociological thought is more formal than substantial (Giddens 2014 [1977], 208–34 and

Nisbet 1993 [1966]). Nisbet's views, however, have had their own descent. John Milbank has perhaps reinforced them most compellingly, arguing that Giddens's response to Nisbet is sufficient only because Nisbet did not make the strong case for sociology's conservative origins and character. Setting out to make this strong case himself, Milbank contends not only that sociology was indebted to conservatism in regard to method, but that the early conservatives were also already "positivists," since they already conceived of their thought as "strictly scientific" (Milbank 1995, 54). My own work to date, more focused on ideational content, has traced Comte's thematic inheritance from Maistre in the fields of epistemology, historical philosophy and the sociology of religion, with a special emphasis on sacrifice (Armenteros 2008, 2011, Part II), a theme that Milbank broaches as well (Milbank 1995, 66–70).

Comte himself certainly identified his thought with the conservative tradition: his crediting of the "retrogrades" is matched only by his identification of Condorcet as his "spiritual father," and seems too empirically substantiated to be explained solely by a will to blot out Saint-Simon. Personally, moreover, Comte engaged deeply with conservatism. In his final years, his republican sympathies turned right and against a parliamentary (liberal) "phase" that he qualified as "shameful and dreadful" (Comte 1855, xii). Mourning Félicité de Lamennais's abandonment of Ultramontane conservatism to become a "deplorable auxiliary of anarchic doctrines" (Comte 1855, xxviii), Comte believed that "all those who [had] sincerely converted to [his] Religion of Humanity [had] transformed into systematic conservatives, destined to become the true chiefs of the party of order" (Comte 1855, xxvi). In light of such statements, Macherey's suggestion that Comte should not be taken at his word regarding the "retrogrades'" influence upon him is especially deserving of attention, most particularly when remembering that Macherey was a student of the Marxist structuralist Louis Althusser.

This chapter seeks to establish definitively to what extent and in what manner Comte was influenced by the "retrogrades." It does so by tracing the development of his views on the "retrograde school," by weighing the relative importance that various "retrograde" thinkers—especially Maistre and Bonald—acquired in his writings and by describing how, on what points and to what extent positivism adopted both Saint-Simonian and early conservative leitmotifs. Leading down unexplored paths, the exercise culminates in the first systematic exposition of Comtean medievalism, itself the amplest depository of Comte's counterrevolutionary dues.

Maistre, Comte and the Two Powers

Comte first mentions Maistre and the "retrograde school" in the *Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel* of 1826, one of the six opuscules that constitute the bulk of his early work. From the start, the mention is approbatory and Maistre praised as the school's major representative. The *Considérations*—whose very title recalls the Savoyard's *Considérations sur la France* of 1797—extol Maistre's "profound justice" in pronouncing European monarchy a "miracle" and underline his "very judicious remark" that the "action of the spiritual power […] must be judged not only by the sensible good it produces, but above all by the evil it prevents and that is not so easy to observe." As Maistre showed in *Du pape* (1819), Comte recalls, once Alexander VI divided the New

World between Spain and Portugal at the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), "not a single war" ensued between those two powers for "the globe's most important colonial possessions," whereas "all the other European powers vied with the most obstinate fury for a few almost insignificant outposts" (Maistre quoted in Comte [1826], 35).

The saga of the medieval relationship between the spiritual and temporal powers is the main narrative of *Du pape*, the Maistrian *opus* that Comte included in his exclusive Positivist Library (Appendix E) as a masterpiece of world literature. Maistre's status as a theorist of the spiritual power seems to have been fundamental for sociology's founder. Twenty-eight years after the *Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel*, the *Système de politique positive* (1851–54) still linked Maistre and the "retrogrades" to the theory of the two powers, praising them for the "very important considerations" they offered on the subject and critiquing them for "that radical inconsequence that consists in transporting directly to modern societies the considerations exclusively drawn from the observation of the societies of the Middle Ages[,] so essentially different" (Comte 1970, X: 197n).

That Comte first and last mentions Maistre to praise his account of the spiritual power seems to support Macherey's argument that Maistre merely confirmed for Comte the Saint-Simonian idea of the separation of powers. Certainly, Saint-Simon's *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève* (1803), which predated *Du pape*, already conceived a society reorganized around the separation between universal spiritual functions and particular temporal ones (Macherey, January–March 1991). *De la réorganisation de la société européenne* (1814), which Saint-Simon co-wrote with Augustin Thierry, further prefigured *Du pape*'s defense of the Church's Europeanist character and integrative abilities, praising the medieval clergy for achieving, through Latin and Church dogma, a continental unity never since paralleled. It cannot therefore be doubted that Comte first encountered the idea of the separation of powers, and of the spiritual power's temporal advantages, in Saint-Simon and not in Maistre.

The question then becomes whose account of the separation of powers and of the spiritual power's temporal capacities Comte finally incorporated into his own thought. To determine this, it is first necessary to clarify the nature and the extent of Maistre's and Saint-Simon's influence on each other. No evidence survives that Maistre was aware of Saint-Simon. He never mentions him and, had he known of him, would probably have refuted him. A blissful ignorance of proto-socialism and *idéologie* characterized the Russian courtly circles in which the founder of conservatism moved during his most creative years (1803–17).

The converse is less likely. The core of Maistre's thought was formed by the mid-1790s, and Saint-Simon launched his writing career six years after the publication of Maistre's first major work, the *Considérations sur la France* (1797). It is hence plausible that *De la réorganisation de la société européenne*'s enthusiasm for Europe's medieval integration was loosely inspired by Maistre's opposition, in the *Considérations sur la France*, between the destructive and necessarily ephemeral "epoch" represented by the French Revolution, and the tranquil old regime, indebted for its millennial endurance to its possession of the "divine principle". But Maistre's presence is far more palpable in Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme*. If the central role that this text ascribes to the pope as the creator, integrator and political guide of medieval Europe is any indication, it seems fairly certain that Saint-Simon was aware of contemporary developments in political

Ultramontanism and that his muse on the subject was none other than the founder of political Ultramontanism himself. This is suggested, among other clues, by the letter Luther sends the pontiff in the *Nouveau christianisme* (Saint-Simon 1825, 44–54), which evokes the Swedish people's sample letter to the pope in *Du pape* (Maistre 1966, 195).

The difference is that, unexpectedly, Saint-Simon the anticlerical apostate is more Ultramontanist than Maistre the Catholic reactionary. Where Maistre values the tense equilibrium between spiritual and temporal power as the guarantor of the political freedom unique to European Christian culture, and where he simply defends ecclesiastical independence in order to depict the pope as an international mediator and European peacekeeper, Saint-Simon exalts papal authority to the point of imagining that in his own lifetime, not only kings but temporal power itself will vanish. The "militant church" represented by the pope and cardinals will declare that Christianity no longer recognizes that "law of the strongest" proper to kings (Saint-Simon, 1825, 46) while "Caesar's [impious] power" "will find itself completely annihilated" (Saint-Simon, 1825, 52) before the growing power of the renewed Church.

On this point Comte draws closer to Maistre. Borrowing from the Savoyard a sharper focus on the subject of actual power, he observes that separate powers do away with either the "preponderance, naturally absolute, of theological beliefs, or with military activity, which encourages always the entire concentration of power" (Comte 1970, IX: xxxvii). Like Maistre, he strives to preserve ecclesiastical freedom and the ecclesiastical limitation of temporal power. He praises the medieval priesthood for "making the government feel the inconvenience of imposing human prescriptions on those who immediately administer divine wills" (Comte 1970, IX: 406). And he insists that the "sociocratic priesthood […] revive and complete, by a decisive systematization, the theocratic office […] suspended […] under temporal usurpation" (Comte 1970, IX: 238). The sole difference is that, where Maistre is little concerned to protect the state from the Church, Comte ever plows the middle way, averring that positivism must avoid both spiritual and temporal tyranny.

Saint-Simon versus Maistre: Knowledge versus Power

If Comte's idea of the separation of powers is more Maistrian than Saint-Simonian, the origins of his thought on the nature of the powers is more complex. Saint-Simon's *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève* simply identify the spiritual power as the *function* of general knowledge and the temporal power as the *function* of particulars. Twenty-two years later, and probably under *Du pape*'s influence, the *Nouveau christianisme* places these notions in a historical and power context, explaining that the medieval church pursued general knowledge and served the poor, but that during Leo X's pontificate, the Church betrayed the Christian spirit, starting to cultivate particular knowledge and elite alliances. The "new Christianity" that Saint-Simon proposed would reverse this "heretical" trend and restore Christianity to its original medieval glory by encouraging the Church once more to serve the poor and by subordinating modern, critical, particular knowledge to the reign of universals. Saint-Simon thus conceived of the modern fall as a matter of knowledge and of his spiritual power as a producer of expertise that, rather than delegate knowledge

production to specialists during the passage from the Middle Ages to modernity, simply acquired a political identity as it became a specialist itself.

This is where Maistre diverged. His popes—even the medieval ones—were always and primarily political actors; and his Church did not *produce* actual scientific knowledge like Saint-Simon's spiritual power. Instead, it *administered* such knowledge, sieving truth from falsehood to create the conditions necessary for the pursuit and pervasiveness of truth and for the exercise of legitimate power (Maistre 1998, 1984). Even divinely revealed knowledge it did not produce, but solely transmit transparently across time. Maistre's modern fall was hence less a matter of knowledge than of passion, and specifically of the pride whose rise had toppled the ecclesiastical administration of factuality. Where, then, for Saint-Simon the production of knowledge and intellectual activity were irretrievably spiritual, for Maistre knowledge itself was a profane matter and its administration and diffusion in the interests of truth the ecclesiastical prerogative that made of the Church a real and legitimate earthly sovereignty.

Saint-Simon had insisted that the spiritual power was an essentially intellectual and scientific function whose goal was to reinvent society, and Comte conserves this intellectualism for the clergy of his Religion of Humanity, whose "government of opinion" (Comte 1970, X: 194) is decidedly Saint-Simonian—doubly so because intellectuals are the ones who hold it. "The people," Comte writes, "accord today to the unanimous opinion of scholars the same degree of confidence that it accorded in the Middle Ages to the decisions of the spiritual power" (Comte 1970, X: 40), a comment on nineteenth-century intellectuals' appropriation of the sacerdotal mantle (Bénichou 1996 [1973], 1977) and one that applied readily to Saint-Simon. The "government of opinion" in the *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève* was led by scholars and scientists. It was only in the *Nouveau christianisme*, and probably after reading *Du pape*, that industrialism's founder envisioned the spiritual power as papal.

Maistre, for his part, may have written on the "government of opinion" as an activity at which France excelled (Maistre 1984, vol. VII), but he never thought of it as spiritual. Opinion was for him a matter too profane, fashionable and mercurial to yoke to invisible things, while intellectuals in his view belonged less to the spiritual than to the temporal realm. This difference between Saint-Simon and Maistre may have a philological basis in the French word "esprit," from which "spirituel" or "spiritual" derives and which can translate doubly as "mind" and "spirit." Saint-Simon is a true *idéologue* in that his "esprit" is largely mind, a phenomenon more material than spirit. Maistre's "esprit," by contrast, is really that which Montesquieu evoked when titling *De l'esprit des lois* after the Pauline verse that locates the laws' divine source in the world of invisible things (Corinthians 3:6). As for Comte, when choosing between the two meanings of "esprit," he leaned distinctly toward the *idéologue* lineage of his former teacher.

More indicative of the Maistrian heritage is Comte's emphasis on practice. He does not write, like Saint-Simon, that the spiritual power reinvents society—a function of which he seems to have thought only himself capable—but that it "counsel[s], consecrate[s], regulat[es]" (Comte 1970, IX: 9), imparting knowledge as in traditional Catholic practice, and as in Maistre's *Du pape*, *Examen de la philosophie de Bacon* (where theology appears

as mother of the sciences) and in the *Quatre chapitres sur la Russie* (which Comte however did not read, as they were first published two decades after his death).

Where Comte reveals himself as his old master's true disciple is in regard to the spiritual power's capacity to reorganize society. For Maistre, as for Comte and Saint-Simon, spiritual knowledge forms society, but for Maistre it does so either transcendentally or compulsively, while for Comte and Saint-Simon it does so both rationally and consciously. For Maistre, the Church limits itself to transmitting knowledge; to regulating its diffusion in society so that falsehood dies and truth flourishes (*Examen de la philosophie de Bacon*); and to using temporal power—precisely the force that Saint-Simon hopes to eliminate together with the "impious" Caesar who exercises it—when necessary to bend human wills. That Maistre's spiritual power should operate in this way is comprehensible, since its goal is not to reorganize, but to reintegrate society.

For Saint-Simon and Comte, on the contrary, the spiritual power is the *generator*, the *origin* of scientific knowledge which less than a power is a "function." It aspires, certainly, to unite human beings, but it exists more fundamentally to reorganize their relationships. It does not need to employ force, since everyone adheres voluntarily to its directives, in rational recognition of its capacity to further happiness. And it is because Maistre refuses to renounce the need of force that Comte complains that Maistre imports the Middle Ages to modernity, directly and without thinking about the essential ways in which society has changed. This, however, does not prevent both Comte and his former mentor from making the head of the spiritual power papal in probable imitation of Maistre—though Saint-Simon's imitation was more literal, since he appealed to the actual Catholic pope, whereas Comte's was more symbolic, since he declared the true pope to be himself.

In sum, then, if Comte retained from Saint-Simon the idea of the spiritual power as an intellectual "function" wielded by intellectuals who reorganized society, he inherited from Maistre a spiritual power that was practical, socially and epistemologically uninventive (except in his own case), and papal in its supreme form.

Politics under Morals

The rapport between the powers implies another between politics and morals, and here too Saint-Simon and Maistre vie for precedence in Comte's thought. All three thinkers declare morals more important than politics. In his early years, Saint-Simon professed that politics should simply be the application of morality; while in his final work, the *Nouveau christianisme*, he dissolved politics into morality as his spiritual power encompassed all temporal matters and Christianity triumphed over all religions. Comte and Maistre similarly believed that politics would become unneeded at history's end, that is, when positivism was perfected, in Comte's case, and when Christianity triumphed universally, in Maistre's. In this they shared Saint-Simon's goal, but not his means: in the future's moral and spiritual world, they expected politics to disappear; yet not, as he did, quickly and violently, but rather gradually and peacefully.

Comte inherited from Maistre and Saint-Simon the idea that the ideal relationship between morals and politics is medieval. He wrote that while the Middle Ages' "purely individual morals" had been "incapable of embracing political life" (Comte

1970, IX: 473–74), the medieval had happily established that "continuous subordi-
nation of politics to morality, that distinguished modern sociability"—just as *Du pape*
had argued (Comte 1969, VII: 86–87). With time, the idea of morality's supremacy
became increasingly important in Comte's work, until the *Système de politique positive*
finally placed morality atop the hierarchy of sciences—even above previously supreme
sociology.

Comte and Maistre also referred their idea of the morals–politics relationship to the
medieval, which Saint-Simon did not. Generally, the articulation of concepts with medi-
eval referents distinguishes Maistre's mark on Comte's thought, especially in theoretical
areas also explored by Saint-Simon. In regard to the morals–politics rapport, when Saint-
Simon sketched it—whether in *De la réorganisation* or the *Nouveau christianisme*—he did so
from a generalist perspective, privileging always the themes of knowledge and social inte-
gration; whereas what most interested Maistre in *Du pape*—and Comte in the *Système de
politique positive*—was the more particular way in which the medieval relationship between
politics and morals had molded specific European customs and cultural attitudes. Thus,
where the Savoyard had reflected that the separation of powers had generated political
liberty along with an exploratory, emancipated, action-oriented and well-integrated civil
society that embraced the whole continent, Comte speculated that the same regime had
become the "principal source of the real superiority of Occidental monotheism" (Comte
1970, IX: 405)—a superiority realized in the "active sentiment of personal dignity com-
bined with universal fraternity," in the "unanimous tendency to esteem men given their
intellectual and moral merit, independently of their social service" (Comte 1969, VII:
87), in the "popular habits of free moral and even political discussion" (Comte 1970, IX:
422), and in "Occidental unity" (Comte 1969, VII: 87).

To this list belonged, too, medieval Europe's non-martial spirit: The Christian Middle
Ages had been blessed with a "happy ineptitude for conquest" (Comte 1970, IX: 497)
and forsaken antiquity's conquering campaigns. Europe's medieval wars were defen-
sive (Comte 1969, VII: 88), with the aggressors being pagans and Muslims, nations
that conquered thanks to the fusing of the two powers (Comte 1970, VII: 109). As for
European theology, it adopted an "essentially defensive activity" (Comte 1970, X: 157)
that mirrored the military establishment's. This was why it was only following "papal
impotence" that war took on a "vicious impulse" in Europe (Comte 1970, IX: 536).
The observation harmonized with *Du pape*'s narratives about the popes' peacemak-
ing powers, with Maistre's dislike of imperialism and disapproval of armament races,
and with the vision of a (Catholic) universal fraternity that ends *Du pape* and *Les soi-
rées*. Of course, it also harmonizes with Saint-Simon's pacifist pleading with princes to
cease their wars, and with the vision of Christianity victorious over all religions that
closes the *Nouveau christianisme*. Here again, though, Comte resembles more Maistre
than Saint-Simon. The latter had intended to use violence to achieve a peaceful unity
founded on knowledge of universals; Maistre had striven for an irenic, Catholic- and
Rome-centered planetary union through eruditely supported papal guidance and abun-
dantly socialized Christian devotion. Comte, closer to the Savoyard in regard to both
means and conceptual identity, declared that positivism would re-establish the peace-
ful universalism of the Catholic medieval centuries in more perfect form (Comte 1970,

IX: 340) by creating unity among nations and cultivating "universal love" (Comte 1970, IX: 423).

Relatedly, Comte's clerical universalism, manifested by his institution of the pope and clergy of Humanity, has both socialist and "retrograde" origins. The Saint-Simonians had preceded Comte in establishing their own, universal clergy, and it is difficult not to see Comte's own clerical initiative as an emulation of theirs. Yet the Saint-Simonians were themselves Maistre's avowed pupils (Enfantin 1865, 78, XIV: 76), and it was Maistre who had valued the most, and earliest, the clergy's universal moral contributions. It is hence probable that on this subject Comte's "retrograde" inheritance was both direct and indirect. He himself remembered gratefully the Ultramontanist Lamennais as the "accredited writer," head of the "retrograde party," who congratulated him when he announced the founding of the priesthood of Humanity (Comte 1970, X: iii). Comte was pro-Jesuit, so as expected it was the Ultramontanist-universal—rather than Gallican-patriotic—stream of "retrograde" thought that flourished during the Bourbon Restoration (1814–30) that seems to have most influenced him. The same, though, may be said of Saint-Simon despite his anti-Jesuit sentiments, probably because the Ultramontanists' universalism converged with his own project. In this respect, the universalism that characterizes both socialist and positivist thought and subordinates politics to morality, is at least partly Ultramontanism reworked.

The "Retrogrades" and the Positivist Method

If the Maistrian versus Saint-Simonian origins of Comte's idea of the two powers can be reasonably established, the "retrograde" beginnings of the sociological way of thinking are even less contested. To date, Milbank's reflections on Bonald's contributions to positivism comprise the most thorough study of the subject. It is from Bonald's social metaphysics, Milbank argues, that Comte inherited the idea (so crucial for the development of French sociology) that not only the individual, but also the social whole is an irreducible fact (Milbank 1995, 51). One might add that Maistre had thought similarly, writing famously in the *Considérations sur la France*:

> There is no Man in the world. In my life, I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; I know even, thanks to Montesquieu, that *one can be Persian*: but as for Man, I declare that I have never met him, […] if he exists, it is certainly without my knowledge. (Maistre 1994, 235)

Thus did the first conservatives respond to the Enlightenment ideal of the isolated individual—with the notion of irretrievable social conditioning. In Bonald's case, especially, the notion accompanied the method of "observing a constant concomitance between certain cultural phenomena and then seek[ing] to explain this concomitance by reference to their function within a social whole more fundamental than the phenomena themselves." The concomitance itself stemmed from a Malebranchian theology that saw the human mind as being "granted direct universal access to a portion of the divine mind" (Milbank 1995, 57). It was an articulation of the mystical transcendence of time and space, and it was with this articulation in mind that Bonald proclaimed the

nominalist precedence of generals over particulars, thus becoming the first thinker to use the word "positive" to signify society's directly revealed character. Comte afterwards transferred the nominalist precedence from the individual to the collective (Milbank 1995, 53) and turned Bonald on his head to claim not that society is divinely revealed, but that all religious beliefs approximate the truth of sociology (Milbank 1995, 59).

While Bonald's influence on Comte's sociological method is generally accepted, Maistre's influence on positivist conceptual categories continues to be debated. This is so even though throughout his work Comte mentions Maistre far more often than Bonald—and even though the Positivist Library contains *Du pape* but no work of Bonald's. Macherey argues that, rather than prompt Comte to "think something positively," Maistre "allowed" Comte "to reason *against* the reduction of the spiritual to the temporal that he imputed to the 'industrialism' professed by Saint-Simon." Macherey thus adopts Comte's own vocabulary to overturn Comte and claim, provocatively, that in Comte's system, Maistre, rather than an "organic" thinker, was in reality a "critical" one, and that the true organicists or purveyors of positive thought in Comte's mind were those very people that both he and Maistre labeled as "negative" or "critical" thinkers, in particular Condorcet (Macherey 1991, 47). In short, Macherey maintains, contrary to Comte's tendency to oppose "reactionary"–"organic"–"retrograde"–"positive" thought to "revolutionary"–"critical"–"metaphysical"–"negative" thought, that he posited reactionary thought as "negative" and revolutionary thought as "organic."

The argument may be strongly qualified. A critique is of course negative and reactive, including the one that the counterrevolutionaries made of the *philosophes*, yet even when describing the "retrograde school"'s rejection of encyclopedic philosophy, Comte associates negativism, or "anarchy," with the metaphysical perspective. He writes, concretely, that the "retrograde" school

> discredited negativism systematically, by proving that its vices, empirically felt, far from offering any fortunate character, resulted necessarily from its nature[; …] the metaphysicians were thus led to render their deism more retrograde, although it remained just as anarchic. (Comte 1970, IX: 605–6)

If Macherey observes Comte inverting the usual categories and calling Condorcet "organic," here, Comte operates a similar inversion in which he dubs the metaphysicians "retrograde." Not only that, but he adds that counterrevolutionary thought made positive contributions. Once conservative tenets spread among the public, he writes, the "continuous need for any religion" was recognized and "moral culture was not less neglected; but nobody dared, as in the eighteenth century, contest its importance and one saw even a universal affectation of sentimentality developing" (Comte 1970, IX: 605). In all, the "retrograde school," exhibiting a "mental and moral […] superiority […] over its adversaries" (Comte 1855, vii), "contributed to posing provisionally the Occidental problem" (Comte 1970, IX: 606).

In addition, then, to swapping adjectives, "retrograde" and "metaphysical" thought currents could cease being antithetical and play identical roles. Comte, that is, could identify "revolutionary" thought as a dually "negative" and "retrograde" stream that ceased

acquiring positive expressions in the nineteenth century, and "retrograde" thought as a simultaneously critical and positive contribution. Comte states this last possibility explicitly when clarifying that the "retrograde school" is not only "negative" for its role as the "indispensable obstacle" that "preserve[s] society from the total preponderance of critical doctrines," but that it is also important as a "stimulant, not less essential, for constraining modern civilization to produce at last the moral system that is proper to it and to give it all the consistency that it must have to be susceptible of replacing the old one" (Comte 1970, X: 198n).

It is not, then, that "retrograde" thought was purely "negative" and empty of method or content. It is that Comte could describe both "reactionary" and "revolutionary" thought as alternately "negative" and "positive," "critical" and "organic," "progressive" and "retrograde," depending on historical context and on the relationships the two bore to each other at different times. Far from placing Comte definitively on the "revolutionary" side against the "retrograde" one, this conceptual fluidity—a harmonic complement to his historical relativism—lends subtlety and complexity to his thought, bringing credibility to his aim of creating a synthesis that could transcend, while incorporating, the political posturing of his time. In fact, the ease with which Comte exchanges adjectives to describe antithetical thought currents, using the same word to qualify inimical movements, highlights not only his relativism but also the dynamic aspect of his philosophy of history, never reducible to the interaction of immutable thought currents.

The "Retrogrades" and the Medieval

Having established that the "retrogrades" did influence Comte, the question remains: What was Comte's *own* account of their influence? The *Système de politique positive* provides the fullest and most direct answer to this question, stating that "retrograde" thought was one of the "two opposite influences" that gave rise to the two "decisive impulsions" (Comte 1970, IX: 614), philosophical and scientific, that formed theoretical positivism. Maistre exercised his own "retrograde" influence on the philosophical "impulsion." He was matched and opposed in this endeavor by the "revolutionary" Condorcet, whose "admirable try" was limited to "indicating irrevocably the elaboration on which spiritual reorganization must rest." Condorcet's thought suffered from "theoretical precocity," since it was "essentially limited to cosmology," while his "revolutionary tendencies"

> contributed to making him fail by animating him with a blind hatred for the past that he wanted to explain. The whole of his essay thus became contradictory, by representing the final progress as the result of a continuous series of retrogradations. (Comte 1970, IX: 614–15)[1]

Maistre resolved the contradiction. Motivated by the incoherence that Condorcet characterized, Reaction's herald "appreciated the Middle Ages with dignity, at least from the spiritual point of view." He intended to replace the encyclopedic history that Condorcet

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1   In support of the argument above, this passage also characterizes "metaphysical" thought as "retrograde."

epitomized, but he instead "contributed to consolidating it, by manifesting its essential conditions, in order to facilitate its necessary realization." Condorcet's synthesis thus constituted the "principal thought" of positivist philosophy and Maistre's its "essential complement" (Comte 1970, IX: 615).

Yet what, precisely, was this "essential complement"? Almost every time Comte writes about the "retrogrades," it is to praise them for exposing the social nullity of materialism and "revolutionary" philosophy, for revalorizing the past and, most importantly, for rehabilitating the Middle Ages. Indeed, Comte connects the "retrogrades" to the medieval so frequently and consistently as to intimate that he deemed their medievalism to be their greatest contribution to human knowledge and the human future. The intimation becomes certainty when considering his remark to John Stuart Mill that Maistre, Bonald and Lamennais had shown him the value of the medieval when he was writing his early opuscules (Pickering 2009, II: 155) and when reading in the *Cours de philosophie positive* (in a passage quoted by Macherey):

> I do not fear […] admitting, with sincere gratitude, and without incurring any just accusation of inconsequence, the salutary influence that Catholic philosophy, despite its evidently retrograde nature, has exercised […] on the normal development of my own political philosophy, especially by the famous treatise *Du Pape*, not only by facilitating for me, in my historical works, a healthy appreciation for the Middle Ages, but even in fixing my direct attention more on conditions that are usually eminently applicable to the current social state. (Comte 1969, IV: 146)

The whole of positivism could in fact be summarized as an attempt to perfect the medieval: Comte mused that the "whole elaboration, temporal and spiritual, reserved to the last generation of the exceptional century, is above all destined to reconstruct, better than in the Middle Ages, the Occidental Republic" (Comte 1970, X: 501). This "superior dignity" (Comte 1970, IX: 421) of the medieval sprang from the epoch's "social aspect […] more important than all [the] special points of view" produced by intellectual speculation (Comte 1969, VII: 62). The Middle Ages was an "admirable try toward human systematization" that "sketched the normal state, as much as doctrine and context permitted it then" (Comte 1970, IX: 418). The period had achieved this thanks to the heart's rule over the mind, which strengthened the "moral impulse," preventing the "unsociable vanity" typical of the "mind's reign" (Comte 1969, VII: ix) and building an "admirable regimen" that offered "noble" and "tender" things (Comte 1969, VII: x). Maistre, Bonald, Chateaubriand, François-Dominique de Reynaud, count of Montlosier, even the early Lamennais, could not have agreed more.

Saint-Simon's shadow, though, fell too on Comte's claim that he had inherited the Middle Ages from the "retrogrades," and on his idea that the future's positivist order should be modeled on the medieval. For *De la réorganisation de la société européenne*, published five years before *Du pape*, had already sketched the Middle Ages deferentially as a time that the industrial order should emulate. Likewise, the Middle Ages appear as a socio-religious ideal to be recaptured in the *Nouveau christianisme*. To be exact, though, the medieval had been but a brief moment in Saint-Simon's vast production, unexplored in great length or depth, and it could not rival the erudition and reflection that

the "retrogrades"—Maistre and Chateaubriand, especially, but also Walter Scott and Alessandro Manzoni—had spent upon it. Even, in fact, when liberals like Thierry and Guizot wrote on the Middle Ages, Comte seems to have taken little if any interest in them: Their works do not figure in the Positivist Library (in Thierry's case perhaps because he was a loyal Saint-Simonian), while the epics of Chateaubriand, Manzoni and Scott are, on the contrary, included. It is only reasonable, therefore, that Comte should have recovered far more on the medieval from these writers than from his former mentor, whose own medievalist legacy was yet probably the first inspiration of Comte's desire to model the social future on the Middle Ages.

The "Retrogrades," Spiritual or Chivalric

If Comte's medievalism was generally "retrograde," Maistre's medievalism was quite unique and, by his own account, Comte retrieved it quite specifically. The Savoyard, he explains, rehabilitated the Middle Ages "from the spiritual aspect" (Comte 1970, IX: 615), and he himself has now complemented this rehabilitation by providing "a temporal explanation of the Middle Ages" (Comte 1970, IX: 63). In the positivist philosophy of history, these Maistrian–spiritual and Comtean–temporal aspects of the medieval each have a temporal corollary. Catholicism, or the spiritual–Maistrian aspect, developed its empire of "independence" (Comte 1970, IX: 481) and "abstract examination" (Comte 1970, IX: 424) during the early Middle Ages, providing the necessary link between the medieval and antiquity (Comte 1970, IX: 399). Chivalric feudalism, or the temporal–Comtean aspect, was the later age of "competition" (Comte 1970, IX: 481) and "concrete judgment" (Comte 1970, IX: 424) that constituted, presumably, the medieval bridge to modernity. Herein lies Comte's own answer to Macherey's claim that the "retrograde school" was for him but pure reaction devoid of positive content. Far from being unalloyed critique, "retrograde" thought was, in its pure and original essence, the theory of the spiritual medieval.

Less prominently, yet just as accurately, it was also the theory of the chivalric medieval. Indeed, Comte states that he has had predecessors in the theorization of the Middle Ages' second phase. Maistre and Bonald may have "hated" chivalry (Pickering 2009, III: 290), but they had ironically furthered the fortunes of their odium's objects by opening up a "full opportunity" of "rectification" of the Middle Ages that

> was soon confirmed after the decisive return that it everywhere aroused toward our pious and chivalrous ancestors. One must even refer to this impulsion the irrevocable advent of historical epic, in the admirable compositions of Walter Scott, prepared by Chateaubriand and completed by Manzoni. (Comte 1970, IX: 615)

All were writers whose passion for the past classified them as resolutely "retrograde."

Interestingly, and probably consciously, Comte projected onto the present the sequence he had observed in the medieval past: Just as Catholicism had inaugurated the Middle Ages, the "spiritual retrogrades"—Maistre, Bonald, Lamennais—had ushered in the nineteenth century. And just as chivalry had developed a worldly ethic out of

Catholicism, the Romantic "retrogrades"—Scott, Chateaubriand, Manzoni—had secularized the spiritual ethos of their counterrevolutionary predecessors.

This parallel between medieval and nineteenth-century movements illustrated the wider continuity between the medieval and the modern that was self-evident for Comte, manifesting a perspective prior, and opposed, to that which developed later in the nineteenth century, when liberal historians postulated a chasm between the Middle Ages and modernity. Far from flatly "retrograde," and in spite of the "essential" differences between medieval and modern societies, the "affective initiation of the Middle Ages" (Comte 1970, IX: xxiii) constituted the essence of the Occidental character. It was the Middle Ages that "directly elaborated the sentiments that determine our behavior" and "constitute our characters" (Comte 1970, IX: 372), with "Loyalty," that combination of "devotion and sincerity," encapsulating the age's sentimental spirit (Comte 1970, IX: 456). Dante illustrated it laudably through his "branding of treason" (Comte 1970, IX: 542), and Maistre and Bonald, dislike chivalry though they might, could only have honored the faithfulness that animated medieval knights and that remained the rudder of their own lives.

Going Beyond the "Retrogrades": The "Adoration of Woman"

What Maistre and Bonald could *not* have honored, though, at least wholeheartedly, is Comte's knightly and religious "adoration of woman." "The admirable chivalry of the Middle Ages," wrote sociology's founder, "compressed under theological beliefs, had never been able to elevate this cult [of woman] except to the second rank. When modern sociability will have taken on its true character, man's knee will bend only before woman" (Comte 1969, VII: xxxix). Comte meant such kneeling quite literally. He covered with a green cloth the red chair where Clotilde de Vaux, his deceased platonic lover, used to sit, turning it by this act into an altar; he prescribed that the chair thus sacralized should never be used for any except religious purposes; and he composed a prayer to Clotilde entitled *À genoux devant l'autel recouvert* [Kneeling before the Covered Altar], the altar in question being the red chair. Its one-time occupant, for her part, was immortalized in a portrait at the Chapel of Humanity in Paris that exhibited her incarnating Humanity Maryolatrically in a white veil and robe (Wernick 2005, 4–5) and holding a child (the Future) in her arms. The resurgence of Marian devotion that followed the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at La Salette in 1846 may have inspired this cult. The great Virgin-muse herself, though, was Clotilde, whom Comte thanked for showing him how to "reconstruct the holy regime of the Middle Ages by devoting […] the first hour of every day to the direct culture of the best emotions of human nature" (Comte 1970, X: 552).

Clotilde's worship would have seemed idolatrous to the "retrogrades," but even it was a Comtean continuation of Maistre's praise, in Book III of *Du pape*, of the Christian woman, who had become a "*supernatural* being" (Maistre 1966: 236) thanks to the medieval Church's "exaltation" and "ennobling" of women following the ignominies of antiquity. "Women never ceased to regret" the Middle Ages, Comte wrote, extending the Savoyard's argument on Christianity's liberation of women, because this period "had nobly instituted their social dignity" (Comte 1970, IX: 417). Conversely, the "holy

resistance of the affective sex" to the "Occidental revolution," "far from being construed as an obstacle, deserves to occupy the first rung in the organization of the modern movement, thus necessarily preserved from a complete rupture with the Middle Ages" (Comte 1970, IX: 516).

Comte's religio-political feminism neared him more to "retrograde" views of women than to the socialist and especially Saint-Simonian feminism with which it has long been associated, and which sought female emancipation un-medievally and through free love. Scholars have long noted that French revolutionary principles initiated a decline in women's status paradoxically encouraged by republican ideals (see Fraisse 1994 for the argument based on intellectual sources, and Desan 2004 for the contrary case founded on juridical ones). I have argued that, as heirs of an aristocratic culture more open to women's education and public roles than revolutionary republicanism, the counterrevolutionaries unexpectedly developed a more feminist discourse (Armenteros 2014a) that often acquired medievalist expressions—such as Maistre's celebration of the ecclesiastical emancipation of women from practical male ownership and the chivalric "retrogrades"' idealization of lady-service. It was an ideal backdrop for positivist feminism, itself a very devotion- (*not* free love-) centered affair. Comte wrote that "veneration" (Comte 1970, X: 57) and the "preponderance of sentiment" in positivist society would exceed medieval precedents (Comte 1970, X: 15). "[A]ll the servants of the Great Being" would be "habituated after the whole of positivist education, to venerate the Virgin as the spontaneous emblem of Humanity," so as to "be able to feel more the affective phase of the Western transition" (Comte 1970, X: 145; on the virginal cult, see also ibid., 411 and 413). By no means consonant with rational republican ideals, this vision was very harmonic with an emotionalism of conservative pedigree and posterity. As Eric Voegelin has observed, providing a converse example, it was Comte's commitment to love, as a principle of human action, taking precedence over reason that prompted Emile Littré to leave the positivist fold, thus initiating an attitude that would mark intellectual and liberal positivism down to the twentieth-century Viennese circles (Voegelin 1995, 139).

More than an object of devotion, moreover, virginity would become a way of life. In *Du pape*'s Book III, Maistre had defended priestly celibacy against Enlightenment mockeries, enumerating the unique social services that men without families provided to society. But in the *Système*, Comte went so far as to advocate the early Christian practice of "continuous chastity" (Comte 1970, X: 277) within marriage as the most perfect state. "Thus purified," he reasoned, "the conjugal bond would experience an improvement as pronounced as when monogamy replaced polygamy." Though inspired by his own platonic relationship with De Vaux, Comte's advocacy of conjugal chastity also echoes the female emancipation, enabled by Christian monogamy, that *Du pape* remembered. The difference was that Comte wished to transcend monogamy and realize "the utopia of the Middle Ages, where maternity is conciliated with virginity" (Comte 1970, X: 278). This was his utopia of the Virgin-Mother made possible by parthenogenesis, a regime whereby "spontaneous fecundation" would allow women to "summarize human perfectioning" by conceiving without men's intervention (Braunstein 2009, 168–79), and an apparent attempt (prescient in an age before IVF!) to devise a biomedical mechanism for the replication of Jesus's birth. In Comte's view, it was the only way of rendering

female adoration truly effective, since it was only once women were truly virginal that they would be fully worthy of worship. Besides Maistrian musings on the advantages of priestly celibacy and the ecclesiastical exaltation of the feminine, the drive to keep men and women physically separated evinced by this utopia was a corollary of Comte's tendency to keep his own femininity at bay (Kofman 1978).

The "Retrogrades," the Trinity and Mysticism

Parthenogenesis led to mysticism, since the proper adoration of women enabled a harmonious relationship between body and soul, and between human beings and the universe. The utopia of the Virgin-Mother was a "mystical summary of the Middle Ages" (Comte 1970, X: 406) that would consummate the Religion of Humanity through the doctrine of the Trinity, itself the greatest "offering" that the Middle Ages had made "to Western hearts," and the means of attaining a "real homogeneity between adorators and adored beings" (Comte 1970, IX: 455). Comte's trinity, however, in no way resembled the traditional Catholic Trinity, and this not only because it comprised no monotheistic God. The Nicene Creed prescribes no hierarchy or difference of worship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but the positivist trinity, composed of the Great Being, the Great Fetish and the Great Context (*Milieu*), was a distinctly hierarchical triad. The Great Being, or Humanity, was the greatest of the three because love was "instinctive" to it, and the Great Context the least of the three (Comte 2000, 136)[2] because love could only ever (obscurely) become[3] its "artificial soul" (Comte 2000, 119). The Great Being corresponded to the "entire plenitude of the human type," that is, to all humans worthy of being remembered for their dedication, and to all animals become "human" through their usefulness[4]—Comte's paradoxically mystical nod to Enlightenment utilitarianism and early modern libertinism. The Great Fetish was the "active and benevolent seat" constituted by the Earth, the atmosphere and the stars and planets "truly linked to the human planet as objective or subjective annexes; especially the Sun and the Moon." Most abstrusely, the Great Context was "the theater, passive as well as blind, but always benevolent, where we refer all the material attributes" (Comte 2000, 109).

   Far though this hieroglyphic scheme may seem from the Catholic Trinity—and scandalous though it would have seemed to the latter's confessors—it still had a "retrograde" ancestry. Comte's trinity, like Maistre's thought, valued mystery as a condensation of veiled knowledge that could stimulate devotion and social action. And like Maistrian and Bonaldian trinitarianism, it lent socio-mystical qualities to the number three. Trinitarianism had been central to the thought of Bonald, for whom not just political

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2   The English word "context" does not capture the dual meaning of "context" and "middle" borne by the French *milieu*.

3   The last of Comte's publications, the *Synthèse subjective*, is also the most incomprehensible. This is due to the fact that it is composed according to a numerological scheme that regulates the number of chapters, paragraphs and words per sentence, as well as the first letter of the first word of every sentence. See Juliette Grange's note in Comte (2000, 6) and the annexes to this edition.

4   On the composition of Humanity, see Braunstein (2009, 185–86).

society but the entire cosmos, from the Holy Trinity to the family, could be understood as a function of the relations between divinely arranged triads that, like Comte's—and unlike the Creed's—Trinity were hierarchical: Father–Son–Holy Spirit; king–minister–subject; father–mother–child (Bonald 1993). More esoterically (and democratically), the Senator of *Les soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* waxed lyrical when musing on the innumerable ways in which three, that hidden doorway to the divine, lay ensconced and symbolized in nature for all intelligent beings to behold.

The Great Being, the Great Fetish and the Great Context belonged to those of Comte's spiritual efforts that—regrettably for perceptions of his mental health (Voegelin 1995, 138–40)—were largely driven by his imagination. But not all of his spiritual initiatives were of this kind. He attempted, too, to acquire direct spiritual experience and to achieve inner transformation, by practicing the meditations of a great spiritual classic. He read Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* everyday, required that his followers imitate him in this activity and celebrated the famous text for upholding divine grace (Comte 1970, IX: 447). Significantly, and unsurprisingly, the *Imitatio*'s devotion was practiced by the "retrogrades." The book had been a favorite reading of Maistre's; in 1822 the *ultra*, Eugène de Genoude, published a translation of it dedicated to the Duchess of Berry after the Duke of Berry's assassination; and Lamennais published his own commented version of Genoude's translation two years later. That Comte took the *Imitatio*'s mysticism seriously, and that he wanted to use it to establish a systematic spiritual process at the core of the Religion of Humanity, is proven by his praise of Catholicism for "demanding our most intimate culture" (Comte 1970, IX: 450), and of the Middle Ages for appreciating "less the exterior results of each behavior than the interior tendencies that it manifests and provokes" (Comte 1970, IX: 449).

The "Retrogrades," the Progressive Medieval and Historical Consciousness

If Comte took the medieval beyond "retrograde" expectations, he also sketched it to resemble conservative portraits. Indeed, no modernizing interpretation could have sympathized more effectively with conservative appraisals of the Middle Ages as rendered wise by Christian theology. Praising Maistre for having "profoundly contributed to preparing the true theory of progress" by "[restoring …] an exact justice to the Middle Ages" (Comte 1969, VII: 64), and berating eighteenth-century "metaphysicians" for their "blind hatred" of the medieval (Comte 1969, VII: 62, 64, 76; 1970, IX: 614–15), Comte viewed the Middle Ages with the "retrogrades" as the time of creativity and dynamism that, far from opposing modernity, had given birth to it. The *Système* evoked Maistre's Middle Ages, the politically creative epoch that had consecrated European monarchy and spawned the European sciences. And it revived Chateaubriand's Middle Ages, the time pregnant with modernity when the individual had been most independent and lived most intensely. Conversely, where the *encyclopédistes* put the Middle Ages forward as a time of stagnant submission, Comte depicted it as a time of rebellion and movement. The Middle Ages were no step backward: Catholicism's "dynamic conceptions" ensured the Christians' superiority over the "best souls" of antiquity (Comte 1969, VIII: 471).

Even more, the medieval had invented the idea of progress: the "progressive ardor that distinguishes the whole of the great Occidental family" was medieval in origin and the Middle Ages' temporal position had helped to spark it. It was in medieval times that the "continuous movement of humanity" had attained enough of a "historical manifestation" for the "real instinct of our perfectibility" to be born. Religion had, then, hastened the development of this instinct: "perfectibility" was nourished by the "universal persuasion of the superiority of Catholicism over polytheism and Judaism" (Comte 1970, IX: xxiv).

The resulting break with the past was not "retrograde" as enlightened histories of the Middle Ages claimed, but modernizing in "anarchic" ways: "When the feudal and theological system was constituted […], the germ of its destruction was [sprouting], the elements of the system that must replace it today had just been created" (Comte 1970, X: 5 and 179). Modernity's seed germinated in various ways. First, Catholicism's "brutal advent," in rejecting "all our Greco-Roman antecedents," prefigured Protestantism's "grave" rebuttal of "all the Middle Ages" and announced the eighteenth century's "blind deism" (Comte 1970, IX: xxiv). Contrary to Enlightenment accounts, it was the medievals who first blew the horn of Occidental anarchy by being the first to "curse" the past. The upheaval born of yesteryear's rejection was augmented by Catholicism's birthing of its own deist and atheist enemies. Metaphysics had originally sprung from an "honorable impulse" that sought not to "dominate theologism" but to "modify it by a gradual dissolution." But it became "negative" during the "modern degradation" (Comte 1970, IX: 66).

Indeed, argued Comte, once more indulging in categorical inversions, it was theological metaphysics that, encouraging "vicious dispositions to absolute independence," bred the "revolutionary instinct of modern Westerners" (Comte 1970, IX: 67). The series of breaks and rejections triggered an increase in the awareness of time, which in turn bred the (for Comte) most important modern consequence of the medieval—that which rendered the "retrogrades"' appreciation of it most valuable: Comte's own historical trinitarianism. The idea was that it is necessary to be aware of at least three terms—antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity, or fetishism, theologism and positivism—before a systematic philosophy of history—Comte's Law of the Three Stages—can develop. And it was in furthering this awareness of time that the Christians had become the "true spontaneous promoters of the noble regime that they did not cease to pursue after too abstract a type" (Comte 1969, VIII: 472).

The insistence that the Middle Ages invented the idea of progress is, to my knowledge, a wholly Comtean original. But the desire to restore to the medieval intellectual initiatives wrongly credited to modernity was first expressed by Maistre (Maistre 1966, 1998) before being pursued by François Guizot (Guizot 1985, 2011). Similarly, the vision of the Middle Ages as an "anarchic" time of individual independence was the Romantic favorite of Chateaubriand, more gloomily explored by Jacques Bins de Saint-Victor (Saint-Victor 1822). Following his characteristic tendency to synthesize opposites, however, Comte balanced conservative medievalist perceptions of anarchy with similarly conservative themes of medieval order. The fierce independence of proto-political groups, he observed, had coexisted with another phenomenon that prepared modernity: the family's incipient dependence on society. "The time had not yet come to restrain directly […]

the primitive omnipotence of fathers over children," and of husbands over wives. "But the continuous intervention of the theocratic priesthood worthily prepared a progress that could begin only in the Middle Ages" (Comte 1970, IX: 234).

It was an evocation of the "retrogrades'' and especially of Bonald's most important legacy to sociology: the individual's utter dependence on social relations and his or her absolute, exclusive constitution through them. And it was a reverberation of *du Pape's* extolment, in Book III, of the Catholic priesthood's intervention in marriage. Further Bonaldian and Maistrian was Comte's general conviction that stable and "civilized" social relations can be formed and maintained only through the intervention of spiritual authority.

The "Retrogrades," the Revolution and Historical Cycles

If the early conservatives influenced Comte's conception of historical epochs, they left their mark, too, on his historical philosophy. In the *Considérations sur la France*, Maistre had evaluated the Revolution as a time of crisis that could not last, contrasting it with the tranquil and millennial order represented by the old regime. These were the beginnings of the more elaborate speculative philosophy of history he exposed in *De l'église gallicane* (1817), which offered an epistemological version of this intuition, distinguishing between times such as the seventeenth century, prolific in creation and discovery, and ages of dissertation (the eighteenth century), expert at manufacturing conflict and distributing falsehood. Interestingly, Saint-Simon devised several theories of history throughout his life that, though each identifying different periods and divided into different numbers of phases, posited precisely this model of alternation between "organic" ages of stasis governed by socially successful philosophies (antiquity, the Middle Ages) and "transitional" ones of crisis or criticism (modernity) (Saint-Simon 2013, II and IV). In Comte's own historical theory, the Middle Ages was, along with fetishism and positivism, an "organic" historical period, a comparatively peaceful time characterized by strong social bonds, religiously forged, that alternated through time with shorter, "critical" periods most recently and apotheotically exemplified by the French Revolution. Certainly, Comte first encountered this way of conceiving time during his collaboration with Saint-Simon, and more specifically during the composition of *L'organisateur* (1819–20). Yet here, once more, the resemblance may be partly due to Maistre's inspiration of Saint-Simon. Putting a religious twist on Voltaire's *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1752), Maistre's *De l'église gallicane* (1817) already commented on the contrast between the religious and socially integrating *grand siècle*, and the ungodly and socially dissolving century that followed it.

Comte's mechanics of historical development, as well, bear similarities with both "retrograde" and socialist historical philosophy. Maistre and Saint-Simon both attributed the Revolution to the modern rise of "negative" doctrines of Protestant origin (Maistre 1966, 1979, III; Saint-Simon 2013, IV), and Comte similarly argued that the revolutionary "crisis proceeded from the intimate decomposition, at first spontaneous, then systematic, that the political system of the Middle Ages underwent in the whole Occident […] since the fourteenth century" (Comte 1969, VII: 65). In Comte's vocabulary, the

"spontaneous" decomposition referred to the beginnings of (Catholic) theological met-aphysics; while its later "systematic" variety was constituted by its Protestant successors. Comte, Maistre and Saint-Simon all thus posited the same "negative" causes for the Revolution, diverging only on the moment when the negativity began. For Maistre, it was when Luther defected. For Saint-Simon, it was when Leo X betrayed Christianity. And for Comte, it was when metaphysical Catholicism gave birth to Protestantism's ideational fourteenth-century predecessors.

Where the "retrogrades" do seem to have had thematic priority, both in Comte's thought and in general, is regarding the Revolution's historical significance as the prod-uct of a fall and the precursor of regeneration. "Rather than prolong the negative move-ment of the five previous centuries," writes Comte, the Revolution "put a necessary end to it, manifesting, by a last shaking, the irrevocable resolution of abandoning entirely the fallen order, in order to proceed directly to a total regeneration" (Comte 1969, VII: 65–66). This interpretation of the Revolution was likely first published by the spiritual coun-terrevolutionary Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin in his *Lettre à un ami* (1795), where the Revolution appeared as a painful operation that Providence-as-surgeon executed to bring the social body back to health (Saint-Martin 1794, 5, 73). Maistre further theologized this vision of the Revolution-as-dolorous-cure: Providence, he wrote, closing the first chapter of the *Considérations sur la France*, "punished to regenerate." None other than Plato evinced this when stating, "The Lord, God of gods, seeing that beings subject to generation had lost (*or lost in themselves*) the invaluable gift, had determined to submit them to a treatment proper to at once punish them and regenerate them" (Maistre 2007, 488).

The "retrograde" tripartite sequence—another trinity!—of a fall or malady fol-lowed by pain or punishment and ending in regeneration thus resurfaced in Comte's thought as the triad of a fall, shaking and regeneration. At first meant to express solely the French revolutionary phenomenon, the threefold pattern over time acquired univer-sal implications within both counterrevolutionary and positivist thought. Thus, *Les soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* reflected that the revolutionary upheaval had "crushed" nations only to "mix" them; *Du pape* envisioned the world's nations, purified by crisis, assembling in Rome's pantheon in Catholic fraternity; and the *Système de politique positive* averred that once the "great crisis" that began with the Revolution came to an end, the "final regener-ation" would not be "purely national," but would comprise all the "Occidental elements" (Comte 1969, VII: 81) until the positivist order embraced the whole globe. Hence the letters that Comte wrote to Tsar Nicholas I in 1852 and to Reshid Pasha in 1853 inviting them to jump on the positivist bandwagon.

Comte's Ultra-"Retrograde" Medieval Politics

As for France, just as it had initiated—or consummated—the modern fall, it would lead the way to universal regeneration. The European premiership of the "church's eldest daughter" in intellectual trends, (anti-) spiritual fashions, social (mis-) inven-tions and political catastrophes—in short, in the "government of opinion"—had been a theme of Maistre's writing career from its opening with the *Lettres d'un royaliste savoisien* (1793) to its close with *Du pape*. Comte echoed it in the *Système de politique*

positive, where the notion that the French population is the "worthy avant-garde of the great Occidental family" returns repeatedly, especially in regard to the medieval. The "decisive substitution of forced aggregation by free association" during the Middle Ages had implied the move of the European capital from Rome to Paris (Comte 1970, IX: 478); and in the positivist future, the "French nationality" would replicate the medieval past by "converting its political center into the religious metropolis of regenerated humanity" (Comte 1970, X: 373). This would be a revival, in perfected form, of the "Catholic republic of the Middle Ages" (Comte 1969, VII: 82), the "fundamental community which[,] prepared by the Roman incorporation, organized itself directly under the incomparable Charlemagne, among the diverse Occidental populations" (Comte 1969, VII: 79) and whose "aesthetic aptitude" was manifested in the continental aegis that Latin had achieved under clerical direction (Comte 1970, IX: 441).

Both *Du pape* and *De la réorganisation* had maintained this, competing once more as sources of positivist thought. Surprisingly, yet following a pattern already detected on the subject of medieval politics,[5] the difference between the two works was that Saint-Simon was more "retrograde" than the "retrogrades." Maistre may have praised the Middle Ages, but he hardly intended to recreate, much less develop further, the social order they represented. His aim in *Du pape* was the more modest one of refurbishing the papacy and the clergy in order to annul royal absolutism, strengthen social bonds, integrate communities, render the voices of ordinary people more easily yet peacefully heard, and in these ways prevent the recurrence of bloody revolution. Deeply conscious that time advances never to turn back, Maistre was not a reactionary in the sense of someone who seeks to restore the past. His thought was too deeply imbued with Enlightenment utilitarianism and the ambition to defend the sacred through the useful; while as an urban aristocrat his politics was largely unconcerned with the survival of feudal hierarchies. In this, he differed from Chateaubriand and most *ultras*, who never engaged with the Enlightenment as closely as he did, and whose landed interests prompted them to defend the nobility's roles and privileges.

Comte, for his part, leaned on Maistre—much as Saint-Simon had done—in order to go beyond him. Like a good industrial socialist—recalling Saint-Simon's argument in *L'organisateur* (1819)—positivism's father had no use for the traditional aristocracy (that quintessentially "useless" class), but also like his former mentor, he sought to import the medieval social order as faithfully and completely as "revolutionary" insights permitted. This move implied, as we have seen, keeping the spiritual power in its medieval form as a producer, rather than as a mere administrator, of universal scientific knowledge. It also included re-inventing papal and clerical roles as Maistre had first suggested, and as Saint-Simon had afterwards insisted, but to the point of turning Catholicism into a new religion. The fact is worth emphasizing in light of Juliette Grange's argument that it was fetishism, rather than medieval Christianity, that inspired the Religion of Humanity.

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5   See the above discussion on Saint-Simon's ultra-"retrograde" conception of the rapport between the spiritual and temporal realms.

Where Comte remained strictly Saint-Simonian and not at all "retrograde" was in his desire to replace landowners with industrialists and incorporate the proletariat: rarely entrepreneurs, the counterrevolutionaries had remained unworried by the rise of industry, and among them Bonald is the only one to have written long enough into the century to reflect on the workers' deplorable condition (Gengembre 1976, 83). Still, even on the subject of workers, Comte combined his Saint-Simonian past with his counterrevolutionary readings: for even to the proletariat he lent a medieval character forged by Christianity's liberating work. It was not only women, he pondered, who regretted the Middle Ages with good cause: Unable to "forget that this great epoch had emancipated them" (Comte 1969, VIII: 132 and Comte 1970, IX: 417), the proletarians too rejected the "predilection of letters for Greco-Roman societies, founded on the slavery of workers" (Comte 1969, VIII: 132). Here, too, there was a Maistrian corollary: For although *Du pape* had not mentioned the "slavery of workers" specifically, Book III had congratulated medieval Christianity for abolishing ancient slavery—a theme later taken up and developed by Maistre's correspondent, reader and emulator Félicité de Lamennais, along with his followers the Mennaisians.

But there was more, as even the democratization of positivist society would take place along medieval paths upon which the "retrogrades" had been the first to tread: "The incorporation of the people to modern society" would follow "the irresistible program that the Middle Ages legated to us," since the "unlettered masses […] alone conserved some real sentiment" of the "social superiority of the Middle Ages, […] especially among the populations preserved from Protestantism" (Comte 1969, VII: 62). Although Comte's, these lines reflected the perspective of *ultras,* Catholic aristocrats and Ultramontane counterrevolutionaries who thought of the European masses, heirs of the medieval, as their closest allies—unschooled yet wise preservers of millennial traditions destroyed by Protestants and freethinkers, living testimonies that the French Revolution was fundamentally undemocratic, since it ignored the loyalties and opinions of most of the population. Further "retrograde" was Comte's celebration of the common people as bearer of true reason. Maistre, Bonald, Chateaubriand, Montlosier—all had honored popular wisdom, customs, traditions and "good sense" in preference to—and critique of—elite intellectualism, and Comte similarly lent the *populus* intellectual status as Western civilization's true creator: "In logic, as much as in morals, our true initiation always resulted from a long popular elaboration, after universal beliefs, without any doctoral impulsion" (Comte 1969, VIII: 103).

Conclusion

I began this chapter by setting aside Comte's assurances that the "retrogrades" formed him, and by systematically examining the relative prevalence of Maistrian and Saint-Simonian ideas in his work. It emerged from this analysis that, as Macherey suggests, the two powers were central to Comte's inheritance from both Maistre and his former mentor. It also emerged, contrary to Macherey and as per Comte's own testimony, that the "retrogrades" and Maistre in particular did play a "positive" role in positivism. By this I mean that they contributed ideational content and methodological form

to the philosophy rather than simply provided a "negative" critique of "metaphysical" and "revolutionary" thought. The question remains of who most influenced Comte—Bonald, the major source of his sociological method, or Maistre, whom he mentions far more frequently and to whom he owes multiple themes. Given the starring role he lends the Savoyard in intellectual history and in the genesis of his ideas—as well as the preference he exhibits for the Ultramontanism Maistre founded versus the Gallicanism Bonald represented—there is little doubt that Comte considered Maistre to be positivism's leading "retrograde" figure—a role that the Maison d'Auguste Comte in Paris commemorates by placing Maistre's portrait prominently opposite Condorcet's. Yet the sociological method's own valorization of generals over particulars should perhaps have prescribed that Comte raise Bonaldian generality over Maistrian particularity.

Insofar as Comte's spiritual power was an intellectual "function" wielded by intellectuals who reorganized society and generated scientific knowledge, it was decidedly Saint-Simonian. Yet insofar as Comte's spiritual power was the consecrator and regulator of knowledge, guided by a pope and socially and epistemologically uninventive beyond Comte's own prescriptions, it was a more traditional, Catholic—Maistrian—phenomenon. In regard to the *relation* between the spiritual and temporal powers, Comte's account was also far more Maistrian than Saint-Simonian. *Du pape* had campaigned for ecclesiastical independence from intrusive temporal sovereigns unto the conversion of the whole globe, while in the *Nouveau christianisme* Saint-Simon had envisioned the spiritual power's annihilation of the temporal. Here, Comte preferred to adhere to Maistre's original medieval vision, consistently celebrating the balance between the powers as productive of the Occident's debate-oriented culture, and rejecting violence as a means of spiritual progress or independence. His final goal was the anti-Machiavellian crowning of morality as the queen of sciences and the (proto-Marxist) withering away of politics—a gradual and originally Maistrian process that contrasted with Saint-Simon's more revolutionary vision.

The "retrogrades'" major contribution to positivism, though, was in medieval matters, and here Comte *must* be taken at his word. If he associates the "retrogrades" with the Middle Ages and praises them consistently for their medieval sensibilities, it really is because on this point they influenced him deeply. Saint-Simon's musings may have prefigured or harmonized with theirs, notably on the need to model the social future on the Middle Ages, a prospect that was also important for Comte. But in breadth and depth of knowledge of the medieval, industrialism's father could not compete with the "retrogrades." It was they, as we have seen, who set the tone of the debate and provided the medieval themes on which Comte drew to design positivist society—politics' subordination to morality, the cult of women, the incorporation of the unlettered masses into modern society, the valorization of emotion over reason, the establishment of a spiritual process at the core of the Religion of Humanity and so forth.

The synthesis of these themes in turn prompts significant shifts in our view of Comte, Maistre, and nineteenth-century medievalism. It suggests, in particular, that both thinkers furthered a unique, modernizing stream of medievalism distinct from the aristocratic, monarchical, and Romantic varieties prevalent in their time. The idea that Maistre's medievalism departed from aristocratic and monarchist models may seem

surprising given that he was himself an aristocrat and a monarchist, but astonishment dispels when remembering that the aristocratic and royalist medievalisms of his time took up Montesquieu's celebration of Frankish culture and the *parlements* (Armenteros 2014b). Not so Maistre's medievalism, which, keeping aside Montesquieu's *aristocratic* liberalism, put forward the president's much less known *ecclesiastical* variety to fashion the Ultramontanist medievalism that Comte inherited. This was a pacifist, anti-imperialist and intellectualist mode of thought that insisted on theology's birthing of science and that Comte married ably with Saint-Simon's technocratic legacy. Somewhat reminiscent of Chateaubriand's Middle Ages—that "fecund night," that "powerful chaos whose flanks carried a new universe" (Chateaubriand 1826)—it differed from this Romantic model in emphasizing not the medieval's chaos but its reasonable sentiment. The Ultramontanist depiction of the Middle Ages as an intellectually creative period for its part acquired an extreme expression with Comte's intimation, subversive of the Enlightenment yet mindful of its ideals, that the Middle Ages was, to date, history's most progressive epoch for its invention and practice of the idea of progress.

Comte believed, though, that the best of the medieval was not its progressiveness but its capacity for devotion—another theme with a "retrograde" ancestry. A crucial distinction must be drawn here. Maistre may have been a *dévot*, but he never followed the Romantics in exoticizing the emotional. Misunderstood all too frequently as a Romantic, he was, like Bonald and Lamennais, a man of the eighteenth century, as well as a Catholic all too steeped in the Augustinian tradition to be tempted to adore the human. Emotion was natural for him, a means of truth-seeking that over time collapsed onto reason. Comte, by contrast, did not think that emotion should be left to flower spontaneously, but that it should be cultivated rationally by worshipping Humanity. He sought to administer the emotions and educe the sacred. He was a Romantic in that for him sentiment was the other, so that his self-presentation as a chivalric medievalist in the lineage of Chateaubriand, Scott and Manzoni is readily understandable.

The antithesis Comte posited between this chivalric feudalism of the Romantics and the medieval ecclesiastical ethics of their "spiritual" predecessors is in turn meaningful for casting new light on early nineteenth-century Francophone conservatism, suggesting specifically that this nascent political movement can be divided into two phases. The earlier phase, traditionally religious and devotional, was at once fiercely anti-rationalist and desiring that ecclesiastical institutions should rebuild a society destroyed by crisis. The later phase, exoticizing the emotional, valorized the near-worship of human beings and looked back nostalgically to the medieval secular social order. More research is needed to ascertain to what extent Comte's "retrograde" dichotomy is empirically accurate: He himself always hoped that his disciples would undertake precisely such investigations, and the project is highly worthwhile given the model's explanatory potential. What can be known surely for now is that Comte's idea of the progressive medieval derived from the vision of the religious "retrogrades"—a vision counter-intuitively more modern than that of the Romantics to whom he opposed them, and with whom he personally identified.

In sum, it seems that, contrary to scholarly suspicions, Comte did not use the "retrogrades" solely as a mask for the debt he owed to Saint-Simon, and that he did not value their thought only for the corrections it provided to metaphysical excesses. Over time,

his desire to owe more to the "retrogrades" than to his former teacher had real consequences. Comte directly derived multiple themes and conceptual categories central to his thought from Maistre and his "retrograde" peers, so that his repeated acknowledgment and professed admiration for the Counterrevolution was not simply honest. It was heartfelt.

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Chapter Five

THE "GREAT CRISIS": COMTE, NIETZSCHE AND THE RELIGION QUESTION

Andrew Wernick

We still don't seem to have left the metaphysical state whose disappearance Comte thought to be imminent. Given all the headlines about the "return of God" a satirist could even ask if we are in danger of leaving it in reverse [par le bas]. One might seriously wonder if the metaphysical state, far from being, as Comte thought, a transitory phase in the dissolution of prior forms of theologism, doesn't result in keeping them artificially alive by means of the uncertainty inherent in all metaphysics. (Michel Houellebecq 2003: 1)

Comte's positive polity, complete with a new spiritual power based on scientist-philosophers and a full-scale Religion of Humanity to ensure the perfect harmonization of feeling, thought and action, has not arrived. Nor will it ever. But what of that? The persistence of capitalism is not in itself a refutation of Marx. Nor is the fact that God has not yet died, or is even staging a grizzly comeback, a refutation of Feuerbach or Nietzsche. To put the point more generally: If History with a capital H, as conceived by the nineteenth-century dialecticians of progress, appears to have come to an end before its consummation, this does not render their analyses of what precedes that consummation entirely without interest. Indeed, the notion of being stuck in the penultimate might offer some clue to what, from a progressive viewpoint, is most paradoxical about the present era.

It is in that spirit that the following remarks are offered on Comte's analysis of the "great crisis" that framed his understanding of his own present, and of the question concerning the post-theistic future of religion that he took to be at its heart. Of course, to treat the situation he problematized under the sign of metaphysics as a moment of indefinite duration rather than a transient upheaval before humanity comes fully into its own, is to separate his question from his answer, and above all from his teleology. But if bracketing, in this way, the positivist sublation to whose performative description Comte devoted so many thousands of pages truncates his thought, it also has the merit of highlighting what the attempted closures of his endless systematizing concealed: the enormity of the problem he felt called upon to surmount, and what, in his own terms, was at stake.

My aim in focusing on this side of Comte's thinking, however, is not simply interpretive. Still less do I mean to suggest that there is any straightforward way in which his diagnosis can be brought to bear on our own circumstances. The point, rather, is to

recall Comte's forgotten place in the genealogy of a cluster of questions concerning the cultural crisis of modernity, the death of God and European nihilism that have been all too exclusively identified with the thought of Nietzsche and his twentieth-century interpreters (notably Heidegger). By examining, on the one hand, how Comte's discussion of negativism and metaphysics in a certain way anticipated Nietzsche on nihilism and, on the other, how Nietzsche's depiction of the religion question in his writings of the 1880s not only critiqued, but built on, Comte's earlier account of the travails of the final transition, it becomes possible to see more clearly the constellation of issues they commonly address—as well perhaps as how their otherwise starkly opposed perspectives might be brought into a sociological conversation more pertinent than either to the puzzles of contemporary post-secularity.

The Western Revolution and *la grande crise*

What Comte called *la grande crise finale* (CPP II Leçon 57: 585; 1844: 50)[1] began with the outbreak of the French Revolution and extended through the dizzying succession of regimes that followed: from those of the revolutionary period itself to Napoleon, the Bourbon restoration, the July Monarchy, the Second Republic and, finally, the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon to which, in the years before his death in 1857, Comte gave qualified support (SPP III: 612–13). In the Positivist Calendar (Appendix A), 1789 also designated year one of the new industrial-positivist epoch. Thus the great crisis coincided with the opening years of the latter, a fraught beginning that had started with the sanguinary destruction of the feudal–theological *ancien regime* but which, with a stabilizing dictatorship in place, and with the completion in 1854 of Comte's second system "instituting the Religion of Humanity," he considered to be essentially over. His last work, the *Synthèse subjective* was written as if it were 1927; by which point, he confidently predicted, the positivist order would have been securely established, and human society would have reached its fully developed form (SS: viii).

   Comte's certainty that the period of chronic instability that had followed the cataclysm of the Revolution was already, by the mid-1850s, drawing to a close, and largely because of his own achievements as the modern successor of Aristotle and St Paul, was idiosyncratic. But the general terms in which he understood the period through which he was living were widely shared. Not just in France, noted John Stuart Mill, but throughout Europe and North America, it was "an age of transition" in which "mankind [had] outgrown old institutions and old doctrines and [had] not yet acquired new ones" (Mill, 1831: 53). Underlying this flux was a social transformation that had displaced the old triumvirate of Crown, Church and landed aristocracy and was bringing new forces to power. More precisely, in the language of Saint-Simon, which Comte adopted, and which itself borrowed from Scottish and French political economy, what was coming into being was a form of society organized around *l'industrie*, which is to say a world of

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1   In the *Système de politique positive* this initial coinage was generally shortened to "la grande crise", but with exactly the same meaning.

work oriented to the organized production of means to satisfy human needs through the application of energy and knowledge to the transformation of the natural world. For the Saint-Simonians, though, this was only half the story. The rise of industry, and corresponding decline of a military form of social organization, was tightly interwoven with another narrative concerning the advancement of knowledge and retreat of mystical belief, which went back to the *philosophes* and had been turned into a universal history by Condorcet (in *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progress de l'esprit humain*). Overall, a society that had been dominated by feudalism and a monotheistic religion was in the last stages of giving way to a new order based on industry and science.

As with previous periods of transition the one that issued in industrial modernity was marked by conflicts between declining and ascending social forces and a general confusion of ideas. This was indeed part of a larger pattern. In the course of civilizational development, "organic" periods alternated with "critical" ones, the former marked by the harmonious integration of dominant forms of social practice with the dominant system of ideas, the latter by conflict and instability. Evidently, however, it is one thing to speak of transition and flux, another to speak of a "great crisis" and to elevate this, as Comte did, into a world-shaking drama in which the very future of humanity was at stake. But before looking more closely at the terms in which Comte did so, four features of the framework that Comte adopted for understanding the character of his epoch are worth highlighting.

The *first* concerns the double place of the advancement of knowledge, and out of this the birth of modern science, in his model of collective human development. On the one side, and driving the whole historical dynamic, was an instrumental relation between theory and practice in which material needs provided the impetus for serviceable knowledge and for its enhancement through the cumulative discovery, in one domain after another, of the natural laws in play. On the other side was an ideological relation according to which the unity and cohesion of society at any one time depended on a consensus at the level of ideas; a condition for which was that these ideas themselves should be in accord both with the dominant institutions of social life and with the contemporary state of knowledge. Hence, (a) the crucial importance of religion, understood on its cognitive side as that institution which, in a sequence of strategic modifications, assembles what is taken for knowledge and truth into a coherent system of ideas, and inculcates it as such.[2] And (b) the need, if the rise of industry to social dominance was to issue in a stable society, for there to be a replacement for Christianity, and more generally for *théologisme*, whose supernatural basis had become incompatible with the rise of the empirically grounded natural sciences, a replacement that could only be conceived as a system of orienting ideas based firmly on the latter.

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2   In the *Cours de philosophie positive*, religion is treated in just this way, i.e. as a ruling system of ideas and knowledge unified by some supernatural belief. Positive philosophy is its successor in the age of science. In the later *Système de politique positive*, religion unifies feelings and actions as well as ideas, and is not tied to a supernatural ontology. There, what succeeds "theologism" in its various phases is the positive Religion of Humanity. For a discussion of Comte's changed definition of religion see Arbousse-Bastide, 1966.

This emphasis on social order, and on the need for a new mental consensus, was combined, *secondly*, with an appreciation for the supposedly lost harmony of medieval society that undoubtedly owed much to ideas taken from Catholic counter-revolutionary thinkers, especially de Maistre, de Bonald and Chateaubriand. Of course there was no going back. Society was to be re-organized "sans Roi ni Dieu."[3] But equally illusory, as Comte had first argued in "On the Spiritual Power" (Jones, 1998: 187 et seq), was the notion that, in a post-theistic society, the functional equivalent of Catholicism and its Church could be dispensed with altogether.

To be sure, the problem of how to sustain moral purpose and social unity in a world dedicated to the scientific conquest of nature had been thought about before. In utopian terms it had been posed by Bacon in *The New Atlantis*. As well, implicit in the Encyclopedia project of Diderot and D'Alembert was the subversive idea that social authority in matters of public opinion had passed from interpreters of Revelation to those of the natural sciences, and that *lumières* and *savants* constituted a rival spiritual power to the Catholic Church. However, it was only with Saint-Simon and still more with Comte—each in their way responding to the challenge of de Maistre[4]—that this idea became explicit.

From conservative Catholic social theorizing also came other borrowings. These included a hierarchical-organicist conception of society and a savage critique of much revolutionary era political thinking as individualistic and anti-historical, with Rousseau's *Contrat Social* as prominent a target for Comte as it had been for de Maistre. It was this element, more generally, which distinguished positivist from liberal visions of emergent industrialism (Stedman-Jones, 2006), insofar as the latter minimized the need for an ideological fix, whether because of Mandevillian assumptions about the paradoxical effects of selfishness and competition, or because of the supposed ease of achieving consensus around the common objective of useful production and, as Bacon had put it, "the relief of Man's estate." Overall, for Comte, the key move, practically and theoretically, was to combine the insights of the progressive school about the laws of history with those of the "retrograde" school about the laws of order. In this way, the incessant conflict between pro- and anti-Republican parties that dominated and disturbed the French political scene in the first half of the nineteenth century could be overcome in a reconstructive synthesis that corrected the errors of each in light of the truths of the other.

The *third* point concerns the place of *la grande crise finale* in Comte's historical schema. Final, in this connection, had more than one meaning. Most immediately, the word drew attention to the fact that the revolutionary upheaval in France had a long pre-history. It was the climactic last act in a process of transition from feudalism to industrialism that had been going on for centuries. The Revolution's regicide, abolition of feudal privileges

3   Comte placed this slogan on the title page of *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme*.
4   "It seems to me that every true philosopher should make his choice between two hypotheses: either a new religion is about to be formed, or Christianity will rejuvenate itself in an extraordinary manner. We have to make our choice […] according to our stand on the truth of Christianity" (de Maistre *Considérations sur la France* 1855: 67; cited in Voegelin, 1975:183). Saint-Simon, with his *Nouveau Christianisme* and appeals to the Pope, opted for a radical reform of the existing Church; Comte, with his Religion of Humanity, opted for a full replacement.

and measures against the Church had given the coup de grace to a social system already in decay and, with the ascendancy of the Third Estate, had liberated an industrialism that had long been incubated in medieval society.

For Comte, the "Western Revolution"[5] could be traced back at least to the fourteenth century. On the socio-economic side it had begun with the rise of the chartered cities outside the purview of feudal relations. The decline of the latter had been furthered by a monarchical absolutism that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, broke the power of feudal magnates and, in Protestant countries, that of the Church. On the religious side, the Papal Schism, the Conciliar movement and the decadence of the fifteenth-century Roman hierarchy had weakened the Church as an institution long before it, and Christendom, had split irrevocably in the Reformation. As for the scientific revolution, and the growing post-Copernican contest between faith and secular reason, the roots of this could likewise be traced back to the high Middle Ages, beginning with the reintro-duction of Aristotle, medicine and natural philosophy to Western Europe in the twelfth century via the Arabs and Moorish Spain.

In a still-longer-term perspective, feudalism itself could be seen as the last, defensive, stage in a form of social organization that, since the rise of warrior tribes, had been structured along military lines; just as the monotheism that had accompanied feudal-ism could be seen as the last form of a belief system, and explanatory model, based on "fictive beings": a supernaturalism that had begun with fetishism, and transitioned to polytheism, before the displacement of the latter in the Greco-Roman world by Pauline Christianity and Islam.

But this was just to look back. The present crisis, as the final phase of the transi-tion from military to industrial society, and from a ruling philosophy dominated by "theologism" to one dominated by science, was also final in a more absolute sense. It marked the last step in the development of society itself. Once this crisis had been sur-mounted with the establishment of a stable political, philosophical and religious frame-work for industrial-positivist society, there was no further major transformation to be had. Thereafter, all that remained were such perfectionist projects as the physiological improvement of the species, for example by eliminating the procreative need for male sexuality—the "utopia" of the virgin-mother (SPP IV: 279)—and the biocratic ordering of its terrestrial milieu (Braunstein 2009).

This was not to say that there were no new problems associated with industrialism itself. The division of labor that Adam Smith had seen as a motor of productivity, and that more generally increased as knowledge and tasks became more specialized, came with a blinkered *esprit de détail* that intensified the need for mechanisms to ensure the *esprit d'ensemble* necessary for voluntary cooperation in the work of the whole (CPP II leçon 46: 76–78). Of still greater import were the class divisions, already pointed out by Sismondi in his *Nouveaux principes d'economie politique* in 1819, and becoming ever more sharp and apparent, between the workers and masters who together comprised *les industriels*. Though a necessary element of a completed transition, it was not enough,

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5   For Comte's "positive theory of the Western revolution," see SPP Vol. III chapter 7.

therefore, to establish a form of state purged of non-productive elements and in which, as those best qualified, the captains of industry directed the "temporal power." By itself this could hardly guarantee the social peace and voluntary cooperation on which the very functioning of industry depended.

For Marx and the Communists this was self-evident. The new industrial order was traversed by a structural contradiction between private ownership and the social character of production that would eventually blow it apart: there was one more revolution to come. For Comte, however, class warfare between capitalists and proletarians was a transient pathology, part and parcel of the same moral problem that stemmed from the decay of theologism and from the absence, as yet, of an authoritative new consensus. Whence greed and irresponsibility on the side of the *patriciens*, envy on the side of the workers and everywhere a materialism that placed gross instincts and self-interest over solidarity on behalf of the collective good.

Comte's proposed solution, as part of the all-encompassing Religion of Humanity elaborated in *Système de politique positive*, was to reform the culture surrounding capitalist property (1848: 392–400) and, with its thirst for justice and solidarity, to "incorporate" the proletariat as a moral force (1848: 154–58). For Comte, in short, the contradictions of transition and the new contradictions of industrial society merged into a single problem, the solution to which concerned fixing what a Marxist would call the ideological and political superstructure, with primacy accorded to the first.

A *fourth* feature to note in Comte's account of the post-1789 historical situation concerns the central role of Western Europe and, within that, of France (SPP III: xiv), in what was taken to be a global transformation. That the process of Humanity's becoming industrial and positive was geographically uneven and would spread outwards from Europe and its most advanced colonies was taken for granted. Internationally, the first order of business would be to consolidate the dominance of positivism in that renewed version of Christendom (based on the populations of France, Germany, Spain, Italy and England) that Comte called "the Western Republic" (1848: 88). And the same applied on the negative side. The great crisis affected Humanity as a whole; but it manifested itself (how could it have been otherwise?) as a specifically European problem.[6]

As for the vanguard role of France, in addition to all the claims that could be made for it, from Charlemagne to the Enlightenment, as the civilizing center of Europe, it was there—with a clarity and violence unmatched elsewhere—that the contradictions of transition had come to a head. Comte traced the reasons for this in France's early modern history, when Protestantism was crushed, then kept out, by an alliance between an unreconstructed Church and an absolutist monarchy; which also succeeded under Louis XIV in co-opting the aristocracy while preserving its privileges vis-à-vis the nascent bourgeoisie; and all this in a country whose scientific as well as literary culture had undergone a prodigious development in part sponsored by the monarchical state itself

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6   Close variants of this Eurocentric philosopheme recur in Husserl's "Philosophy and the Crisis of Western Man" (Husserl, 1965: 149–92) and in Nietzsche's notes on "European nihilism" (Nietzsche, 1968).

(SPP III: 580 et seq). With none of the fudges and compromises that marked, for example, the more gradual dismantling of the medieval order in England (SPP III: 579), the outcome was an explosive confrontation between the anachronistic institutions of Catholic-feudalism and oppositional forces whose pent-up energy was able to sweep them completely aside.

A further consequence was that uniquely in France, with the pre-industrial order in ruins, the question of what institutional configuration should replace it had been presented, all at once, as an urgent problem to resolve. What had ensued, moreover, was a battle not only over the content of post-revolutionary reconstruction, but over how to think it (Comte, 1848: 63). Whence for Comte, as it had been for Saint-Simon, and for de Tracy and the *Idéologues*, the great urgency of completing the scientific revolution with a science of man and society. This was essential not only for the philosophical synthesis needed to ground and unify a new moral consensus, but also and more immediately—as emphasized in the 1822 "Plan of the Scientific Work for the Reorganization of Society" (Jones, 1998: 49–51)—to analyze the present situation and devise, for the first time scientifically, a political program to exit the crisis. The interpretation of the present as a moment of transition, between a known past and a predictable future, was an essential aspect of exactly that. As, too, was the double movement that Comte traced, ever more elaborately, in his successive analyses of industrial modernity's difficult birth: on the one side a negative series tracing the levels at which the old order was successively dismantled, and on the other a positive series in which elements of the new were forming in the womb of the old.

The Great Danger

For a subjectivity seeking a fixed orientation amidst the chaos there was doubtless something reassuring about these Comtean tropes. However—and here we come to the heart of the matter—the same analysis that rendered the post-revolutionary situation intelligible as a determinate moment in the journey toward a good and stable future also indicated that the final transition was the most perilous of all.

The only comparable transition, noted Comte (SPP Vol. III: 503), was from the polytheistic empires of Greco-Roman antiquity to feudalism and monotheism. The shift to monotheism had been strife-ridden as too, after the fall of Rome, had been the establishment of Catholicism as a transnational spiritual power. But the most difficult changes had been social: an "affective revolution" leading, over several centuries, to the abolition of ancient slavery, defensive militarism and—in chivalric and maryolatric mode—the "emancipation of women." Intellectually, on the other hand, and largely through the Christian appropriation of Greek philosophy, there was much less discontinuity. What occurred—a "concentration of the previous polytheistic synthesis into a monotheistic one"—was not a fundamental change but a modification that rendered "theologism […] adequate to frame the purely provisional coordination, which was all that general morality required." In the transition from feudalism to industrialism, however, the opposite was the case. While industrial society had the *social* advances of Catholic-feudalism to build on (in the freeing of labor, the chivalric elevation of women and the separation of

the spiritual from the temporal power), on the *intellectual* side the "final systematization of morality" involved a complete mental revolution (SPP III: 504–6).

Nor could this be achieved all at once. The requisite new system depended on a "synthetic study of the Inorganic World, Life and Society," to achieve, which after the long pause in scientific progress after the Greeks, and in the teeth of ecclesiastical opposition, required "a long and arduous intellectual preparation" (SPP III: 504). Moreover, once all the basic-knowledge domains had been positivized—each involving its own mini-upheaval—to synthesize these into a coherent overall philosophy necessitated not just, as in previous transitions, a modification of the existing dominant philosophy, but a complete recasting. Indeed triply: To move from a theological to a science-based perspective required not only the complete abolition of a fictive world beyond the senses; it also required—demolishing, too, the halfway house of metaphysics—the systematic substitution of relative for absolute conceptions of knowledge and truth. Which in turn, third, involved not only the Copernican de-centering and the empiricist limiting of knowledge claims (to phenomena and their laws, not things-in-themselves and their causes) that came with Hume and Kant, but another leap as well. This was the relativization that came from understanding human knowledge and conceptions as themselves phenomena—phenomena that belonged, moreover, to the domain of society, and whose theoretical and practical value needed always to be appraised in terms of the socio-historical configuration in which they arose and had their effects.

The double-edged character of the ground-clearing critique and abstractive metaphysics that necessarily mediated this intellectual revolution, and the mortal dangers that the whole process presented, we will come to in a moment. But first we must ask what, for Comte, the danger actually was, or more precisely to what? The term *crisis*—a medical term in which the survival of an organism is at stake—begs the same question. Strangely, although the answer is both evident and central to Comte's entire discourse, it is rarely if ever broached directly, only indirectly through a vocabulary of dissolution, subversion and anarchy. At risk, conversely, was the unity, harmony, and order of society. Such talk can easily become banal. But, it should be stressed, what concerned Comte was not just (dis)order on the surface—in the streets, domestically, politically, and so forth—but of society as a whole. And at the limit, the damage he feared was not only to the order of society as the kind that it is, given its stage of techno-intellectual development, but to its order in a still deeper sense, the order without which it would not be a society at all.

From a Comtean perspective, the conservatives' error had been to confound the last two senses. They had not recognized that the order of Catholic-feudal society was historically relative and destined to be replaced by another, industrial-positive one. Indeed, their anachronistic promotion of a return to the *ancien régime* actually promoted disorder. At the same time, however, for all their ahistorical misunderstanding and for all the mystifying God-language in which their proto-sociologizing was wrapped up, *ultras* like de Maistre and de Bonald had been right about the stakes. Disorder could go too far. Societies were not immortal. They could die. That dreadful possibility, moreover, had become palpable in the present epoch. The final transition had unleashed destructive forces that, at the climax of the crisis, had presented the danger not just of a temporary

upheaval but of an irreversible dissolution; and the longer the delay in furnishing positive solutions the higher the risk.

Of course, no more in his understanding of what society *is* than in his analysis of what threatened it did Comte simply take over the conservative Catholic problematic. In conceiving *la société* not just statically, but as it had manifested itself down the ages, and making *this* the object of a science, he at once positivized and historicized the integralist notion of society, which the retrograde school had frozen in the image of an idealized medievalism. To fully understand *la grande crise*, then, we must take account of Comte's complexified concept of the entity under threat.

To be noted first is that Comte classified sociology among the sciences of life.[7] This was not only because society was composed of individual beings whose nature was itself a province of biology. Nor, though this too was crucial, because biological knowledge was necessary for understanding how, and with what difficulty, human beings were able to bond together in a society. Human society was also a life form in its own right. It was, to be sure, a very special kind. It was an organism of organisms, with a "composite nature" each sub-organism of which was its own independent center of feeling, thinking and acting[8] (SPP II: 288 et seq). As such, it nonetheless exhibited those traits that in general distinguished the living from the inert.

Most basic was the irreducibility of society as a functioning whole. In common with plants and animals, the organs and functions of which a society consisted were interdependent. They constituted a system. Organs had to coordinate with one another in their functioning for a "vital consensus" to be sustained; failing which, if the system breached its limits of variation, and the disequilibrium went past the point of no return, the whole system could fall apart (CPP III, Leçon 41). As a safeguard, at the same time, living organisms had regulatory subsystems and in the case of animals a specialized organ—the brain—for that purpose. Transferred to the social plane, the conservative dictum that "every society needs a government" was thus given a quasi-scientific warrant.[9]

However, human society did not subsist in a material void. The harmony to be maintained was not only inner but between itself and the outside. Whence a further sociological apriori. As with other life forms human society was nested in a milieu (SPP III: 30): an ecological niche on which it was totally dependent for its continuing physical existence, but which it also had the limited power to modify (its *puissance modifactrice*).[10] In the case

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7 For Comte's distinction between the sciences comprising "cosmology" and those concerning the "study of life," and the methodological importance of biology for sociology, see SPP Vol I: 564–66 et seq.

8 Comte's first extended discussion of the "social organism" and its difference from both an individual organism and a mechanically composed organism (like a polyp), is in Leçon 47 of the *Cours de philosophie positive*.

9 Cf Durkeim: "The social brain, like the human brain, has grown in the course of evolution." (Giddens, 1986: 43)

10 As Canguilhem (1952) points out, Comte's conception of the organism/milieu relation is in general mechanistic. Only in the case of humanity, with the growth of its scientific knowledge, is the modifying power held to be significant.

of tribal or national societies, this milieu was the territory on and from which they lived. In the case of the englobing society constituted by humanity as a whole, the milieu was "our planet." The overall history of humanity, indeed, could be written as the history of this relationship. That is: of how, at first in scattered communities, but in an increasingly more concerted way, humanity's *puissance modificatrice* steadily grew—to the point, finally, where all other life forms were subdued (or worse) and the earth itself was transformed.[11]

As this last point makes clear, for all its commonalities with other life forms human society had one quality that made it decisively different: its capacity, at once in its relation to the world and in its own body, to evolve. In effect, it was a self-developing superorganism. Society, of its essence then, had a history. At root, what enabled this forward dynamism was language and its storage capacity. Thus, despite the finitude of individuals, knowledge and culture could be cumulative, innovations could carry forward and the collective power to modify the human environment could increase.

Moreover, in pace with these changes, and with concomitant ones connected with modes of knowing, social scale, governance and ideological harmonization, came institutional changes, too. The direction was toward increasingly differentiated functions and organs. And through it all could be traced a long chiasmic movement wherein, as wealth-through-conquest and military forms of organization waned in centrality, the pacific, world-uniting trio of industry, production and science rose to predominance.

This was not, nor could it be, a smooth and continuous process. Uneven development and growing tensions between emergent and outmoded elements of the social body led to full-scale crises followed at intervals by step changes in the prevailing forms of organization, mentality and rule. But through it all, following the "laws of progress," the social totality evolved, and therewith the very form in which, following the "laws of order," it constituted a functioning whole. "The normal type of human existence consists of a state of complete unity. All our evolution, whether individual or collective, therefore consists in developing and consolidating that unity" (SPP III: 9).

To this, finally, there was an important corollary. If the structures of society change in complexity and mode, so too one may assume, does the manner in which it maintains its vital consensus including, fundamentally, how it holds together *as a composite being*. At issue here was the changing nature of the social tie: that is, of what bonds individuals together in the meta-individual being that they constitute.

In one respect, the retrograde school had already included a time dimension in the way they thought about the social tie. In addition to *solidarité*—the synchronous side of individuals holding together as a group—they emphasized persistence and the binding of society across generations. In Comte's terminology: *continuité*. In a conservative optic, however, continuity was understood statically, as tradition, particularly as safeguarded by the Church. The latter was granted a developmental latitude but only within doctrinal limits. For that reason, too, connectivity of the present with the past was foreshortened.

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11 This process was the principal theme of Comte's intended final volume of *Synthèse subjective*: "*Système d'industrie positive, ou traité de l'action totale de l'humanité sur sa planète*" (*System of Positive Industry, or Treatise on the Total Action of Humanity on Its Planet*).

Built into Catholic traditionalism was hostility to previous epochs (the Roman especially) as pagan. But even worse were the revolutionary radicals. Surpassing even the Protestants with their mordant hostility to the Middle Ages, they would wipe clean any memory of feudal Europe's "preparatory regime," including those aspects that were worth saving and modifying for the future. Society was to be reconstituted *de novo*. In this, too, the Revolution and its ideologues reinforced the tendency of modern industry itself to emphasize solidarity at the expense of continuity. Among these the very worst, in Comte's book, were the "Deists, who denied all filiation" (SPP III: 2) and thus made negation of the time-binding aspect of the vital consensus into a veritable principle.

What a fully restored *continuité* required—an imperative for the positivist settlement (SPP III: 2–3)—was the prevalence of a time-sense marked by a critical/appreciative reprocessing and remembering of the past, linked affirmatively to the further progress of order that could be projected (scientifically) into the future. In this way the present generation would be linked to previous ones in a spirit of gratitude, and to future ones in a spirit of benevolence. Not just the repairing of continuity after the rupture of the Revolution, in fact, but its systematic enhancement, was a central feature of positive religion. Hence, in its symbology, Humanity as a mother holding the infant future in her arms,[12] and in its rituals, a heavy emphasis on memorialization and on cultivating an appreciation of what past phases in the development of Humanity had contributed to progress.

This, though, was only part of the matter. What of the synchronous side of the social tie, *solidarité*, and its own changing modalities? One thing was clear: With the displacement of military by industrial activity as the route, in advanced societies, to material improvement, the element of force in the unity of the social could not but diminish and the importance of cooperativeness among ever more task-specialized individuals could not but increase. The second, indeed, was a condition for the first. But how was that possible, even in principle, given the stubborn egoism of human nature?

Comte's answer, a preoccupation of his later work, built on a "science of the soul" (Appendix B) that he derived, with speculative amendments, from the "cerebral physiology" of his day, especially the phrenology of Franz Joseph Gall (Clauzade 2009). A central element was a theory of the sentiments, each with its own physical location in the brain and which, together, assisted by the intellect, drove activity (SPP I: 669–703). As with all Comte's schemas the sentiments—"feelings when passive, penchants when active"—constituted a scale, rising from the lower and powerful ones to the higher and weaker ones. The former—listed as nutritive, sexual/maternal, improvement (destructive and constructive), pride and vanity—served the needs of the ego; the latter, in ever higher degrees, from attachment to veneration to benevolence, were social and awakened the instincts of altruistic love (see Appendix B). The time-worn problem of individual morality, how to overcome selfishness, was thus biologized. In that same move its solution was also rendered immanent. Saving grace did not, as for Pauline Christianity, come from without. Living for the other, however weak an impulse, was a nascent capacity given at birth.

12 As in the devotional painting by Eduardo de Sa that hangs in the Chapelle de l'Humanité in the Maison de Clotilde de Vaux in Paris.

For the personality to be shaped in that direction required only (as difficult as it might be) exercise and habit to strengthen the highest sentiments, discipline and moderation to curb the lower. But how could this happen on a society-wide level, let alone as a cumulating historical process?

To some degree the requisite moral education of the sentiments was a spontaneous consequence of the social relations in which individuals came to find themselves. It began, foundationally, in the nexus of affective ties that constituted the family (SPP II: 177–215). Particularly vital was the role of *la femme* as wife and mother, for whom the maternal instinct was as strong as the sexual one in men (SPP II: 696). With a direct route to altruism, women were by nature *le sexe affective* (SPP II: 246) and—as Comte had discovered at first hand in his relationship with Clotilde—the savior of men.[13] As the scale of society grew, this primal strengthening of the higher sentiments was supplemented by involvement in the increasingly extensive circles of association in which individuals were embedded. In early forms of society, the military itself had a morally educative dimension: honor, loyalty, respect "and even kindness to inferiors" (SPP: III: 57). Following the abolition of slavery and the replacement of serfdom by free labor, a further elevating education of the sentiments occurred in the growing sphere of organized work.[14]

However, given the inbuilt strength of the lower instincts and the predisposition to egoism which they imparted, the movement upwards could be so little guaranteed that it required the continual intervention of a special institutional agency charged with that function. This, in tandem with its intellectually coordinating role (as "philosophy"), had always been the social function of religion. Viewed abstractly, in fact, it was not belief in spirits, gods or God, that is, *théologisme*, that was essential to religion, but its historical function as that which, reaching deep into subjectivity, rallies the individual and binds him or her to society, thus securing on both the individual and collective levels, a "state of full harmony." This was precisely the revised definition that Comte gave to religion in the *Système* and beyond (SPP II: 8–9).

As for the future, the individualism that came with specialization, the economic egoism associated with the freeing of markets, and the moral disorder evident in class conflict, all implied—given the contrary imperative to maintain a high pitch of altruism—that religion and its moral intrusiveness would be needed not less in industrial society, but more. The same result could be extrapolated from the series of religious epochs. From fetishism to polytheism to monotheism, religion had loomed progressively larger in social and individual life, at the same time as it had detached itself as a separate but englobing institution. The totalistic organization of the medieval church was not, therefore, a monstrous exception in the story of progress but in the very line of historical march. In

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13   "The moral amelioration of man constitutes the principal mission of woman" (CPR: 163) "The nature and destiny of women are as intermediary beings between man and Humanity" (SPP IV: 67)

14   "All practical regeneration can be reduced to systematizing, appropriately the spontaneous tendencies of modern industry toward a collective character. […] An existence where each works for another becomes more accessible to social feeling than military activity" (SPP IV: 57).

Comte's pithy formula: As a law of development, "Man becomes more and more religious" (SPP IV: 10).

Paradoxically, then, with the rise of science and industry the need for an expanded role for religion grew at the same time as the "irrevocable decadence of theologism" (Comte 1848: 419) rendered useless the only one there was. For this reason just as much as for the intellectual anarchy that the Revolution had left in its wake, the absence of a religious institution to replace the outmoded one whose monopoly it finally ended, was a catastrophe. The moral crisis was a religious crisis and the religious crisis was a crisis of the unity of the whole. As de Maistre put it: "There is no longer any religion on earth: mankind cannot remain in this state" (cited in Voeglin 1975:184).

For all his atheistic sociologizing, what Comte retained from the conservative Catholic paradigm is striking. In his notion of society as a composite being, egoism versus selfless love remained a central problem for social order, and religion as an active system of moral education remained functionally essential to bind the social totality together. The composite nature of society as a being of beings was for him likewise a route to its sacralisation. Whether or not divinely instituted, *la société* was encountered as a reality immanent and transcendent to the individual. No less than for the conservatives, it deserved respect, even veneration. But Comte went further. Not God, as St. Paul had affirmed, but society—and, in its largest extent, Humanity—was that, and only that, "in which we breathe, move and have our being." With which understanding Comte in effect equated society rather than the Church as the *deus communis* in which "we are members one of one another" (CP: 35). He thus inverted de Bonald's view that the sacred authority of society and its institutions registers the presence of God to propound the doctrine that society/Humanity actually is *le vrai Grand-être.*

John Milbank (1993: 52) has emphasized, as bad theology imported into French sociology, the continuity in this move. But with Comte's inversion came two crucial this-worldly riders: first, that this God, though ever more perfect, was neither eternal nor omnipotent; and, second, that sustaining the Great Being that was human society depended not on some still higher Being (the Creator God) but on its individual members and servants. What transcends and grounds us, this was to say, is a fragile human construct; one which depends, moreover, not only on our ongoing cooperation with one another, but on all the meta-practices of religion whereby the unity of society is subjectively reproduced. Nor, Comte thought, did the need for this effort diminish with the demystification of "God" and the unveiling of society as itself the proper object of worship. To the contrary, the requisite labor of social reproduction becomes all the greater, as Comte makes manifest in his design for positive religion, in which a vast apparatus of worship, doctrine and moral control is erected to sustain the Great Being in its full, spatio-temporal extent, both as an actual and imagined reality.

Behind the excessiveness of Comte's construct, we may easily detect a symptomatic panic about disorder. In the human sacrifice of energy, time, resources and gratification, the repressive implications, too, are evident.[15] In the cult of Humanity, as in other cults,

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15 It may be noted that Marcuse's critique of Freud in *Eros and Civilization*, with its distinction

the gods must eat. To be sure, there is a liberal-seeming logic here as well. The immense social and psychological investments needed to sustain positive religion and its moral regime are the prerequisites for a harmonious society based on voluntary cooperation, rather than one based on obedience, a penal state and rule by force. To which, however, there was an equal and opposite corollary: to want the latter without the former—the anarchist pipe-dream—would be to invite a descent into the abyss.

Negativism and Metaphysics

Given a Comtean understanding of the vital unity that keeps a functioning society in being, its disintegration would have four moments: inter-institutional dysfunction and disequilibrium; weakening of the regulatory mechanisms, especially moral–religious, amid growing conflict and dissensus; corruption of mores, regression to egoism and base sentiments, spreading from the public realm to work, family and personal behavior. Finally, at the Hobbesian (and debauched) limit, the very texture of the social dissolves, and with it the capacity of society to hold together as a composite being. The *grande crise* had arisen because, in the hiatus that had opened up—in post-1789 France most starkly—between the decrepitude of the old synthesis and the ripening of conditions for the emergence of a new one, the uncompensated-for unraveling of the medieval order had taken things dangerously far down that track (SPP III: 422–23).

In part, the dangerous drift toward anarchy and dissolution was an effect of the hiatus itself; that is, of the disorientation, division and crumbling of moral authority that came from the prolonged absence of a philosophy adequate to the rallying and uniting of minds in the coming age of science and industry. But the modern disorder was not only passive. It had an active side, in the shape of critical ideas and forces that, with gathering strength and virulence, had directly attacked fundamental aspects of the Catholic-feudal regime, acquiring in the process a life of their own. On its destructive side, Comte came to call this critical movement, in its various manifestations, *négativisme* (SPP III: xi).[16]

Its intellectual expression, whose full flower was the Enlightenment's *doctrine critique* (SPP III: 551, 584 et seq), could be traced in the currents that, from the rise of medieval scholasticism onwards, had led from challenges to dogma from reason, nature and the senses; to the autonomy claims of natural philosophy and the push-back against ecclesiastical control; to an increasingly abstract and indistinct idea of God (Deism); and finally, with Spinoza and less ambiguously with Voltaire and Helvetius, to the outright rejection of theism. In the wake of the Reformation, and fueled by Protestantism and its elevation of the individual against church authority, an active *négativisme* could also be discerned on

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    between "basic repression" and "surplus repression" (1966: 37–38) could well be applied to
    Comte, insofar as he too conflated the order requirements of industrialism with those of capitalism, and both with those of society in some more primal sense.

16 Comte's earlier work (e.g., the *opuscule* fondamentale, qv Jones 1998 Essay 3) had spoken of
    negative and positive series as making up the transition to modernity, but had not conceptualized *négativisme*, as opposed to *la doctrine critique*, as such. The introduction of this term in
    Comte's later work, little highlighted by Comte himself, has received scant attention.

the socio-political side. Here Comte singled out three principles: freedom of conscience, equality/equal rights and sovereignty of the people (SPP III: 551 et seq). Each had arisen to attack a particular pillar of the medieval polity (the Catholic priesthood, hereditary privilege, divine right of kings). Together they had coalesced to form the driving force of modern revolution.

Now up to a point this negative movement was essential. Monarchy, otherworldly religion, landed nobility, serfdom, slavery—these all had to go if industrial society was to fully emerge. As for the ruling philosophy, the final transition entailed a complete epistemic rupture. Not only theologism, but its ghostly metaphysical afterlife had to be cleared away if a coherent positivist understanding was to take root. Indeed, it was the halfway house—of eclectic compromise, of remaining in the thrall of abstraction, in short, of metaphysics—that was most in need of critique.

It is in just this sense that Comte (SPP III: 511–12) introduces a distinction between "complete" and "incomplete" negativism. The latter was that of the Deists, and of all who adopted a scientific view of nature while still clinging to the old faith. Complete negativism was the position of those scientists and "lofty minds" who had renounced theologism altogether. As with Nietzsche's distinction between complete and incomplete nihilism (Nietzsche, 1968:19)—which Comte's uncannily anticipates—the terminus of demolition is identified with the moment of entry into a new mode. However, "complete emancipation" from theism and its metaphysical residues was not enough. Critical philosophy had to become in every sense positive. Which is to say, for Comte at least, that the completion of *négativisme* entailed an end to negativism itself when its ground-clearing work was done. And necessarily. For once the old synthesis and regime were destroyed, negativism would lose its constructive purpose and become purely a force for disorder.

After 1789, in fact, not only had negativism careened on, but the intellectual, political and (anti-)religious critique that had fueled the Revolution had broadened its targets and, in the radical movements of the 1840s, pointed toward an attack on authority and order as such. Equality was invoked against every kind of hierarchy. Sovereignty of the people inspired a democratism that placed popular opinion over qualified leadership and policy. And the interpretive rights claimed by Luther for the faithful had blossomed into the individual's right to judge anything (SPP III: 550), with anarchic implications both for the possibility of mental consensus and for *la morale*. More disturbing still, anarchy had surfaced as an affirmed ideal, both as an anti-statist doctrine vying for the ear of rebellious workers, and also, as the furthest imaginable extension of anti-Christian critique, in the earlier espousal of crime and libertinage by the unmentionable de Sade. Worst of all, the spirit of critique could absolutize and become a kind of rage—as if, within the improvement instincts (*instincts du perfectionnement*, see Appendix C) the destructive component had detached from the constructive one and become dominant as a motivational aim. At this point, for example as "blind hatred of the past" (SPP III: 614), *négativisme* had become a pure force, negation for its own sake.

Of course, the ideals that came to the fore in the Revolution, and which continued thereafter to underpin the republican cause, were not used *only* as a battering ram.

Anchored in naturalism and reason, propounded in charter documents and embodied in constitutional designs, serious efforts were made to rebuild society on their basis. However, as was evident in the endless constitution-making and regime changes during the revolutionary years, and later in the short-lived Second Republic (1848–51), there was no stability in the results. Whether parliamentarist or Jacobin the panaceas of Reason failed the reality test. By their very nature, indeed, such doctrines were incapable of generating a viable program. They could destroy but not build. And this was not just because of their historical shaping as a critical weapon, but because they built abstractly from apriori principles without recognition of the natural laws in play in the very field in which they were trying to intervene.

Nor could it have been otherwise. In the logico-historical order of the sciences, sociology had to await the founding of biology, and biology that of chemistry. At the time of the French Revolution chemistry was a new science, and biology was not yet organized as a coherent field (SPP III: 590–95). So, in 1789 the preconditions for the establishment of social science, and thus for political theory and practice to become positivized did not yet exist. In the absence of sociology, moreover, and of a scientific understanding of history, the sciences could not be synthesized. Nor, therefore, could the overall shift in epistemic mode occur on whose basis alone the completion of the Revolution would be possible. Not only, then, in the transitional gap between "defensive monotheism" and the positive polity, was the prevalence of a metaphysical approach to politics—and of anarchic doctrines like parliamentary democracy that privileged individual opinion—a direct obstacle to the establishment of a stable political regime. On the plane of social theory, the prevalence of metaphysics blocked scientific development and in this way, too, prolonged and worsened the crisis.

But here there was a further problem. Unblocking the blockage of metaphysics on the putative plane of sociology involved not just dismantling imaginary causes and ungrounded abstractions. The particular metaphysics in play—whether in contract-based theories of the state, liberal ideas of the Rights of Man or *homo economicus*—operated with a model of the social that placed the thinking and acting individual at the center of the picture, and indeed made it a foundational category. Such a viewpoint precluded the recognition of society as a trans-individual reality with its own determinacy, thus rendering the very object of sociology (in Comte's sense) unthinkable.

The epistemological problem this presented, moreover, was exacerbated by the way in which modern industry itself, through task specialization and economic competition, predisposed—despite its otherwise collective character—to an individualism closed off from a social viewpoint. Nor was the closure simply a matter of cognitive blinkering. Greater individuality, specialism, and ambition had become system imperatives. For Comte the question was whether the egoistic sentiments this drew on, and strengthened, would simply fuel the anarchic trend to generalized selfishness, or could be harnessed by the social sentiments to serve the general good. Doubling the perspectival problem, in other words, was a moral one. Individualist metaphysics and egoism went hand in hand. Given Comte's theorem, indeed, about the primacy of the sentiments (SPP I: 689 et seq), to overcome the first required overcoming the second. The move from the individual to the social viewpoint, then, which was a cornerstone not only of sociology but of positive

philosophy,[17] involved not only a wrenching conceptual break. That break could not be effected in practice, and certainly not sustained, without the predominance of altruism in the psychic economy of the knowing subject.

It is this line of argument that underlies Comte's second system, and also its performative character. Whence, in the *Système de politique positive*, a treatise on sociology that simultaneously prescribes and institutes the Religion of Humanity. Whence also, launched in that same work, a subjective synthesis of knowledge that would culminate in a treatise on *la morale*, and that aimed, pedagogically, to unite feelings with intellect and action. What interests me here, however, is not how Comte proposed to resolve the impasse he had diagnosed, but the central place it held in his analysis of the *grande crise*. In that regard two things are striking.

First, the problem of metaphysics as a roadblock to science, which came to Comte from Bacon (in his critique of scholasticism and the four idols) via Hume and the Encyclopedists, fuses in Comte's construct with the problem of anarchy and (so to speak) socio-cide raised by the Catholic counter-revolutionaries. That this gave Comte's account of the crisis, especially after the mid-1840s, a highly conservative cast is evident, as too the Catholic inflection in its fixing on individualism and Protestantism as vectors of *négativisme*. But the linking of (modern) metaphysics to individualism, and of both to the crisis of early industrial society, was a strategic move in a wider sense. If it set Comte on a right-wing trajectory out of Saint-Simonianism—Maurras was to be a fan (Sutton 2002)—there was also a left-wing variant given early expression in *The German Ideology* of Marx and Engels and which, combining a critique of bourgeois ideology and of idealism, became a staple of modern Marxism. In Comte's hands, in any case, the conservative problematic was both deepened and socio-historically reframed. By embedding the counter-revolutionary critique of that cluster of tendencies he called *négativisme* in a narrative of transition, Comte was able to de-absolutize the concept, with the result that: (a) negativism was given a relative value in the march of progress; and (b) a distinction could be drawn between incomplete and complete negativism, and between both of these and the pure negativism of destruction for its own sake.

At the same time, second, by making society/humanity not God the ground of our being, Comte gave an entirely this-worldly reading of what was most deeply at stake in the crisis. In the positivist make-over, what conservatives defined and feared as absolute destruction, was transposed from worries about the (cultural) death of God and its disastrous consequences to ones about irrevocable social dissolution in the context of a stalled transition to a post-theistic order centered, subjectively, on a (finally) "demonstrable faith" in Humanity.

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17 "Le point de vue sociologique est […] le seul vraiment philosophique, et chacun sent par là combien doit être impuissante ou vicieuse toute étude relative à la marche de notre intelligence quand on y procéde essentiellement du point de vue individuel." [The sociological point of view is the only philosophical one, and everyone senses by that how powerless or flawed every study must be relative to the progress of our intelligence when one proceeds essentially from an individual point of view] (CPP II: 100 Leçon 58).

Negativism and Nihilism

It would be hard to find two nineteenth-century European thinkers whose formation and sensibilities were more opposed to one another than Comte and Nietzsche: a generation apart and from opposite sides of the Rhine, the one a mathematician obsessed with order and system, the other a classicist and professed Heraclitan for whom "the will to a system" was "a lack of integrity" (Nietzsche, 1990: Maxim 26); Comte a preacher of altruism, Nietzsche a warrior against Christian virtue and "moralic acid." Yet both were rebellious non-believers, with a world–historical sense of themselves, wrestling with the future of religion and morality after God; and both were doing so from the midst of what they both saw as a deepening civilizational crisis. In Nietzsche's later writings, moreover, where these preoccupations come to the fore, we see, across the chasm of their differences, not only a certain continuity of themes. There are similarities and even points of intersection in how they are conceptualized.

I have already noted a parallel, in the distinction complete/incomplete, between Comte's *négativisme* and Nietzsche's *Nihilismus*. But what are we to make of this? And how, more broadly, are we to understand the relation between what Nietzsche thematized under the signs of the death of God, the twilight of the idols, European nihilism and so forth, and Comte under that of *la grande crise finale*?

Let us note first the pivotal role that the rise of a scientific worldview and its unsettling effects came to play in Nietzsche's account of the contemporary situation. In "the history of an error," that one-page summary of Western philosophy that recounts the rise and fall of the Platonic positing of a reality more real than the one of our senses, the "cockcrow of positivism" signals "daybreak" and the "first yawnings of reason" (Nietzsche,1990: 50). These yawnings, moreover, heralded the end not only of the God-illusion, but of all the lingering conceptualism and attachment to a fixed Truth that Comte called metaphysics. Other passages in *The Twilight of the Idols*—whose title not only parodies Wagner's *Götterdämerung*[18] but also alludes to Bacon's idols and thus to Comte's own definition of the era—critique the anthropomorphic projection and false psychology that Nietzsche, like Comte, detected in such categories as cause, purpose and free will. Nor are these echoes and borrowings from the law of three states unacknowledged. Comte was one of the very few modern philosophers whom Nietzsche singled out for praise. To be sure he was scornful of the Religion of Humanity—"With his moral formula *vivre pour autrui*, [Comte] did in fact out-Christian Christianity"(1982: 83)—and Nietzsche thought that the aging Comte had retreated into a sectarian and lachrymose mysticism. But the Comte of the *Cours* was an intellectual hero: "That great honest Frenchman beside whom, as embracer and conqueror of the strict sciences, the German and English of this century can place no rival" (1982: 215).

This is not to suggest that the later Nietzsche adopted from positive philosophy more than its overarching idea. He had no use for *l'échelle encyclopédique*, industrialism is absent

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18 In German, the title was *Götzen-Dämmerung*.

from the picture and there is no sociology, static or dynamic.[19] As well—and this is the crux of his *ideological* divergence from Comte—where Comte had joined the problem of completing the epistemic shift past theology and metaphysics to a problematic saturated in the categories of conservative Catholicism, Nietzsche joined it, in a kind of radical aristocratism, to values and concepts distilled from pagan antiquity, Dionysian art and the nobility ideals of warrior aristocracy.

From this stemmed sharp divergences in how they characterized both the crisis and its stakes. For Comte the specter was of dissolvent disorder. Nietzsche foresaw a century of terrible wars. But his deepest worry—in the image of the "last man"—was about mediocracy, comfortable self-satisfaction and the loss of striving for anything (Nietzsche 1969: 43–47). For Comte, if purged of theism and the egoistic pursuit of salvation, the residues of moral culture that an evaporating Christianity was leaving behind could be positively built on; for Nietzsche these residues were at the heart of the civilizational problem, as the carrier of servile and self-abnegating values, as a perpetual war against excellence, nobility and creativity, and generally as a force for devitalization and anthropological decline.

But the law of three states remains as a frame. Thus, Nietzsche follows Comte in defining the displacement of theism by a scientific worldview as a total epistemic rupture. He similarly places his analysis of contemporary cultural tribulations in the metaphysical twilight of that rupture. Like Comte, too, he insists that, for the intellect, the only way forward is through a full embrace of the scientific worldview with all its de-centering and anti-metaphysical implications; an embrace that likewise extends to the human domain (though for Nietzsche in the shape of a proto-Freudian psychology deployed as a cultural hermeneutic, combined with his own version of a science and genealogy of morals). For both, finally, this entire epistemic drama is indexed to the possibility of a wider transformation, amounting indeed to an evolutionary leap: for Comte, the establishment of a positive polity and the realization of humanity as *l'Humanité*; for Nietzsche, with murkier implications, the advent of all that is allegorized in the figure of *der Übermensch*.

That there should also be similarities between their accounts of the malaise that both see as intensifying in this unresolved conjuncture is not surprising. For both, in effect, the dynamics of (stalled) transition present themselves in terms of a similar quasi-dialectical model: in fact a double one, in which a positive circuit is intersected by a negative one. Thus, in the perilous interval between the death of the old and birth of the new, survivals obstruct, creative destruction turns virulent and a so-to-speak excessive negativity appears on the scene.

In naming the latter *Nihilismus*, it should be said at once, there is no evidence that Nietzsche was just relabeling a term, *négativisme*, that he had taken from Comte. How much of Comte's early, let alone later, work he had actually read may be doubted. In any case, the term came to him via a strand of Russian anarchism made notorious by the

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19 Also, as Hussain (2004) points out, Nietzsche's "History of an Error" goes much further in its deconstruction of metaphysics than Comte's positivism. Rather than just placing the real beyond what science can know, Nietzsche's story concludes by abolishing the very distinction between the real and the apparent.

assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, and its literary treatment by Turgenev and Dostoyevsky. Nor are the meanings identical. To negate (something) is not necessarily to will nothing(ness). Moreover, Nietzsche's "nihilism" has a wider range of senses than Comte's "negativism." In addition to being a state of the will and a cultural force it is a process and condition: "That the highest values hitherto devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (Nietzsche, 1968: 9).

Nietzsche, lastly, makes a distinction between active and passive nihilism (1968: 17)—and between pessimism of strength and pessimism of weakness, existential despair (1968: 526–28)—for which Comte has no equivalent. Comte is generally blank, indeed, on the whole dimension of disorientation and meaninglessness. He does have a formula for madness: the involuntary preponderance of *impressions internelles* over *impressions externelles*.[20] But this is a malady of too much, not too little, meaning. It has nothing to do with the wiped horizons that Nietzsche's madman depicts as the consequence, for those with ears to hear, of the death of God.[21] That meaninglessness itself, rather than amorality and loss of impulse control, might be the abyss into which modern Western culture was falling—Nietzsche's "uncanny guest at the door"—would not have been for Comte a thinkable thought. For even at the extreme limit of moral anarchy an orientation of sorts would be supplied by egoistic self-interest serving the lower instincts. Indeed, with liberal economists this had become an (anarchic) ideology in itself. Only in Durkheim's distinction in *Suicide* between the disintegrative psycho-pathologies of *anomie* (normlessness) and *egoisme* (the absence of ideals) does the psychological and social collapse of meaning find a clear place in neo-Comtian sociology.

Nietzsche's "nihilism" nevertheless shares with Comte's more restricted concept of "negativism" three significant features:

Both terms, first, were ways of grasping as an interconnected phenomenon, on the one hand the critical movement in thought that had gone, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from undermining the dogmas and shibboleths of revealed religion to attacking the moral and intellectual universe that theism had guaranteed; and on the other its practical correlate in movements aiming, ever more radically, at the overthrow of dominant hierarchies and institutions. Similarly, too, the "devaluating" of Christianity that was central to this double movement was in part internally caused—for Comte, the playing out of the contradictions in a theological tradition that had yoked together Greek metaphysics with a mystical cult of individual salvation; for Nietzsche, the turning against itself of Christianity's will-to-truth.

Second, for Nietzsche as for Comte, the movement of negation had an ambiguous value. As the ground-clearing overthrow of absolutist foundations, metaphysical as well

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20 Its converse, the subordination of the "within" to the "without," was also an epistemological axiom: Rule 4 of positivism's "first philosophy" (SPP IV: 176 and see Appendix D). The same interconnected logic, of sanity/madness with science/non-science, is explicit in Comte's later account of his own descent into, and recovery from, mania. It was, he says, a journey from positivism to fetishism and back, passing through monotheism and polytheism (SPP III: 75).

21 Nietzsche's parable of the madman, from *The Joyful Wisdom*, is presented in full, together with Heidegger's commentary, in Heidegger 1977.

as theistic, it was to be championed all the way. At the same time, a negativity that had become an end in itself was a blind alley and a disease of the soul. Worse still was a reactive negativity that attacked the very conditions of a leap beyond, as in the vengeful leveling that both Comte and Nietzsche saw as a hallmark of the anarchist and social-ist left. In any case mere negation could neither build nor create. For this there had to be a yes—whence Nietzsche's "Joyful wisdom," and (in one of its senses) Comte's "positivism."

But on what basis? What was there to affirm—non-arbitrarily—if the Copernican de-centering of man-on-earth was to be accepted, if the universe was objectively devoid of purpose, if mortal life was all there was? For both Comte and Nietzsche, the answer lay through a sober-minded attachment to the world (Zarathustra's "be true to the earth") anchored in an act and attitude of *self*-affirmation. But here there was a parting of the ways. For Nietzsche the site of self-affirmation was the individual. For Comte it meant collective self-affirmation, or rather the affirmation by individuals of the collective being they were part of, in the moral/emotional form of altruism and epistemologically through the assumption of a social (or sociological) viewpoint. But in neither case, we may note, was the individual or collective subject taken as the ground and horizon of being the merely existent one, in its current condition. Nietzsche's guiding star was not *der Mensch* but *der Übermensch*; Comte's, not humanity as an empirical aggregate, but as the collectivity of all who serve her, Humanity not as it is, but as a trans-historical and self-perfecting being.

Without such an affirmative turn, and the realization, in historical time, of what it presaged—which Nietzsche projected into an indefinite future and for Comte required a new world religion—the dialectic would not just stall but risked becoming a death spiral. For Comte, the danger was direct. Pure negativism was more than a patholog-ical symptom. It accelerated trends to moral anarchy, the collapse of authority, and the consequent weakening of the whole social organism. For Nietzsche the case was more complex. Willing nothing was reactive and toxic. But it was also, in a decadent culture, a relative sign of health, of a strong will-to-power.[22] From war came martial virtues. The contribution of active nihilism to the downward spiral lay not, indeed, in the chaos and conflicts made worse by anarchic dismantling, for this was not the spiral itself, but from the *ressentiment* it expressed and militated for, and the depressive impact of this on the general economy of active and reactive forces. In this moreover, active nihilism was only part of a wider revival in a myriad secular forms of the slave revolt in morals and of Christianity's ancient war against the noble, the exceptional and the free-spirited.

And so to one last parallel. In both constructs a distinction can be drawn between the (pure) negativism and (active) nihilism that culturally, politically or intellectually mani-fested themselves as such, and a deeper, more diffuse, negativity indexed to what each considered to be the real stakes in the game. In Nietzsche the distinction is clear. Willing nothing is not the ultimate threat: it is all that propels or induces toward a condition of

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22 "Man would much rather will nothingness than not will" (Nietzsche, 1998: 118).

not willing, the extinction of the will-to-power. The absolute opposite of *der Übermensch* is *der letzte Mensch* (the Last Man), in whose dead soul there is no longer any "dancing star" (Nietzsche 1969: 45–46).

In Comte the levels are harder to disentangle, but a similar distinction is implicit in his critique of De Maistre et al. for failing to distinguish between assaults on the Catholic-feudal order and on social order as such. In the post-Revolutionary period that duality is elided. However, a distinction remains in the difference between the avowedly destructive forces that Comte lumps together as "anarchism" and the larger and heterogeneous movement of social dissolution of which it is only the most noisome part. It is that negative movement in all its aspects—including the shattering of *continuité* in the Revolution, the chronic ideological and philosophical dissensus that followed, and the atomizing effects of *l'esprit de détail* that came with industrialism and scientific development itself—that is the Comtean equivalent of what we may call *deep nihilism*.

At its limit is the nihilation of society as such. But for Comte there is also a danger closer at hand. This is that the social and cultural capacities needed to surmount the great crisis will more and more diminish, that history will miss the boat and, with the final transition blocked, that *perfectionnement* and *progrès* will themselves cease to be essential attributes of humanity. As with Nietzsche, that is to say, what is at ultimately at stake for Comte in the movement of negation is the life of a living organism—but that life as *bios* (active life) not *zoe* (existence). That is: not merely with respect to its physical survival but, more essentially, with respect to its inherent capacity to surpass what it is.

To this there is a rider. In both the Comtian and Nietzschian scenarios the deep nihilism posited beneath a surface nihilism is defined with reference to an immanent transcendent—the self-transcendent element in Humanity (Comte) and Life (Nietzsche)—which also figures in grounding the affirmative project from whose (transformed) perspective the whole analysis is couched. Evidently there is a circularity here, one indeed of a theological type. Nor could it be otherwise. There is no presuppositionless way to define deep nihilism, nor can surface nihilism be critically appraised without such a concept. At the same time, only a (so to speak) true account of that which negates the most essential element of human reality (beyond mere existence) would be able to escape the charge, leveled by Heidegger against Nietzsche, of not thinking nihilism non-nihilistically (Heidegger 1977). These two intertwined features—the distinction between surface and deep negativism/nihilism, and the relativity of the latter to whatever is taken as the highest, deepest, and most essential—are an aspect of all such constructs, including Heidegger's; and, indeed, of the initial modern concept of nihilism that emanated, in Jacobi's critique of Spinoza, Kant and Fichte, from Christian theology itself (Gillespie, 64–93).

<center>***</center>

None of the parallels, overlaps, and isomorphisms I have pointed out between Comte's account of the "great crisis" and Nietzsche's of European nihilism is meant to diminish the differences. The constructs to which they are tied remain not just irreconcilable in their valuations, but incommensurate as cognitive maps. Theirs is an argument in which neither can have the last word and each can trump the other.

For Nietzsche, Comte's second career as the would-be founder of a new world religion was an inconsistent retreat, an effect of his being "French and Catholic" and unable, despite his forthrightly scientific atheism, to resist the impulse to recreate around himself the ethos of the old Church and its "mystic lights" (Nietzsche, 1982: 215). But, we may reply, Nietzsche's approach to the death of God and overcoming nihilism was marked by his own formation as German and Protestant. Whatever he learned from the ancients, or Schopenhauer, he never escaped from German philosophy's preoccupation with *Geist* nor from Luther's interiorizing of religion and incessant wrestling with conscience and guilt ("Have you not heard me? Dionysus versus the Crucified!"[23]). Moreover, just as Comte is vulnerable to Nietzsche's critique that Comte's journey toward sociocracy, altruism and the Religion of Humanity is a classic case of incomplete nihilism—the sacralization of society to compensate for the death of the Catholic God—Nietzsche is vulnerable to the Comtian charge that his sovereign individualism and abjuring of sociology for psychology, is stubbornly a-social and itself therefore metaphysical.

What Comte and Nietzsche present us with, in fact, is not just two rival a-theological paradigms for thinking about the dark tendencies in their times, but two different ways of staging the religion question as it arose in European modernity; a difference that corresponded both to the Reformation divide and to the differential intersection of the religion question with civic and state politics in post-revolutionary France and Wilhelmine Germany. The relation between these paradigms is nonlinear. Comte is not a precursor of Nietzsche, nor Nietzsche a superior successor. They simply offer different and alternative heuristic frameworks for understanding what they both take to be an in-built crisis of modern Western culture.

Put differently: in the nineteenth century emerge not one but two paradigms for what we might call the classical theory of nihilism. What Comte's shares with Nietzsche's illuminates not only features of each, but the formal features of nihilism more generally as a critical concept and evolving problem-constellation. To find a place for Comte in that constellation—for example in his sociologized understanding of metaphysics and negativism—would considerably enrich the conceptual field onto which this cluster of problems opens out, not least in the challenges that Nietzsche and Comte bring to one another.

This is not a new thought. The absorption of Nietzsche (and Marx, too, though that is another story) into the deconstructed remnants of classical French sociology became a leitmotif of twentieth-century French social theory. It was a prominent feature of Bataille's political and (ir)religious writing in the 1930s and is apparent among the Parisian postmoderns, Baudrillard most prominently.[24] But there is always more to be done. In the age of Columbine, 9/11, emptying old-line churches, rising fundamentalisms, identity

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23 The last line of *Ecce Homo*, the autobiographical essay that Nietzsche wrote just before his descent into madness in 1889. This line can be read as Nietzsche's own inner struggle, and not simply as a taking of sides.

24 See, for example, Baudrillard's mid-1970s essay "The End of the Social", and his discussion of *post-histoire* in the first few pages of *Fatal Strategies* (1983).

politics of all kinds, revived debates about God and science, new challenges about the place of Abrahamic religions and their symbols in the public sphere, and a worldscape of (un)holy wars, failed states, and globalizing consumer capitalism, the further insight that might be gained from such a conjugation, and more generally from the whole legacy of nineteenth-century insight into the crisis of modernity and secularization, can scarcely be said to have been exhausted.

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Chapter Six

"LES AR-Z ET LES SCIENCES": AESTHETIC THEORY AND AESTHETIC POLITICS IN COMTE'S LATE WORK

Stefanos Geroulanos

Art [1] nm (ar; le t ne se lie pas: l'art oratoire, dites: ar oratoire, et non l'ar-t oratoire; au pluriel l's ne se lie pas, les arts et les sciences, dites: les ar et les sciences; cependant cette liaison plaît à quelques-uns, qui disent: les ar-z et les sciences).[1]

In the 1848 *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme* (*A General View of Positivism*), published in the middle of the June Days of the 1848 Revolution, during an apogee for positivism as a movement, Auguste Comte proposes a dual, complex role for art and the artist of the positive age.[2] First, he says, art will lose the towering, if excentric, place it holds in the current social system: it will lose its autonomy, irregularity, exuberance and power, the separate realm through which artists engage and influence social activity. But, second, art will acquire a new force, and the artist, having come to accept his dependence on science, industry and technique, will become the figure who outlines the future.

> In his efforts to accomplish this object, the Positivist poet will naturally be led to form prophetic pictures of the regeneration of Man, viewed in every aspect that admits of being ideally represented. And this is the second service which Art will render to the cause of social renovation; or rather it is an extension of the first. Systematic formation of Utopias will in fact become habitual; on the distinct understanding that, as in every other branch of art, the ideal shall be kept in subordination of the real. (Comte 2009: 335)

It is an astonishing formulation. One might expect art to decline in the positive age, to become incidental or ornamental, a genre of comfortable if pointless pictorial speculation that enlivens without genuinely affecting. It is not merely, as Mary Pickering (3: 204) notes, that in the positive future "the mind would gain satisfaction in directing its energy

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1 Littré 1883, s.v. art.
2 Comte 1848 translated as Comte 2009. On the context of the publication, see Pickering 2010, 2: ch's 6–7; 3: 7, 62.

toward the arts." Comte proposes, in fact, that not only will art participate in the regeneration of society and, indeed, that of human nature itself—not only will it come up with depictions of the present and the future, of ideals to follow—but it will indeed form *systematic utopias*. These are ideals to draw out from the new present; conditions envisaged by a normalized time that subjects itself to them because it finds itself perfected and represented in them. Art will acquire a different prophetic voice than the ones it has enjoyed in the past: subservient to the real, it will posit the ideal and depict futures toward which this real will move. Crucially, these are *futures* in the plural, systematic *utopias* imagined as varying or manifold, as if the future held multiple acceptable idealizations of the present, as if the path to utopia were imaginable but not singular.[3] The course of future history is not foreordained, in that multiple prospects bearing in themselves multiple pasts can be found in normal positivity, in a present time that carries within it a splendor and plurality that could unfold and change genuinely. There *is* an absolute, there *is* a sublime, and this is to be temporized not only in a future that is planned for and yet pluralized; instead, this absolute is set as a structure of the future's plurality. All the same, this art that promises alternative paths joins with, yet struggles against, that world that deploys a well-defined, fully ordered immanent principle. Art both brings the present to the future and confirms that future's essential divergence from an immanent, ordered current time.

This chapter aims at an interpretation of Comte's position on art and aesthetics in his later work, in particular their paradoxical status in a world structured by science in the anticipated positive polity. It focuses on the *Discours d'ensemble du positivisme* rather than the whole *Système de politique positive* because of the urgency evinced in the *Discours*, because of its harried writing and frail construction in the midst of 1848, and because of its attempt to reconstruct Comte's conceptual system. A broad context here is provided by Saint-Simonian conceptions of community, leadership and socially valuable art (McWilliam 1993), by Hegelian conceptions of art at the end of history, and by Romantic understandings of the tension between art and life, to which I shall return. My main concern here is the value of aesthetics in Comte's exposition of the positive polity, where art is depicted as playing a role that is, on the one hand, idealizing and normalizing and, on the other, authentically creative and transformative. Comte's positivism is of course an unlikely site for a full-blown aesthetic theory, something that commentators have repeatedly noted and that Comte himself acknowledges when first entertaining the subject. It is this unlikely status that makes it so remarkable that he insists no fewer than four times in the first two pages that art plays an important role in the social regeneration he proposes as an essential component to positive politics (Comte 2009: 3, 291–92; see Wernick 2001: 99n.38).

At issue in the paradox is also the place of Comte in the history of notions and figures of a regeneration of Man, of a "New Man," of social renovation as a profound transformation of society and Man themselves. The dream of such a regeneration dates largely to the French Revolution; as historians and critics such as Mona Ozouf, Jean Starobinski and Bronislaw Baczko have shown, it was essential to the understanding of art and architecture, of dreams of the future, of the revolutionary festivals

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3   Comte also encourages utopias, in the plural, in Comte 2009: 303–304.

instituted by Robespierre, the speculative architecture of Nicolas Leroux, the *code civil* of Napoleon. In 1848 and following decades the motif emerges again—not only on the march of socialism but also with its opponents, notably Wagner, and it persists into the avant-garde plans and dreams of the new century and the political regimes of the 1930s. Given the temporal structure Comte designed for the course of modern order and progress, which became more central to his later synthesis, and which treated the entire period since 1789 as a transitional revolution that had yet to be brought to a close and that only positivism could correctly conclude (Wernick: 117), art comes into Comte's late work to play a major role for social regeneration—uniting the scientific, industrial and technological dimension in the social as well as his newfound focus on women and the working class as historical agents of positively organized progress.[4] Particularly curious in this context is Comte's sense of art as contributing to the crafting of a future defined by *order* but nevertheless open to this prophecy. It would not be an overstatement to write that Comte was singular in establishing the terms of a paradox that over time became widely adopted. In the 1920s and 1930s a highly similar principle—of a world already largely in order yet needing depiction and realization of the future—would become essential to socialist realism as much as to architectural modernists like Le Corbusier.

The Conceptual Structure and Dynamics of the *Discours sur l'ensemble* and the Sixty-Year Revolution

Comte opens the *Discours sur l'ensemble* with a dual task: to reaffirm the completeness and maturity of positivism, particularly as a doctrine for social reorganization, and to modify it by showing how only now, after it has been rendered subservient to order and progress and properly considers and comprehends feeling within society, can it offer a proper plan and approach for this reorganization. It is a delicate dance that, even while it relies for its details on the particular conceptual scaffolding that Comte has built in the past and is now reconstructing: his fundamental division of history into three ages, his amendment of the earlier rationalistic positivist theory, his understanding of the relation of nature to society and his sense of the capacity of his approach to transform the latter and bring it into conformity with the former. His articulation of an aesthetic politics is the goal of this scaffolding, which is also to say that it is consequent or derivative, and for this reason it matters to look at the structure and dynamics that lead to its propositions.

Comte's use of concepts in the *Discours sur l'ensemble* follows a fairly clear—albeit internally very tense—structure. Comte systematically structures concepts in terms of the way they cross from the order of nature to the synthesis of human society, and the purpose of his "positive synthesis" is, by and large, to bring conformity to the two such

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4   Comte argues this despite his sense that art had thrown off the yoke of theocracy well before science did, which is consistent with his dismissal of modern art but could be said to clash with the conviction that art is now in a different stage than it has been.

that society, thanks to his "science" of society, can be at once the ordering and fulfillment of a human nature that complicates the phenomena and order of the natural or inorganic world. Just like the natural order, the human one is subject to laws, though these remain largely hidden from view. The gap or lapse between the two parallel orders—which Comte never proposes to flatten to a single order, but always to harmonize—is traversed by a number of dynamic concepts: Thought, Feeling, Action, Moral Unity. As opposed to stable, or ordering concepts, that belong to either order and are coextensive with its laws, these transversal concepts bear on them both the disorder of the contemporary world and the need and possibility of bringing it together. Thought, Feeling, Action seem disordered and confused in that they are subject to natural laws, but are, like these laws, distended in a disorderly and illusion-ridden society. *Because* they are subject to laws from both orders, *because* they are experienced as disordered in human society, and finally *because* they offer man a way of thinking and thereby effecting *both* society and his own nature, they form the terrain on which the work of positivism is to be don, and, conversely, they set the terms and horizon (or, to keep with the metaphor of the terrain) of this work. *Reorganization* and *Regeneration* as concepts carry precisely the sense of a singular return to "laws of social development" (Comte 2009: 24, 303) that can establish social as well as mental harmony.

This is a substantive shift for Comte, begun already in the 1843 *Discours sur l'esprit positif* and closely linked as much to his concern for mental harmony as to his social theory (Comte 1995: § 19 et al). After decades of advocating Reason as the structuring premise for positive science, by the *Discours* he had become convinced that laying the blame for social ills on a deficiency of Reason was untenable. In the social realm itself, it was imperative to recognize the priority of Feeling over Reason and urge their conformity, and the shifts proposed in the *Discours* follow this disarticulation.

With this conceptual structure and dynamic in mind, we might begin to set the stage for interpreting at once the meaning of 1848 in Comte's thought and the particular role of art in his pursuit. "Revolution" carries two accents. The first is decidedly negative, as Comte presents the world as undergoing a continued revolution that began in 1789 and that *must* be brought to an end.[5] However, the second accent is rather different in style and character: It partakes of the need to reorder the world that *is* taking place in the move from a Theological to a Positive worldview. The revolution of the past six decades thus at once does and does not coincide with the Metaphysical stage, when this last is conceived as a transitional stage between the Theological and Positive ones (Comte 2009: 19–21, 33–35). The confusion that is declared and felt during the Metaphysical stage remains, in the *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme*, linked both to social disorder and metaphysical reorganization—a resistance to the finality, suppleness and completeness of positive law. Intellectual crisis and social crisis go hand in hand: Resolving one means resolving the other and, thus, terminating the revolution involves *completing* it—as politicians and

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5   Thus, for example, the cover pages of the *Système de la politique positive* present the book as appearing in "the 63rd year of […] the Revolution" as if this Revolution would only end with positivism's achievement.

philosophers had time and again claimed to be doing, at least since Napoleon and the consuls' proclamation on 25 Frimaire of Year VIII that "the revolution is finished"—would be to achieve this goal. In the *Discours*, Comte describes the present moment in terms of an "immense sphere" that "is opened" for the application of his theory at the very moment that he is laying it down. 1848 is then not a new revolution; it is the extension of the 60-year transformation and the chance to "terminate"—achieve, complete, harmonize—the social revolution (2009: 3) that has been in motion and the spark for demonstrating once and for all that, despite what has been claimed of positivism, it is in fact "favorable to Feeling and even to Imagination," thanks to which this termination can occur (2009: 1). Put differently, it is the moment when positivism can become and be recognized "at last as a complete and consistent whole" (7) that is fully applicable to a world in dire need of order and harmony, a world in which "Reason has become habituated to revolt." (21) This isomorphism—in fact the mapping of the completed positivist system onto a long-running revolution that is about to be ended—conducts precisely the two sides of the image that Comte is so intent on projecting. First, that the social transformation under way is a spiritual or moral reorganization (2–4) and, at the same time, that positivism's turn to Feeling (or "Affection" (12)), to buttressing (or "advancing") the "benevolent emotions" (24–25), is both the political truth underlying its purpose and the "comprehensive and durable" synthesis for the social and moral spheres (12).

This generates a fairly straightforward tension in Comte's text: If positivism is now to "comprehend the moral sphere"—the verb "comprehend" being understood in both of its usual senses—to discard the priority of a belief in Reason that had originally ordered and sustained it, and instead to recognize this moral sphere as the sphere of the "movement's" application and the essence of man, how can positivism remain committed to the *Order* and *Progress* that it has declared as its scientific system and goal? How can Comte hope to restore *harmony* between the order of nature and that of society while destabilizing the very source of Order? Art is a weapon unsheathed at precisely this theoretical and political juncture; but before pursuing it further, it is worth looking at the shift, as regards art, from Comte's early work, in more detail.

Earlier Comments on Art and Contemporary Comparisons

In his early work, notably the *Cours de philosophie positive*, Comte engaged art as a coefficient of industry, an effect linked to the particularities of social organization. Granting considerable significance to it in the polytheistic era, he attributed to Greek art a capacity and a force that he saw as entirely missing in current forms of art, which are daunted by the lack of moral harmony more broadly characteristic of the present. Greek polytheism had allowed for the arts to appear as pure expressions of "what was in every mind."

> The want of [moral] harmony [between the active interpreter and passive spectator] is the main cause of the feeble effect produced by the greatest modern worlds of art, conceived, as they are, without faith, and judged without conviction, and therefore exciting in us no impressions less abstract and more popular than those general ones which are a consequence of our human nature (Comte 1896: 39).

Central among the arts here was Architecture, which was singularly significant for him for its distinct improvement over time. Unlike British and German philhellenes, who celebrated ancient Greek architecture as sublime, Comte identified Greek architecture with moral harmony but treated the Gothic cathedral as aesthetically far superior. In it, "the moral power of the art attains a sublime perfection which is nowhere to be found among the temples of antiquity, notwithstanding the charm of their regularity" (Comte 1896: 42).

Having established the sharp difference between non-modern and modern art, Comte then recalibrates the concept "Art" affirmatively in terms provided by practical and industrial arts, that is, a sense that is largely defined and modulated by the less-aesthetic sense of the term "art" we find in terms like "arts of management," "medical arts," and so on. Art and technique are generally identified at this point, with the latter taking priority, such that art would exist as an order of ideas separate from the scientific order, but impelled in the same direction. This, Comte treats as promising:

> Modern society […] has been from the beginning of the Middle Ages, one long stage of transition, directed by monotheism—the social state presenting no stable and marked aspect, and the philosophy favouring scientific more than aesthetic development. All influences have thus concurred to retard the course of the fine arts; and yet, all evidence proves that there has not only been no deterioration, but that genius of this order has attained and surpassed the elevation of the noblest productions of antiquity, while it has opened now provinces of art, and declined in no other respect than in social influence. To all who judge be a higher criterion than the effect produced it must be evident that, in spite of unfavourable circumstances, the aesthetic, like all the other faculties of Man, is under a condition of continuous development. When a stable and homogeneous, and at the same time progressive state of society shall have become established under the positive philosophy, the fine arts will flourish more than they ever did under polytheism, finding new scope and new prerogatives under the new intellectual regime (Comte 1896: 43).

The promise is delimited in two ways: first, we are starkly within the ideology of social art prevalent in nineteenth-century art—art valuable for the improvement of society—a conception that Saint-Simonian circles had already delineated as relevant to their own projects.[6] Comte's particularity lies in his criticism of art's social influence, which because of modern moral troubles he treats as unpromising under the current regime. Second, the advance of art participates with the advances of the sciences in a more general human progress.[7] The proposed "flourishing" is here crucial, in that art already appears as liberated in the positive age, *but* its function and space will be the consequence of, rather than a participant in, these advances. When Comte thus speaks of art, he is speaking first and foremost in terms of "arts of management" and "medical arts," and the consequence is one of aligning the capacities of art, regardless of limitations, with this particular modality of art's relation to life. Art, in other words, is not poetry or, rather,

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6 For Comte on Social Art in the *Discours*, see Comte 2009: 32, 343.
7 See Braunstein 2009: 56, which I mention here for the emphasis on medical art, order, and normality.

poetry is not art unless and until it can be a poetry that is underwritten by the laws that line the rest of human life.

One may point to three theoretical systems among which Comte's choices are suspended, even though there is little evidence to link Comte to the latter two. The first is the movement arguing for social art in early nineteenth-century France, a movement to which Henri de Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians who followed him had contributed. Art had to be socially valuable, it had to point to an improved and aesthetically superior future in which order was scientifically set to harness class antagonisms and intellectual strife and demagoguery. Even allowing for the *sui generis* character of his writing, Comte could in principle be read as framing his argument by way of social art and Saint-Simonian theory. That art was to be united with science and to offer compelling futures in such a manner as to allow for a new aesthesis was broadly in tandem with Saint-Simon's approach in *L'Organisateur*. But there were three radical points of difference. First, Art in Comte concerns, as we have seen, a renaturalization and reharmonization of society so that its laws would be in tandem with those of nature. At the same time, Comte neither declared art to be simply *socially* useful in the present—he understood it as the necessary umbrella and hinge for his other domains, and one that needed to be overturned in order to find this necessary locus. Nor, third, did he postpone the absolute that art would offer into the future: He instead allowed it to perform a temporal loop quite different to Saint-Simon's thanks to which, isomorphically to the role it had played in the past, it could facilitate a social and political dynamism for future transformation*s* (again in the plural). The other two theoretical points of reference are G. W. F. Hegel's and the young Richard Wagner's. The comparison to Hegel is notable because of the broad-stroke similarities between the vectors of history proposed by the two, and by Comte's bastardization and reversal of the notion of an effacement of art at the end of history, thanks to which art as known thus far would disappear. It is, however, the Wagner case that provides the most significant counterpoint to Comte.[8] In no other aesthetic and *soi-disante* revolutionary theory in the mid-nineteenth century was the artist given such broad rein over his audience and the nation as Wagner offered; Comte did not go that far. He did not abandon rationalism and progress at all, but he did suggest that art entered the picture and staged an Artist-audience relationship that restructured the social precisely by re-naturalizing Feeling and Sentiment. The 1848 context and the paradoxes of the *Discours* make these reference points all the more pressing.

Comte's Aesthetic Politics and Its Paradoxes

Art is not the only "new" subject for positivism in the *Discours*—Comte portrays "Woman" and Religion (positively conceived) as unexplored spaces of promise. Positivism however reaches art differently than it engages Woman—whom it incorporates—or than

8 On Wagner, see Geroulanos 2017 and Michaud 2004.

it pronounces Religion, which it determines as an umbrella covering its unity and social purpose. Not only does Art now encompass Poetry—besides Music, Painting, Architecture as well as the scientific arts—Art is instead awarded the seemingly impossible role of resolving the revolutionary tensions—between Order, on one hand, and Feeling on the other—and restoring "our normal state," the state that has never before existed. Its place in the conceptual webbing of the *Discours sur l'ensemble* is analogous to its role in the future polity. By finding its place in the positive society, Art brings the Revolution to a close, submits to laws, and opens to its own supposedly true flourishing (Comte 2009: 294 et al). We might term this expression of "penultimism" Comte's *conceptual–political subjunctive*.

> Art, so far as it is yet organized, does not include that part of the economy of nature which, being the most modifiable, the most imperfect, and the most important of all, ought on every ground to be regarded as the principal object of human exertions (Comte 2009: 32).

Expressed here in the negative, the subjunctive marks the promise of the harmonization of society and Feeling. By standing on the threshold between its historical failure and its positive flourishing, Art bears both the promise and the supposedly troubled history of its meaning.

To quote this place in Comte's conceptual web, and in the dynamism of the present moment, however, is also to note that the webbing of the *Discours* is something of a moving target, full of tensions in Comte's repeated redefinition of not only Art but related concepts as well. To explain his particular blend of aesthetic politics is to articulate these tensions against the imaginary of Art as Comte proposes it in the subjunctive and in its supposed history; the remainder of this chapter proposes to do precisely that, first drawing out the tensions and disjunctions, then noting Comte's manner of imposing continuity, finally closing by explaining the regenerative project across these projections of past, aesthetic politics and future.

Tensions

Originally introduced alongside Feeling, Art in the fifth chapter of the *Discours*—the chapter on Art's place in positivism—is suspended between Feeling and Imagination, yanked sometimes one way sometimes the other. If, in the Introduction, Comte could describe positivism as "favorable to Feeling *and even* to Imagination," the pressure this introduces as Imagination gradually becomes central to the system is palpable: Imagination and Feeling need to be regulated into the system without fundamentally disturbing its purposes and structure. The two concepts of Feeling and Imagination are supposed to be straightforward or commonsensical. The former treats emotional activity as a pre-rational, almost natural, behavior on behalf of each individual; the latter is seen more explicitly as a refusal of reason, an attempt to provide specifically social bases for the flight from the natural and the rational, bases that are tantamount to morality. If Art is meant to mark the softening or opening of positivism—its recognition of the moral sphere, this moral sphere being now *at times* attached to Feeling (defined as supreme over

Reason) and emerging from Imagination (inferior and opposed to Reason, more basic or primitive)—it is to do so by arranging the different levels of Imagination/Reason/Feeling and to manage Feeling in a manner that is scientific yet primitive, ordered yet authentic. Divorced as these aspects of human life have been from one another, the comedy of their remarriage is tantamount to their fusion at the edges and also to their hierarchization. Thus, Comte can propose, seemingly without paradox, his assertion that the intellect must be free, but "We must control its natural tendency to unlimited digression." Digression thanks to the imagination poses a problem, but one that can and must be harnessed for the restoration of society (2009: 280, 281). In ignoring this, scientific investigation has failed to achieve what it sought, and has brought with it a negative effect not only on art itself but on moral progress (292). Yet the hierarchy and reintroduction—indeed the promise of regeneration through Imagination and Feeling—are anything but straightforward: Art is supposed to affect Reason and be itself rational; yet at the same time it is supposed to, in a sense, rule over reason by ranging between Feeling and Imagination.

Two further paradoxes crisscross the argument. First, Comte sutures a thoroughly neoplatonic theory of Art's purpose with a counter-theory according to which Art needs at all times to be subordinate to reality. On one hand, it is responsible for the identity of the True, the Beautiful and the Good, a point that Comte repeats ceaselessly (2009: 300, 310, 320). It is responsible for designing "types of the noblest kind," which society could and should then attain (302). Yet *by the same token* the ideals are and must be "always subordinate to the real." The second paradox is just as frustrating: Art should *not* govern (297–98) and yet it should imagine, articulate and design Utopias. It should remain subordinate to "the actual laws of social existence" and not pretend to be structuring them, yet it should pave and show the way for Feeling to imagine them modified and pursue their correct modification.

Impositions of Continuity

Comte sees no aporia in any of these disjunctions—no reason to interrupt or question the viability and consistency of the hierarchical remarriage of Feeling, Reason and Imagination that he proposes, nor of the paradoxes of idealism and governance that he awards to Art. Three distinct moments of the chapter serve as movements intended to impose continuity and non-contradiction. First, his history of Art; second, his theory of expression and representation, which subtends and replicates the structure of the transversal concepts coming to their own and restoring the balance of nature and order; and, third, his fusion of the subjunctive promise of Art with the polemical situation of the present.

Comte's history of art roughly parallels the three-stages theory of history: twice in the chapter Comte tracks the place of Art in the polytheist, monotheist, and metaphysical eras with a promise to its rejuvenation and perfection in the positive. Yet here Comte is at his least Hegelian: Art does not quite *express* each age; it has never been "incorporated" into the social order (2009: 314), but sits always awry with respect to it (and not in

a dialectical fashion). It expresses the best that those living within an age could express, but it confirms the ages' failure to think correctly, "positively"; not since polytheism, moreover, has art been allowed "free scope"; it has merely remained a dysfunctional tool of religious power (360). Only particular exceptions are worthy of praise, notably medieval Cathedrals and the handful of the Great Men of art whom Comte admires. Piling invective upon invective on the remainder, and especially on poets of the century preceding him, Comte's art history amounts to a promise that none of this pre-history of the positive age will affect regenerated society (316–18, 328, 334–35). The latter will amount to the systematic unfolding of Great Men and Great Art, and by the same token, the restoration of the hitherto disjointed relationship between Art and society that will make possible Art as a mirroring of society and the *expression* of the new age.[9]

The art–historical theory, wholly in keeping with Comte's overall presentation of human history, also serves to whitewash the gradations between Feeling and Imagination and to justify the effect Art would have in the positive age. In the pre-modern past, Feeling had lacked Reason to guide it; not to put too fine a point on it, Imagination had run amok in organizing the relationship between Feeling and the moral sphere because there was no systematic and rational form capable of providing the necessary normal order. As a result, some works could be works of genuine astonishment and wonder, but Art had been misguided throughout because it confirmed at once Man's impotence over his world and the speculative or theological explanation of this world. These fundamental and longstanding misunderstandings of Art's role were due to the insufficient recognition of laws, of the "fact that the highest phenomena are as much subject to laws as others." (2009: 33) That men are ignorant of the laws of nature and the order of society is a mantra that Comte often locates next to his claims on art, as the two are linked, to suggest that the dynamic, "less rigid" higher laws grant humanity precisely enough room in which to modify life and order: Art serves exactly this purpose, namely the amendment, adaptation, modification of the laws.[10] But this is *only* possible at a moment in human history when Reason has emerged and is rising to dominance, when the affective and imaginative registers are harnessed by it, and when the overly rational scientists can be held back to allow for the proper "remarriage." Art may not be clearly attached to Feeling or Imagination in that it is constructive of them, as much as it is derivative of their order.

This also would explain Comte's argument that Art should not govern yet should nevertheless organize ideals. At stake would be the direction of the harmony between human order and nature; the imposition of *laws* despite the lack of proper understanding of natural laws (and also of the workings of society) was instead very much attached to a misunderstanding of the capacity of man to reach from society into nature. Like Thought, Feeling, Action, Moral Unity, here the concepts of *representation* and *expression* become transversal concepts that break through from one order to the other. *Representation*

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9   "The greatest epoch of Art has yet to come." (Comte 2009: 317); on art as a mirror of society, see 306, 318.

10 Thus, Comte (2009: 32) claims that the only unmodifiable phenomena are the solar systems—toward all others, Man is "the arbiter."

is particularly valuable to Comte: *Because* Art is fundamentally representational for him, it provides a dual role—of at once "imitating" and "idealizing." (312 et al) In representation, it "heightens" or stretches some features of reality and "suppresses" others (307). Some of the novelty of the aesthetic theory in the *Discours* becomes evident in the movement of representation. While for Comte Art remains in the *Discours* allied to and coextensive with practices like "the medical art," this alliance now seems more metonymic and idiosyncratic, oriented toward the claim to the co-implication of Art and science; representation is essential from Poetry, which lies on the speculative end of the variety of arts, to Architecture and Sculpture, which lie on the more practical, or realist, end. *Expression* at the same time links Art back to Feeling, eschewing the Imagination. Expression encodes representation in forms that are affectively and also rationally (albeit not *merely* rationally) expressed. In both cases, Art "influences Polity by the direction it gives to [...] types." (302) Types, for which poetry depends on philosophy and which are direct results of the imagination, structure representation and expression into applicable forms that provide structure and direction without governing. Comte claims that types are very "insufficiently" or "imperfectly" understood at the present time; yet insofar as representation and expression arise transversally, like Thought and Action, out of the natural order and in order to function in human society, it makes sense that types are meant to be part of the harmonization of nature and society (302). "The conception of the type is the same as the aesthetic imagination" itself, Comte insists, thereby arguing again that the capacity to direct social harmony in a manner consistent with nature must rely on positivism's capacity to retain and encourage precisely this typology (303). Creating types involves the Imagination: it relies on the Imagination being given rein to operate freely, albeit not as freely as might lead to its separation from Reason and society. The creation of types is thus concomitant with Feeling and, unsurprisingly, intended to be rational. This "representation" assumes no distortion but merely "idealization," no legend but merely idealization, no expression except that of a perfectionist's rendition of the present, ultimately nothing but a positivist confirmation of the present as extending into the future. Thanks to the restoration of Art, the idealization of the present opens it to a future which *may* become fundamentally different, but not without an Art capable of abstracting, out of the present, in a direction that is identifiable yet also irreducible to present concerns. This kind of representation can, as a result, offer the move toward a utopia that is not entirely envisaged in the present, yet not capricious either. The conceit here is that governance need not fall within Art's scope. Artists (poets, sculptors, musicians and architects) will be capable of asserting futures through the simple representation of past and present—indeed through the recollection of "all phases of the Past [...] with the same distinctness with which some of them have been already idealized by Homer and Corneille"—while using their futural orientation to "celebrate Humanity" as it stands now (325). This peculiar temporal loop, in which Humanity, through its self-depiction, is open to a future in which it is transformed yet flattens the past into the present to celebrate itself, constitutes the refraction necessary for Artists to both rely on "the real" and submit themselves to it, while postulating, without caprice or confusion, the force of the future as an idealization of the present. This is the point when Artists will relinquish their status and class as Artists to the philosophic

Priesthood; the fusion of the two involves, for Comte, the capacity to, so to speak, govern without governing, to offer a future without enforcing it.

> An almost inexhaustible series of beautiful creations in epic or dramatic art may be produced, which, by rendering it more easy to comprehend and to glorify the Past in all its phases, will form an essential element, on the one hand, of our educational system, and on the other, of the worship of Humanity. (2009: 325)

In some respects, the art form that seems closest to this form of social organization is architecture, which Comte treats in a manner radicalized from his earlier work. While repeating his earlier claim on the power of medieval religious architecture, Comte now proposes a kind of total work of art in architecture ("the property which Architecture possesses of bringing all the arts together into a common centre"), and casts it as capable of forcing impressions on its audience—not only the inhabitants of its buildings—that are "*so powerful and so permanent*." (312–13) While "far more dependent on technical processes; and indeed most of its productions are rather works of industry than works of art," it carries within the capacity to shape a world and facilitate its direction for those inhabiting it. We will return to the problem of architecture at the end of this chapter, particularly with regard to positivism's unlikely influences in the twentieth century.

The Final Fusion of Aesthetic Society and the New Man in the Subjunctive

Within this framework, Comte's conceptual–political subjunctive provides the third sort of continuity and bears more fruit. It is also here that the utopias and New Men of positivist art can emerge. Art is now in an odd holding pattern: it will be ready when the inversion into the new society occurs, and at the same time, it will effect this inversion. Comte replicates his conceptual–political subjunctive as the structure of the future's dynamism over and over: "If," "once" and "when" are operative terms that, attached to the future that can be rationally and scientifically anticipated, allow for Art to emerge both as it is conditioned now—a handmaiden of science becoming liberated to complete and reframe the power of science—and as a conduit of the promise of the new era, which is to effect, without submission on anyone's part, the new world onto Feeling. Laws, at the same time, rely for their full bloom on the capacity of Art to effect social harmony, hence also on an acceptance of natural laws within society and, by extension, on the formation of social laws that can be recognized and felt within society. The comprehension of laws depends to a degree on the representation of types, on the guidance and harmonization of society and, in that manner, Art provides the chance to shift from a rationale of "understanding" laws to one of controlling and guiding them into further harmony. Insofar as Comte identifies the transformation of Art—the recovery of its plenitude and force, its futurity, its capacity to cover the past—with this subjunctive inversion that completes the Revolution and establishes the Positive age, the paradoxes he has forced do not simply fall away, but provide the tension necessary for the promise of positivism in the imagined new age to become fundamentally and irreducibly aesthetic.

A Coda on Socialist Realism and Le Corbusier

What might be an example of positivist Art? And, if we have difficulty identifying examples in his time, why would Comte's formulation deserve analysis beyond the technicalities involved in outlining his theory? It is worth closing here by reference to two twentieth-century approaches that could not be subsumed under the rubric of positivism, yet nevertheless involve very proximate conceptions of the place and value of aesthetics in the modern political universe: the world of socialist realism in the USSR, and the theory and practice of Art in modernist architecture, specifically in Le Corbusier.

Socialist realism's depiction of work is a notable example, in that the dual operation of imitating *and* idealizing, guiding *without* governing, alongside the identification of socialist utopias in and by way of the artwork itself, offered precisely a kind of aesthetics of revolution that Comte would have approved.[11] In paintings of glorified labor, for example, socialist realism depicts a type that is at once a "New Man" and a radicalization of reality, the effecting of social regeneration. In these figures, history is completed (and cited) in entering the new Soviet age, and art proclaims the achievement of the subjunctive, the completion of the political revolution into an aesthetic transformation. Art cannot be treated as simply a matter of propaganda or of faith in a ruling aesthetic, and it cannot be theorized as operating *in contrast* to a science seen as dominant. On the contrary, it extends and represents this science. It does not govern, for it does not depict *all* of the new reality, but it sets within its (visual, architectural, or poetic) frame a part of this reality—its immanent principle perfected—while allowing what lies beyond the frame itself a freer rein than one would otherwise expect. Art for the socialist realists involves a complex relation between technique and science, on one hand, and the fusion of aesthetic creativity and a normative singular regime in need of

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11 One need not agree with Boris Groys's account of socialist realism in Groys 1992, particularly the reduction of constructivism and socialist realism to a single line of derivation thanks to which "the Stalin era satisfied the fundamental avant-garde demand that art cease representing life and begin transforming it by means of a total aesthetico-political project," to see that the Stalinist use of "the tradition" as a past to be brought back into the present, and the pursuit of a future that was to be at once structured and imagined, yet also allowed its own character and transformation. See p. 63: "It is not for nothing that socialist realist aesthetics always speaks not of "portraying" positive or negative heroes, but of "incarnating" them by artistic means. In and of themselves the positive and negative heroes have no external appearance, because they express transcendental demiurgic forces. However, to demonstrate these forces in a manner that is "intelligible to the people" (the "people" here meaning not actual consumers of art but mortals who lack transcendental vision), they must be symbolized, incarnated, set upon a stage. Hence, the constant concern of socialist realist aesthetics with verisimilitude. Its heroes, as is stated in certain of the quotations cited above, must thoroughly resemble people if people are not to be frightened by their true aspect, and this is why the writers and artists of socialist realism constantly bustle about inventing biographies, habits, clothing, physiognomies and so on. They almost seem to be in the employ of some sort of extraterrestrial bureau planning a trip to Earth—they want to make their envoys as anthropomorphic as possible, but they cannot keep the otherworldly void from gaping through all the cracks in the mask."

idealization on the other. Suturing these, it offers a future—or a set of futures—within and beyond its frame.

Le Corbusier also positioned himself, and in his case rather more explicitly, within a positivist framework. Amidst the supposed dregs of contemporary architecture and its pervasive negative effects on modern life and culture, Le Corbusier proposed in *Vers une architecture* (*Toward a New Architecture*) that the alternative "Architecture or Revolution?" (Le Corbusier 269) be resolved in favor of the former. Architecture alone held the reins of a new and ordered world; it alone was capable of directing industry, business and construction into this world. "Industry has created its tools. Business has modified its habits and customs. Construction has found new means. Architecture finds itself confronted with new laws." (Le Corbusier: 283) It is difficult not to hear loud and clear echoes of Comte in the claim that architecture is meant to follow such new laws as emerge from engineering, economy and mathematics, and with an eye to a new society of mass-production houses that architecture, "pure creation of the mind," would serve to make beautiful:

> The Engineer, inspired by the law of Economy and governed by mathematical calculation, puts us in accord with universal law. He achieves harmony. The Architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit; by forms and shapes he affects our senses to an acute degree and provokes plastic emotions; by the relationships which he creates he wakes profound echoes in us, he gives us the measure of an order which we feel to be in accordance with that of our world, he determines the various movements of our heart and of our understanding; it is then that we experience the sense of beauty (Le Corbusier: 1).

In proposing to normalize and order modern society—so "profoundly out of gear"—Le Corbusier would thus give quarter precisely to a Comtean art theory, offering it a radically different politics than Stalinism's, yet all the same pursuing a New Man that would sheathe and shift the present into its own future. In an aesthetics that leads Feeling and Imagination to order and allows them to complete and perfect Reason, we find a completion of history into a new present and a new set of futures not limited by merely political revolution, but effected through business and order, a morality of transparent life, and a beauty to relay the present into its conditioned yet unpredictable future.

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Chapter Seven

COMTE'S CIVIC COMEDY: SECULAR RELIGION AND MODERN MORALITY IN THE AGE OF CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY

Thomas Kemple

Introduction: Beyond the Law of the Three Stages

In the history of sociology, August Comte has largely become a forgotten founder or a figure of fun. The familiar bust of him sculpted by Antoine Injalbert in 1902 that now sits in the Place de la Sorbonne—where his disembodied head is flanked by his beloved Clotilde de Vaux posing as a Madonna and Child and by a proletarian teaching himself how to read—attracts at most mild curiosity or an amused glance from the afternoon coffee crowd. At best his work is approached with embarrassment—considered pathetic because religiously ecstatic—or indifference, insofar as it is assumed to be superseded because scientifically refuted. The many volumes that make up his *Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–42) and *System of Positive Polity* (1851–54) are usually reduced to a casual line or two in hurried commentaries that summarize "the law of the three stages—theological, metaphysical, positivist"; a few anecdotes about his dispute with his mentor Saint-Simon; his troubles in securing an academic position; his odd relationships with women; or a hurried recitation of the famous positivist motto—"Love, Order, Progress." The conventional wisdom is that Comte advocated his eccentric system of thought more persistently than he was able to realize it in practice. When his intellectual career and personal life later became so thoroughly intertwined, he could only fail to deliver on what he preached. John Stuart Mill's judgment has become the prevailing consensus: Comte's consistency is to be admired, but "the melancholy decadence of a great intellect" in his later work is lamentable (quoted in Gane 2013, 209). His legacy must therefore be laid to rest, mourned or even actively suppressed since the path beginning from him (*à compter de Comte*) ultimately leads nowhere.

Nevertheless, traces of Comte periodically reappear in modern social science discourse in the form of phases or "recyclings" that retrace his path from scientism and secularism to religious conversion and post-metaphysical closure. Michel Serres sees the gap left by Comte's encyclopedic ambition as a symptom of the recurring intellectual malaise that has haunted Western thought in the twentieth century, at least in its French variations:

> The crisis of our knowledge has no place. Thus we despair that this crisis has never taken place; for many, it has never taken place, and for others, it has happened elsewhere. We're missing an Auguste Comte, which is why, without ever citing the old man, everyone goes on repeating him just as they unwittingly repeat those who have not been replaced. The old institutional walls preserve him and perpetually call up his ghost. (Serres 1974, 159)

Here, Comte's impossible project is understood to constitute a kind of primal scene for the original conception of modern social science, not despite but because of the logical ambiguities, leaps of faith, fictional inventions, occasional hesitations, epistemological breaks and psychotic ruptures that characterize it (Wernick 2001). Far from declaring Comte's irrelevance, what I have elsewhere called "the Comte effect" (*l'effet Comte*) can be detected in the waves of self-reflection and renewal that are expected to account for— and count on—the progress of thought in the efforts of science to shape social order and to direct political life (Kemple 2005, 380). Before psychoanalysis and deconstruction, and beyond the debates between postmodern cultural theorists and post-positivist empiricists, Comte was among the first thinkers to consider seriously how the irreducible fact of fantasy figures into the experience of reality; and, likewise, how an account of the facts (*comte des faits*) may be informed by a flight of fancy, a figure of speech, or even a fairy tale (*conte des fées*). Contrary to the insistence among later "positivists" on reducing thought to logic, evidence and observation, Comte adopts a more open approach to knowledge that emphasizes the irreducible role of emotion, speculation and imagination in all knowledge (Sharff 1995). Far from promoting a crude form of either scientism or historicism, Comte's positivist spirit is inseparable from the fictional constructions and the critical abstractions that often gave rise to it.

One of the obstacles standing in the way of a more congenial reception of Comte may stem from the apparent consistency by which he expressed his "fundamental law" from his first system to his second system. In retrospect, he acknowledges, "the greater vivacity and originality of the first work is compensated by the more imposing regularity and constructive completeness of the second" (Comte 1975, 311). The *Course* and the *System* thus emerge in his work as the objective–scientific and subjective–practical sides of the "same" course of historical progress:

> The general law of human development, social as well as intellectual, lays down that all our speculations upon all subjects whatsoever pass necessarily through three successive stages [*trois états successifs*]. We begin with theological imagination, thence we pass through metaphysical discussion, and end at last with positive demonstration. Thus by means of this one general law we are enabled to take a comprehensive and simultaneous view of the past, present, and future of humanity. (Comte 1975, 328; 1851, 33)

And yet, as Mike Gane has shown in an argument also developed by Michel Bourdeau (2006), despite the abbreviation, popularization and de-dramatization of "*la loi des trois états*" when it is reduced to a museum piece, an illusion and an intellectual curiosity, the emphasis in Comte's work shifts over time from its formulation as a sequence of phases or stages to its conception as system of *states* or *estates* (*états*) (Gane 2006, xiv). Rather than simply positing a single sequential chain of cultural forms, an unbroken

series of transitions, or a progressive movement in a one-way temporal direction, Comte asserts the possibility of rupture and the necessity of return within the present metaphysical system: "Curiously […] Comte insists [that] the order of analysis is: state one, state three, state two[, … arguing that] in our day three different systems coexist in the heart of society: the theological-feudal system, the scientific-industrial system, and lastly, the hybrid and transitional system of metaphysicians and lawyers" (Gane 2006, 27, 34). By analogy with the three medieval estates of the clergy, nobility and commoners, Comte envisioned a post-revolutionary social and political order of intellectuals, women and workers. He thus came to emphasize that these estates coexist to varying degrees in the social order of the present, each finding its fullest expression in the three complementary states of human existence: "thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Comte 1975, 343). However we judge its failures or idiosyncrasies, Comte's grand system not only anticipates the empirical-scientific specialization of sociology later inaugurated by Emile Durkheim, but exceeds it in significant ways as well.

Comte's Civic Comedy: Women, Workers, Intellectuals

Comte's second great attempt at synthesizing his ideas, the *System of Positive Polity*, involves a return to the first principles of human existence: "The first condition of unity is a subjective principle, and this principle is the subordination of the intellect to the heart" (1975, 325). In this version of "the three states" the heart and the hands have priority over the head, which responds to and follows from them. Likewise, from a certain perspective the arrow of time offers a distinctive view of the progression of human history, in which the disorder of the present can only be understood scientifically through the detour of past beliefs and the anticipation of future certainties. As Gane (2006, 94) notes, a radical discontinuity is introduced into Comte's later thought between the metaphysical and the positive state, particularly through the irresolvable tension that becomes evident between the "decompositional series" that descends from Catholicism to Protestantism to Deism (and potentially onward to secularism and atheism) and the "rising series" that ascends from physics to chemistry to biology to sociology (understood as the source of a new altruism and ultimate spiritual authority). When the scientific objectivity achieved in the earlier *Course* reaches its limits, positivism is given a new subjective, ethical and practical basis through a method that stresses emotion, imagination and love. This twofold hermeneutic is accomplished by combining intellect and feeling with objective knowledge and a scientific understanding: "The subjective principle is primary, but it can only be effective if it realizes the world discovered and organized by science" (Gane 2006, 97). General systematic insights must therefore be specified through the art of social life inward to the most intimate experiences, as Comte announces in dedicating his *System*: "We tire of thinking and even of action; we never tire of loving [*On se lasse de penser, et même d'agir; jamais on se lasse d'aimer*]" (Comte 1975, 317; 1851, 1). The exhaustion of the old social order that is manifested in social revolution must therefore be followed by a transformation of the person, with individual and collective change conceived as a logical outcome of Comte's critique of the metaphysics of the self and of the polity (Gane 2013, 219).

In revising his "*loi des trois états*" Comte does not so much give priority to the regenerative force of subjective feeling as much as he privileges a certain impersonal feminine ideal in mediating between the existing state of humanity and its full potential. A woman's love—as mother, wife and companion—animates the origins and ends of the human species in the present crucial transitional stage of its development: "Love, then, is our principle; order our basis; and progress our end [*L'amour pour principe, ordre pour base, progrès pour but*]" (Comte 1975, 381; 1851, 321). As Andrew Wernick (2001, 108–9) points out, a curious anomaly is introduced when this principle is placed at the beginning or "front" of his system: "Woman appears in the story as a *dea ex machina*. […] Only women, restored and revered as a moral force, can counter the egoistic rebellion of head over heart that has characterized meta-physical upheaval; only they, through the affective re-education of men, can make possible the constructive way out." Despite Comte's insistence that the feminine sources of love draw inspiration from the future, his image of woman is decidedly universalizing, conserv-ative, and backward-looking insofar as her "essential nature" at every phase of history is the basis for her social mission in the domestic sphere, in contrast to the public duties of men (Comte 1975, 373–74). This ambivalence prompted Sarah Kofman's psychoanalytic-deconstructive reading of Comte's shifting modes of self-disclosure, which she treats as so many ways of exposing the obscene gaps that remain from the bifurcation and attempted closure of his system: "What he fears (desires) is not just to be taken for a woman, it is to be identified with one of those women who cannot live openly [*vivre au grand jour*], with a pros-titute, as was [supposedly] the case with his own wife" (Kofman 1978, 148). Here, Comte becomes another (Freudian) case history in the annals of social and cultural thought, and his impulse toward "becoming-woman"—personal transsexualism as a social model of sacred transfiguration if not also of scientific invention—is taken as a pathological symp-tom of cosmological, biological and ideological "aberration."

To be sure, Comte's second system was not only a personal response to his dispute with his wife or the product of his private sorrow over the death in 1846 of his beloved Clotilde de Vaux, the writer and intellectual whom the *System* is dedicated to and whom he refers to under various names as *ma sainte ange, épouse, soeur, fille, élève* (Pickering 2009a, 147–82). Positivism also has a practical side and collective mission to improve the lives of ordinary people, not excluding Comte himself. Failing to find a secure position in the university, he supported himself through a number of precarious educational endeav-ors: private tutoring, teaching at a boarding school and serving as examiner at the École Polytechnique. Significantly, he first became famous for his free public lectures outside the university, especially his talks on astronomy, to as many as 300 people lasting three hours, often at times that clashed with church services (Pickering 2009a, 37–51; 2009b, 183–86). These lectures, published in 1844 as the *Traité philosophique d'astronomie populaire* and prefaced by the *Discours sur l'esprit positif* (written earlier in 1842), were intended to introduce working people and "all minds, regardless of scientific background" to the emerging scientific vision of the place of humans in the cosmic order of things (Comte 1842, 53–55). In the words of a miller who attended those held in a former convent next to the Church of Notre-Dame des Victoires, Comte showed astronomy to be "the great motor that transformed the popular mind to its current rational state," thereby displacing the old religious worldview with the emerging modern scientific cosmology (1842, 67).

Public lectures like these exemplify Comte's practical advocacy for educational reform and his role as a leading force in forging a new alliance between proletarians and philosophers, who must appeal to the "large stock of good sense and good feeling" among the working classes and to "the universality of intelligence" (1975, 348; 1842, 26–27). In contrast to the relatively conservative views he expresses concerning the eternal feminine, here Comte reveals a more radical side in promoting political reconstruction through the moral and mental regeneration of the laboring masses.

Comte's three estates of women, workers and thinkers are not simply updated versions of the medieval orders of nobility, commoners and clergy. Nor are they merely secular translations of the Christian trinity, with the Madonna standing in for the Holy Father, the proletariat for the Son and the intellectuals for the Holy Spirit. Rather, they are the interdependent components of a *system*, each an indispensable function of the other:

> Spiritual power, as interpreted by positivism, begins with the influence of thinkers, while the people are the guarantee for its political efficiency. Although it is the intellectual class that institutes the union, yet its own part in it, as it should never forget, is less direct than that of women and less practical than that of the people. The thinker is spiritually powerless except insofar as he is supported by feminine sympathy and popular energy. (Comte 1975, 376)

The solidarity of the coming modern society must therefore be articulated through the communicative community of women, workers and intellectuals of the future, where the order of daily life will best be maintained through their respective organization in the heart, hands and head of the body social: "The first principle is that man should support woman; the second, that the active class should support the speculative class. […] This, then, is the way in which the priests of humanity may hope to regenerate the material power of wealth and bring the nutritive functions of society into harmony with the other parts of the body politic" (1975, 377, 388). Ironically, the new social order proclaims equality while at the same time reinforcing some of the old hierarchies of class and status, insofar as sentimental attachments among peers and expressions of benevolence to others coexist with the veneration of superiors and kindness to inferiors.

In any event, Comte's *System* exceeds the theoretical or practical search for social solidarity and scientific certainty by ultimately casting itself as a *religious* quest for the Absolute, where each subject must pass through the double ordeal of objective confirmation and subjective conversion: "Positivism must be regarded as an eschatological tradition that is separate from but interwoven with the revolutionary character of science" (Gane 2013, 224). The mechanistic sequencing and linear fatalism of the objective synthesis of the earlier system is displaced, supplemented and in some ways undermined by the triple register of a subjective process governed by cycles of stability and change:

- A collection of theoretical doctrines (*dogme*) inspired by the past
- A corpus of moral rules (*régime*) grounded in the present
- A catechism of liturgical rituals of worship (*culte*) in which the sentiment of love projects a vision of the future

This trinitarian structure is given formal scientific expression in terms of institutionalized norms and promoted informally through everyday aphorisms, such as "act from feeling; think to act." Wernick is unapologetic about the manifestly dreamlike and delusional character of Comte's second system with its fantastic thesis of a "Religion of Humanity." Rather than dismiss its logical inconsistencies and provocative fantasies merely as symptoms of a psychotic break, he argues, we should consider how they illuminate the process of system-construction itself: "Whether in the medium of an intellectualist sociologism, a religio-sentimenal sociologism, or a bio-sociologically composite *science de morale*, a leap of faith—finally to a mode of consciousness conceived as 'normal', and itself ramified by a self-instituted religious pressure to conform—is always needed to make the system cohere" (Wernick 2001, 78). What makes Comte's failure so interesting is precisely the way in which he ultimately cannot allow the religious experience of belief that dominates the theological stage to be obliterated by the rational knowledge attained by positivism. Comte's project of establishing *une foi démontrable* thus requires both the motivation of a *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) and the imperative of a *fides quaerens agendum* (faith seeking to be enacted) (Wernick 2001, 79, 214). In tracing a backwards path through theological belief and metaphysical speculation, his progressive-regressive method of combining hypotheses and observations, fictions and facts, also becomes a personal policy of mental hygiene, moral reform and social action.

Insofar as Comte's "cult" acknowledges the irreducible character of faith at the heart of reason and of action in driving the mind, the failure of his system should not be considered tragic, at least in the sense that it enacts, stages or represents the Absolute as what must inevitably spell the ruin, misfortune or catastrophe of existence. Rather, the failure of his system can be understood as *comic*—not in the sense that it unfolds humorously or ends happily, but rather to the extent it "is or becomes the Absolute" by embodying and playing out what it can only partially comprehend or contingently realize, that is, in the way that "comedy is the universal at work" (Zupancic 2008, 27). In other words, rather than view Comte's positivist cult and his Religion of Humanity simply as sad or silly, we should approach them with the deference and delicacy of any serious attempt to bear witness to the sacred sources of Being. Comte's distinctive ambition and sense of awe are epitomized in his visionary Conspectus of Social Worship, or *Tableau sociolatrique* (Comte 1975, 464; Kemple 2004, 367), which he also laid out as a practical project in his architectural sketch for a Temple of Humanity (see Figure 7.1). In this remarkable plan for a theoretical theatre and commemorative space, the objective and subjective dimensions of the Great Being of Humanity can be seen to converge in the temporal succession of annual events (Appendix A) and to conspire in the spatial coordination of symbolic enactments of social solidarity. Wernick's description of these imagined devotional occasions is worth quoting at length:

> The duality of *l'Humanité* as a term referring both to the developing quality of the social tie and to that of society's general (i.e. technical, institutional, political, intellectual, religious, etc.) form is reflected in the calendric organization of Positivist worship. Through one sequence of festivals, the faithful express gratitude for all the domestic, civic and humanity-wide ties and institutions, together with the rising scale of social sentiments on which these
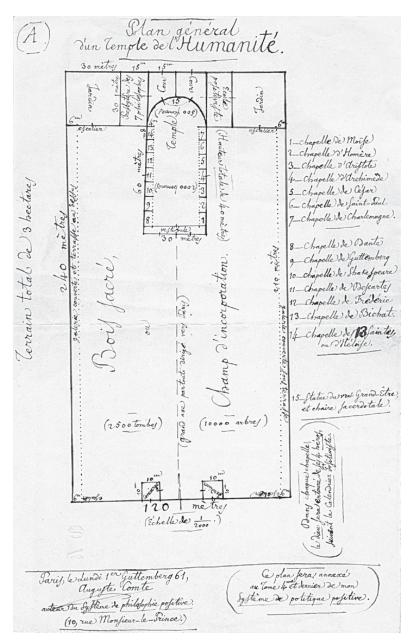
Figure 7.1 Plan général d'un Temple de l'Humanité

In Comte's 'General Plan for the Temple of Humanity', the temple terrain would occupy three hectares, with a large "sacred wood, or field of incorporation" made up of 10,000 trees and 2,500 tombs. The temple itself would consist of 14 chapels dedicated to "the heroes of the positivist calendar," from Moses and Homer to Bichat and "thirteen female saints, or Heloise," with a "statue of the true Great Being and priestly pulpit" placed at the front.

rely. Another sequence does the same for the overall march of civilization from tribalism to modern industry. On each side, each step of progress, whether considered historically or in terms of its continuing (but rearranged) place in the culminating result, is 'appreciated' for what it prepares and contributes, until both series come together in the Feast of the Dead, and the annual round begins anew. (Wernick 2001, 199)

What I am calling "Comte's civic comedy" entails as much this secular observance of moral rules, theoretical doctrines and liturgical rituals as it does a sacred reverence for the power of science to bring life and death into a singular relationship and cyclical unity. His cult of positivism—the religion of humanity—brings women, workers and philosophers to center stage by forging ties that are both parochial and catholic in consecrating the civil, secular and universal character of their communion.

Durkheim's Moral Discipline: The University, the Professions and the State

Although Comte was unable to find permanent employment in the university, he never relinquished his commitment to the moral mission of higher education and its institutional realization in the post-revolutionary era. The moral force of the new intellectual movement he sought to lead lacked practical power relative to the material force of government. Nevertheless, the superiority of the emerging rule of science and sensibility would become evident in his suggestion of a dignified alternative to prevailing social classifications framed in terms of wealth and worldly position: "True, the higher standard will never be adopted practically, but the effort to uphold it will react beneficially on the natural order of society" (Comte 1975, 382). The emerging ideal of morality would express the synthesis of the positivist spirit with the art of living, as well as the unity of morals with morale and the combination of everyday customs with the esprit de corps needed to reanimate the social organism. With this ideal in mind, Comte understands the problem of solidarity in a time of social upheaval and cultural crisis as a *religious* problem. The sacred source of the social bond is less a transcendent guarantee than an immanent force, as suggested by the etymology of the term *religion* in designating the dual function of separating the members of a collective from within through individuating desire and then tying them together again (*re-ligio*) from without through the cultivation of common sympathies:

> The grand object of religion being to teach us to live for others, it must consist essentially in regulating the direct cultivation of our sympathetic instincts. In fact, such would be its sole function were it now that our physical wants necessitate the addition both of the doctrine and the regime, so by man's own exertions to give an altruistic character to the natural egoism of his incessant activity. (Comte 1975, 462)

Understood as a combination of the practice (cult), theory (doctrine) and institutional order (regime) that renders individuals autonomous while holding them together, religion expresses the aspect of social life that "rallies and regulates" the sentiments of individuals and brings them into harmony with collective thought and action: "This synthetic state thus consists as much in *regulating* each personal existence as in *rallying* these diverse personalities [*Cet état synthétique consiste ainsi, tantôt à* régler *chaque existence personelle, tantôt à* rallier *les diverses individualités*]" (Comte, quoted in Wernick 2001, 101–2). The spirit of conservation and discipline needed for moral regulation exists in productive tension with the energy of improvement that rouses individual members to action by gathering them together in the interests of social regeneration.

Social integration and cultural control—*ralliement et règlement*—mark the point of contact and contrast between Comte's grand system and Emile Durkheim's efforts to specify, verify and refine this system a generation later. Often overlooked in accounts of this second, successful attempt to launch the science of sociology as an autonomous field of inquiry are the ways in which Durkheim's project profoundly overlaps with Comte's efforts to locate the religious sources of social solidarity and personal autonomy. Although Durkheim would grapple with Comte's work throughout his career, he singles out the 1895 lecture course that he taught in Bordeaux, where he first seriously encountered the work of W. Robertson Smith, as the turning point where the sociological approach to religion was first revealed to him. This moment would mark a "dividing line" in the development of this thought in which the sacred power of symbols, the moral significance of collective representations and the subjectification of social forces became central concerns in his thinking (Alexander 2005, 147). In fact, Durkheim would teach a related series of courses in Bordeaux throughout the 1890s under the Comtean title "*Physique des droits et des moeurs*" (Physics of laws and customs), the notes for which were later edited and published posthumously under the title *Leçons de sociologie* (lessons [or lectures] in sociology) and translated into English as *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. These courses were again updated and presented on as many as eight occasions at the Sorbonne between 1902 and 1915, effectively tracing a unifying thread through the whole of Durkheim's career: from his early "search for solidarity" to his "quest for the sacred" and his unfinished plan to write "a new great work" on ethics (Watts Miller 2012, 161; Turner, in Durkheim 1992, xxx). His reflections on modern morality had already begun with his study of the German ethical philosophers as early as 1885, and later informed his lectures on socialism in 1896, along with the conclusion to *Suicide* that discusses occupational groups and professional ethics in 1897, his courses on moral education beginning in 1898–99 and the new preface added to the 1902 edition of *The Division of Labour* (Watts Miller 2012, 26–29, 69–73). From his first writings to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) and beyond, Durkheim aimed to scale down Comte's grandiose vision of a Religion of Humanity into a more modest, specialized and secular analysis of the differentiated organization of industrial society with its cult of individuality and potential for civic renewal.

In many ways echoing and refining Comte's general scheme for the new science of Humanity, Durkheim's plan for the social sciences would eventually include a "morphology" for examining the geography and demography of social formations and a "physiology" for analyzing the structure and function of interdependent institutions. Already in his inaugural course at the University of Bordeaux in 1888, he endorsed Comte's call for a "social physics" that promised to discover the natural laws of social reality, in particular its patterns of both stability (statics) and change (dynamics). In declaring an end to "the heroic age of sociology" epitomized by Comte and Spencer, however, he stresses the need to update and refine Comte's plan by incorporating the latest developments in evolutionary biology and comparative ethnology (1978, 50–57). Like Comtean positivism, Durkheimian sociology is modeled after the biology of the organism and its environment (*milieu*), and thus examines the social cell and its metabolism rather than simply proceeding as a method of classification and comparison. Even at the end of his career, Durkheim would retain much of the methodological ambition and metaphorical framing of this project with his plan to write a two-volume work synthesizing his lectures on ethics: the first providing a critical overview of approaches and methods, and the second a series of empirical investigations into "moral facts," beginning with the systematic observation of their "visible signs" in particular times and places and across the spectrum of individual experiences and impersonal forces. As he writes in the "Introduction to *Morality*," probably drafted the year he died and edited and published posthumously by his nephew and collaborator, Marcel Mauss, Durkheim planned to write a "Physics of Mores" or "Science of Morality," demonstrating how the psychology of individual conscience is dependent on a sociology of collective consciousness in a way that allows us to draw practical conclusions from theoretical studies: "Thus, the art of ethics, namely, the construction of the moral ideal, presupposes the existence of an entire science, one which is positive and inductive and which embraces all the details of moral facts" (Durkheim 1978, 199). The science of morals entails a disciplined study of rules of conduct and social sanctions based on the disciplined observation of empirical evidence and social facts, rather than the proliferation of mere speculations or prescriptions. In particular, the three aspects of morality that he examines in his lecture courses—professional ethics, civic morals and legal rights—are intended to be elaborated on in the projected book with reference to the specific institutional domains that characterize modern social life.

As if to update and specify Comte's general plan for the Temple of Humanity, Durkheim's course on the history of education in France at the Sorbonne in 1904–5 devotes seven lectures to discussing the evolution of the university from the late twelfth to the mid-sixteenth centuries (1977, 63–173). Focusing on the University of Paris, since it later became the "prototype" of secondary education in France, he argues that both moral discipline and social freedom were fostered within the institutional complex of higher education created by and later competing with the established Church. While the scholastic arts of grammar and logic were emphasized in the Middle Ages, the specialized teaching faculties that emerged during the Renaissance became increasingly concerned with the techniques of dialectic and debate in combining ecclesiastical and secular functions: "A doctorate from the University of Paris was seen as a doctorate from the universal Church, *doctor universalis ecclesiae*. It was then a natural consequence of the

cosmopolitanism that we have already noted as being one of the main characteristics of social life in the Middle Ages" (Durkheim 1977, 85). The corporation of teachers, with its own statutes and regulations (*consortium magistrorium et scolarum*), evolved into colleges that would oversee the disciplining of students as well as the administration of curricula and examinations for the conferral of degrees. These institutional foundations of the university would later provide the cultural milieu of encyclopedism, humanism and realism that dominated both Renaissance and post-revolutionary regimes of higher learning. The scholars who came to power after 1789, when the college and the university were supplemented by the polytechnic and the école normale, eventually came to revere science and history as the sacred liturgies of the new age. To the extent that "the university, which holds the power on the definition and its contents will soon recognize no other rational pursuits," Comte's catechism and his general plan for a Temple of Humanity are typical of the age in in the way that they canonize genius, just as established religion prays to martyrs and prophets. (Serres 1995, 448–49)

Where Comte had to create his Religion of Humanity out of a virtual institutional vacuum, Durkheim was able to advance a kind of civic religion with the material support of the university and the intellectual encouragement of a devoted circle of students and colleagues (Wernick 2001, 262). In 1913 he was appointed to the first official chair of sociology in France, which he inaugurated by giving a course on pragmatism and sociology, and where he took up the problem of the social conditions and public mission of sociology in fostering a democratic culture of argument, negotiation and deliberation. The following year he taught a course on ethics (*La Morale*), anticipating his next book project, and in 1915 he continued the discussion of these themes in his last course on "The Social Philosophy of Auguste Comte" (Lukes 1973, 410–35, 617–20). These lectures can be considered the culmination of his career-long reflections on the nature of morality and the physics of mores, and thus as his final attempt to answer the fundamental questions concerning the role of sociology in formulating laws and ethical codes for industrial society: "What is to become of public morality if there is so little principle of duty in this whole where that is so important in social life? There are professional ethics for the priest, the soldier, the lawyer, the magistrate, and so on. Why should there not be one for trade and industry?" (Durkheim 1992, 20). Just as professional ethics can function as a special case of common morality, so can occupational legislation—such as the rules governing secondary councils, intermediary bodies, deliberative assemblies, and professional associations—be considered a particular form of the law in general (Durkheim 1992, 39). In a modern industrializing society, the collective consciousness is not evenly diffused through the whole social body, but rather localized in specific social organs. Above all, the *conscience collective* is concentrated in the modern state which, "in a certain sense […] is the organizing centre for the secondary groups [… and] a special organ whose responsibility it is to work out certain representations that hold good for the collectivity" (Durkheim 1992, 49–50). Again taking a cue from Comte, Durkheim reveals his larger project of transforming old institutions—not the medieval Church and the priesthood, but rather the corporation and the guild—by adapting them for new times and by unifying the estates (*les états*) of the social realm into the political order of the modern state (*l'État*).

At the same time as the state works out collective representations in the form of national symbols, constitutions and legal codes for the society as a whole, its function is also to "liberate individual personalities: rescuing the child and the woman from patriarchal tyranny, the craftsman and his master from guild tyranny" (Durkheim 1992, 62, 64). Here Durkheim returns to his theme—already introduced in the conclusion to *Suicide*—of the modern "cult of the individual" observed by both the state and the individual alike through collective rituals of free inquiry and critical thought. These symbolically mediated communal practices clarify and reinforce the separation between the domains of the sacred and the profane, the ideal and real, the extraordinary and the everyday, the self and its others. They give shape to the core belief of this cult, namely, a certain elemental notion of the soul, which is "none other than the totemic principle incarnated in each individual," as he writes in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995, 251). In this sense, the intensity of sacred symbols and the collective effervescence they inspire are routinized and rationalized in the "extensive" modes of logic and classification that are the foundations of lasting institutions (Lash 2010). The right (and rite) of property likewise exhibits a certain sacred character, insofar as it is defined more as a negative cult of exclusion based on taboos (modeled on the hearth, tomb or domestic enclosure) than as a set of positive prerogatives: "Man's right of property is only a substitute for the right of property of the gods"; and "human property is but sacred or divine property put into the hands of men by means of a number of ritual ceremonies," including oaths, covenants, wills, pledges, contracts, agreements and declarations (Durkheim 1992, 157, 160). The negative aspect of the institution of inheriting property from generation to generation can therefore be considered the "supreme obstacle" to the realization of a democratic society and its spirit of individualism, where wealth should ultimately be public property distributed positively according to need, ability and merit rather than privately appropriated according to birth, family status or chance. For this reason, professional groups must become the heirs of family authority and agents of redistributive justice, while equality and liberty should be guaranteed by the state. The modern state itself takes on a set of both secular and sacred functions as a kind of rational and secular church, which Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms* defines as an institution that unifies all those who adhere to a system of beliefs and practices relative to "things set apart and forbidden […] into one single moral community" (Durkheim 1995, 44). But unlike the church, the moral community that makes up the state must sanction not only social solidarity but personal liberty and its cult of the individual as well.

Conclusion: Beyond the Three Estates of the Positive Polity

Although Durkheim persistently and periodically engages with the grandiose plan for the science of sociology outlined in Comte's *Course in Positive Philosophy*, in his published writings and lectures he makes only the occasional vague reference to the *System of Positive Polity*. Usually such allusions are made under a critical light that draws attention away from the significant similarity and overlap between his ideas and those of his predecessor, as in the prophetic conclusion to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*:

In short, the former gods are growing old or dying, and others have not yet been born. This is what rendered vain Comte's attempt to organize a religion using old historical memories, artificially revived. It is life itself, and not a dead past, that can produce a living cult. But that state of uncertainty and confused anxiety cannot last forever. A day will come when our societies once again will know hours of creative effervescence during which new ideals will again spring forth and new formulas emerge to guide humanity for a time. And when those hours have been lived through, men will spontaneously feel the need to relive them in thought from time to time—that is, to preserve their memory by means of celebrations that regularly recreate their fruits. (Durkheim 1995, 429–30)

Writing a few years before the outbreak of World War I, Durkheim seems more confident than Comte was (in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions) that the ancient or dying gods might be resurrected through a modern cult, giving form and substance to new ideals. Rebuking Comte for attempting to force the recovery of antiquated memories of the old-time religion through the charisma of the intellectuals, Durkheim foresees a day when ceremonies and celebrations will keep the ideals of the new age alive, if only temporarily, through the "collective effervescence" they inspire. Instead of preaching the revival of abstract rituals that revere former masters, or calling for commemorative festivals of past historical events, he insists that only the vital need to relive and remember the past in the present can forge a creative union of thought and reality that will endure into the future.

Since Comte's and Durkheim's visions of the future are in some ways also our present, it is worth asking whether their prophecies concerning a kind of moral or religious revival might offer a relevant perspective on the structural strains and cultural fragmentation of today's postmodern societies (O'Neill 1995). As if to anticipate a somewhat mystical or even apocalyptic strain of thought that would come to characterize, among some twentieth-century thinkers, the response to world war and counter-cultural revolution, Comte remained faithful to the radical idea that the reconstruction of shared beliefs and social consensus can lay the moral groundwork for the Industrial Age. By contrast, Durkheim inaugurated a more ascetic strain of sociological thought in emphasizing how the web of interdependencies emerging from the division of labor may result in the individualizing pathologies of egoism and anomie, and thus require new forms of devotion and discipline to restore the esprit de corps of modern societies. In this regard, each thinker can be viewed as a kind of "godless intellectual" for whom secular actions or even sacrilegious thoughts express a profound appreciation for the divine forces and transcendent powers that linger beneath the surface of contemporary life (Riley 2010, 198). On the one hand, the sociologist may become the *vessel* of the Absolute in the tradition of Comte, for whom "the affections of my daily life are a strong confirmation of my conception of the true constitution of society, in which the maintenance of order depends on the twofold relations of philosophers with women and with proletarians" (Comte 1975, 316). On the other hand, the sociologist is conceived as the *instrument* of the Absolute, as the means by which the sacred and profane dimensions of life become manifest and conscious of themselves, as in Durkheim's dualistic concept of "*an individual being* that has its basis in the body and whose sphere of action is strictly limited by this fact, and *a social being* that represents within us the highest reality in the intellectual and moral realm that is knowable through observation" (Durkheim 1995, 15, emphasis added). From each

perspective, the task of sociology is either to rally and reinvent a reverence for the sacred, or to regulate and renew the social bond required to hold the collective together.

Comte in particular invites us to grasp the persistence of certain primitive and theological motifs within the metaphysical and modern pretensions of contemporary social and political thought. As Gane argues, postmodern intellectual theatrics breathe new life into Comte's messianic "theory-fiction" by challenging a new world into existence through the invention of new fetish objects: "It could be argued that whereas Comte wanted to designate Humanity as the fetish object of the new post-metaphysical religion, on the model of the Supreme Being, the currently dominant form is the Market as fetish object" (Gane 2013, 217; 2003, 186). Bruno Latour takes this argument a step further by considering how the fact objects of modern science themselves become fetishes, in the sense that they are treated as human constructions with an objectivity of their own that apparently transcends conceptualization and fabrication:

> The word 'fact' seems to point to external reality, and the word 'fetish' seems to designate the foolish belief of a subject. Within the depths of their Latin roots, both conceal the intense work of construction that allows for both the truth of facts and the truth of minds. […] Joining the two etymological sources together, we shall use the label *factish* for the robust certainty that allows practice to pass into action without the practitioner ever believing in the difference between construction and reality, immanence and transcendence. (Latour 2010: 21–22)

Without irony, and without explicit reference to Comte, Latour calls the collective practice of science, which is based on the naïve faith in the difference between facts and fetishes, "the modern cult of the factish gods." If the modern worldview is defined by an arrogant belief in belief, he argues, the "non-modern" person lives more humbly by "making do (*faire faire*)," by a kind of practical improvisation or *bricolage* rather than a methodical procedure for separating faith and reason. Rather than dissolving all ties between what is real insofar as it is unchangeable and what is made in the interests of freedom, the proper aim of this non-modern cult is to make good attachments, forge better bonds and substitute more healthy relations and realities with less healthy ones (Latour 2010, 59). In this regard, Latour can be said to take up a middle position between Comte's devotion to the role of primitive fetishes in rejuvenating the subjective values of collective life and Durkheim's commitment to ensure the function of moral facts in furnishing valid objects of modern social science and political practice.

If Comte's image for sociology as a kind of Religion of Humanity is not simply to be rejected, ridiculed or forgotten, then we need to think seriously again about those points on which his system stumbled. Beyond the repeated stock phrases and recycled terms of his encyclopedic ambition, Comte had the humility to stop and contemplate the unknowable and unrepresentable features of collective life, as W. E. B. Du Bois noted over a century ago:

> Let's go back and ask frankly: Why did Comte hesitate so strangely at the 'parts which constitute' Society, and why have men so strangely followed his leading? For the Great Assumption of real life is that in the deeds of men there lies along with the rule and rhythm—along with physical law and biologic habit—a something Incalculable. (Du Bois 2000 [1905], 40)

Since Comte's time countless attempts have been made to name this "something" that eludes all our efforts at comprehension and explanation. The death of God that Comte's positivist project tried to account for has been superseded by the death of Society, History and Humanity, at least as these phenomenal realities have been conceived as a European program for rendering the meaning of contemporary life understandable and controllable (Wernick 2001, 222). For Zigmunt Bauman (1989, 171–77), the ultimate challenge for a sociology of morality after the catastrophe of the twentieth century is to account for cultural forces and social facts that may act contrary to their use in moralizing ways: How is it that groups upholding social principles can promote institutions of cruelty? And why do individuals conform to practices that silence the voice of morality, defy social solidarity and neutralize the possibility of critical thought? In answering these questions, today we may have to enlarge Comte's vision of the three "estates" of the positive polity made up of women, workers, and intellectuals to include a fourth estate of relatively autonomous social spheres and civil institutions, including the independent press and the mass media; and perhaps also an emerging fifth estate of relatively marginalized networks of interactive channels and social media that now characterize the digital age. To accomplish this feat of the imagination we will have to think beyond the dualisms of religion and the calculations of science and confront the ineffable realities that unite them.

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Chapter Eight

AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE CURIOUS CASE OF ENGLISH WOMEN

Mary Pickering

In November 1841, John Stuart Mill wrote to Auguste Comte for the first time, expressing his admiration and launching one of the most remarkable exchanges of letters in the nineteenth century. One reason Mill was drawn to Comte was that he believed that positivism could fill the role once played by traditional religion. Yet shortly after their correspondence commenced, Mill suggested to Comte that he did not approve of his public anti-theological stance, which could alienate potential supporters, especially in England, where people feared atheism. Paying him no heed, Comte simply redoubled his attacks on traditional religions. Another source of tension arose soon after this disagreement. Comte insisted on the small size of women's brains, a position that infuriated Mill, who believed in women's equality. Mill's friend Harriet Taylor eventually nudged him into dropping his correspondence with the seeming misogynist (Pickering 1993–2009, I: 522–23, II: 71, 78, 82). And yet four brilliant English women were drawn to Comte's thought: Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, Annie Besant and Beatrice Webb. It was precisely Comte's atheism that spoke to these women, among the most important of the nineteenth century. As a scientific philosophy that maintained a strict morality, positivism helped alleviate their crises of religious faith, especially by appealing to their deep concern with duty, and enhanced their investigations of themselves and society.

Harriet Martineau

Born in 1802 into a middle-class, manufacturing family, Harriet Martineau was given an excellent education by her strict parents, who wanted their children to be able to support themselves but did not give them much emotional warmth (Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 66–67). A sickly person who lacked the senses of smell and taste and lost her hearing at an early age, Martineau embraced their Unitarian religion, which boosted her self-esteem. She developed a strong sense of duty that was marked by Unitarianism's values of personal responsibility and activism and its promotion of moral principles, education and social welfare (Logan 2002, 12. 200; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1998, 24, 30). The sixth of eight children, she was close to her brother, James, who became a Unitarian minister. One of his college friends, who was also a minister, was supposed to marry Harriet, but he died before the marriage date, somewhat to her relief. Her mission

in life clarified soon after. In 1827, she wrote, "My aim is to become a forcible and elegant writer on religious and moral subjects, so as to be useful to refined as well as unenlightened minds. […] To be useful in my day and generation is enough for me" (Martineau 1877 II: 166). A formidable intellectual, she remained unmarried and sought to devote herself to helping others (Logan 2002, 20). The insights she gained as the victim of an oppressive family environment, with her parents wielding power in an authoritarian fashion, made her eager to ensure the "justice due from the stronger to the weaker" (Martineau 1877, I: 16).

Marginalized by her deafness and Unitarian religion, which was still out of the mainstream in nineteenth-century England, Martineau became an acute observer of the social world (Hutcheon 2001, 30–31). In 1821, she started making money by writing for the *Monthly Repository*, a Unitarian journal, to which she eventually contributed over a hundred articles on such varied topics as the need for women's education, the evils of slavery and scientific epistemology. The latter reflected her interest in science, something encouraged by Unitarianism, which prized rationalism and empiricism and believed natural laws regulated the universe and even God himself (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992, 91n7). In 1830, Martineau met the Saint-Simonian Gustave d'Eichthal, who was visiting William Fox, the editor of the *Monthly Repository*. D'Eichthal introduced her to the work of Henri Saint-Simon, and she became enthusiastic about his ideas of progress and history and his approach to building a new society founded on the sciences and industry. Auguste Comte had helped Saint-Simon develop many of these ideas, and d'Eichthal had originally been one of his most fervent disciples. However, Martineau knew nothing of Comte's works. Two years later, she started writing popular fictional tales that showed the basic ideas of political economy; *Illustrations of Political Economy*, finished in 1834, became a bestseller, bringing her financial security and celebrity status. She then wrote several scientific studies of society, novels with middle-class heroines, and reports on her trips to the United States and the Middle East (Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 67–69; Sanders 2003). George Eliot, who was much inspired by her, proclaimed that Martineau was "the only English woman that possesses thoroughly the art of writing" (Haight 1954, 55, II: 32).

Martineau's trip to the Middle East from 1846 to 1847 brought her into contact with other faiths, which made her see Christianity as merely a temporary stage in the history of the mind. It was unable to compete with scientific knowledge in terms of certitude, honesty and effectiveness (Sanders 2003). Science became to her "the only source of, not only enlightenment, but wisdom, goodness and happiness" (Martineau 1877, II: 26). Scientific knowledge could help people change the world and make it more just. As she became increasingly interested in science and the agency it gave to humans, she grew disillusioned with Unitarianism (Hutcheon 2001, 39; Hoecker-Drysdale 2001, 170).

In 1851, Martineau and a young geologist, Henry George Atkinson, published *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, which advocated applying the scientific method to all subjects, separating theology from science and making science the basis of philosophy. "Knowledge is to be sought in the contemplation of things and material laws" (Martineau and Atkinson 1851, 144). Condemning Christian dogmas, myths and superstitions as well as metaphysical speculations, the authors went so far as to maintain that

the mind developed from experiences and did not have immanent categories that were divine in origin; it was purely a material reality. The book was considered a proclamation of Martineau's agnosticism, if not atheism. Mill was right; the public was not ready for such boldness, and she was mocked and shunned for being gullible and godless. James, her favorite brother, wrote a harsh review and never contacted her again (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992, 2, 28, 64–66, 86; Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 68–69, Sanders 1986, 106–7; Webb 1960, 294; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1998, 28).

While involved in this bold work, Martineau became interested in studying Comte after talking about him with an American, who was reading his work while visiting her in Yorkshire in 1850 (Martineau 1877, II: 52, 57). She perused a piece on Comte written by George Henry Lewes, George Eliot's partner. It appeared in Charles Knight's *Weekly Volume* and later became a chapter in Lewes's *Biographical History of Philosophy*. She also read a summary of positive philosophy by Comte's leading French disciple, Emile Littré. It was probably Littré's *De la philosophie positive* of 1845. Martineau read this work in French, which she had learned as a child because her family was proud of its French Huguenot background. Intrigued by these overviews of Comte's philosophy, she bought the *Cours de philosophie positive* in April 1851 (Wheatley 1957, 315; Nevill 1973, 101). Two days after beginning it, she began to "'dream' of translating it" to make its ideas better known in England (Martineau 1877, II: 57). Although she did not approve of Comte's disparaging remarks on women or his notion of a planned hierarchical society, she was able to overlook these problems, much as her acquaintance John Stuart Mill did in the beginning. Positivism was attractive to her because it systematized the important sciences, putting them in a hierarchy, and created a scientific basis for all of knowledge, especially social theory—precisely what she suggested was important in *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 53, 69). She believed Comte's scientific system of knowledge could also guide social reforms. She hailed the *Cours* as "one of the chief honours of the century" (Martineau 1853, I: vi).

Martineau also appreciated positivism for giving her an exclusively scientific framework for understanding the development of the mind, whose operations were the subject of the book she wrote with Atkinson (Webb 1960, 281). Comte's historical law of three stages, the basis of his new science of sociology, extrapolated from the evolution of the individual mind to explain all of social development. She embraced this law, which she used to explain her own evolution from theologian to metaphysician to positivist (Harrison 1896, I: xiii). Comte's law of so-called normal evolution allowed her to think that she was not an anomaly because all people would eventually reject traditional religion.

To defend Comte and show his significance became deeply important to her as he vindicated her trajectory. Revealing the depth of her enthusiasm, she maintained that Comte's ideas had permeated the sciences and that the truths of his philosophy "represented all that is systematic in our knowledge." It was unjust that intellectuals did not acknowledge his importance and influence out of "fear of offending the prejudices of the society in which they live" (Martineau 1853, I: v).

One of her chief aims was to rebuke those who attacked the *Cours* for its anti-religious stance, a problem she understood on a deep level because she too was criticized on this

score due to the book she coauthored with Atkinson. She sympathized with Comte when he repeatedly denied that he was an atheist, a term that tainted his reputation. In the *Cours*, he suggested that atheists were really late-stage, completely negative metaphysicians, trying to determine whether God and first causes exist; they should not be confused with positivists, who focus on how things function, not why (Comte 1975, 2: 394). Similarly, and with as little success, Martineau rebuffed those who sought to demean her by accusing her of atheism. She explained to a friend, "What is knowable about a First Cause is simply this—as any disciple of positive philosophy is fully aware—that our mental constitution compels us to suppose a First Cause, and that that First Cause cannot be the God of theology" (quoted in Wakeman 1877, 45–46). She claimed that because she asserted that a first cause did exist, she could not be considered an atheist, for an atheist denied first causes and thought everything was "made or occasioned by other things that he knows." In other words, an atheist was "one who rests in second causes." (Martineau 1877, II: 404). Comte and Martineau attempted to redefine atheism to escape the stigma.

The main point is that Martineau sought to defend Comte in order to defend herself. She wrote, "As M. Comte treats of theology and metaphysics as destined to pass away, theologians and metaphysicians must necessarily abhor, dread, and despise his work." These critics were both irrational and immoral in her eyes. They bred "low aims," "selfish passions," and "proud ignorance," all of which led to the evils of their times. She and others who had gone beyond theology and metaphysics found the "moral charm" of the *Cours* "as impressive as its intellectual satisfactions." Comte uplifted people by making them recognize that they were part of the universe, instead of its oppressed objects. Martineau wrote that, thanks to Comte:

> We find ourselves living, not under capricious and arbitrary conditions, unconnected with the constitution and movements of the whole, but under great, general, invariable laws, which operate on us as part of the whole. Certainly, I can conceive of no instruction so favourable to aspiration as that which shows us how great are our faculties, how small our knowledge, how sublime the heights which we may hope to attain, and how boundless an infinity may be assumed to spread out beyond.

Grounding people in reality, positive philosophy gave them "sweet serenity, lofty courage, and noble resignation." Because it revealed the possibilities offered by progress, it filled life with "worthy occupations" and raised "human hope and human effort to the highest attainable point." It stimulated an individual's "moral discipline" especially by encouraging "the habit of truth-seeking-and truth-speaking, of true dealing with self and with all things." Once the "natural conscience" was disciplined in this way, all the "moral attributes" were enhanced. Theologians and metaphysicians thus erred in speaking "evil of a philosophy which is too lofty and too simple, too humble and too generous, for the habit of their minds" (Martineau 1853, I: xiii–xv). Martineau's support for positivism as not only scientifically superior but morally admirable could not have been more effusive.

Besides justifying her rejection of the Unitarianism in which she was raised, Comte reinforced her sense of duty to be useful to society and her calling as a writer devoted to the common good (Martineau 1877, II: 59; 1853, I: vii; Yates 1985, 15;

Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1998, 26; Sanders 2003). As revealed in her popular tales illustrating the principles of political economy, Martineau imagined herself to be an educator able to reach the common people who, she imagined, yearned for and needed instruction in all types of science especially because they suffered from "reckless" doubts, "a vast amount of wandering," "unsound speculation," and "moral uncertainty and depression" stemming from the "social turmoil" of the era. Comte's work represented to her "unquestionably the greatest single effort that has been made to obviate" this dangerous and painful skepticism. With its principle that knowledge is certain if it is limited to phenomena that can be observed, the *Cours* could provide a "rallying-point" for people's "scattered speculations," a solid basis for their intellectual and moral convictions and a "principle of action" (Martineau, 1853, I: vii–ix; Martineau 1877, II: 73).

Martineau believed workers would study the *Cours*, but in its present six-volume state, it was too wordy and boring to read in any language. She figured that if she could shorten it, translate it into simple English, and sell it at an inexpensive price, she could successfully transmit the gospel of science to the lower classes (Martineau 1877, II: 873; Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 53, 65). Thanks to positivism, the minds of the people and society in general would evolve to a higher level. In short, in Martineau's eyes the *Cours* held the key to intellectual, social and moral progress (Webb 1960, 305, 307; Arbuckle 1994, 217). It was her duty to promulgate its principles to save society.

It took her sixteen months to reduce the *Cours* from six to two volumes and to translate it in a free style, not going word by word but instead setting down Comte's "meaning in the briefest and simplest way" possible (Martineau 1877, II: 72). She eliminated extraneous and redundant material and omitted sections that a scientist friend, John Pringle Nichol, thought weak. Whereas the original *Cours* was 4,712 pages, her version was 1,041 pages plus a preface of 15 pages.

In her *Autobiography*, Martineau described at length this exhausting "labour of love" and the "rapture" that she felt within her. While writing "many" passages, she felt "tears falling into [… her] lap." She wrote,

> I often said […] in the course of it, that I should never enjoy anything so much again. And I believe that if I were now to live and work for twenty years, I could never enjoy anything more. The vast range of knowledge, through which one is carried so easily, is a prodigious treat; and yet more, the clear enunciation, and incessant application of principles […] I became 'strengthened, established, settled' on many a great point; I learned much that I should never otherwise have known, […] and the subdued enthusiasm of my author, his philosophical sensibility, and honest earnestness, and evident enjoyment of his own wide range of views and deep human sympathy, kept the mind of his pupil in a perpetual and delightful glow. (Martineau 1877, II: 71–72, 90)

In effect, Martineau had an emotional conversion experience, something missing in her rational, Unitarian upbringing. As Lesa Scholl remarks, Comte took on the role of "religious guru," and Martineau was his "religious devotee" (Scholl 2011, 52). In her *Autobiography*, Martineau alluded to the sacred nature of their relationship: "After all deductions made, on the score of his faults as a teacher, and my weakness as a learner, the relation was a blessed

one" (Martineau 1877, II: 72). References to discipleship, revival, "rapture" and enthusiasm were more common among fervent Evangelicals than Unitarians (Scholl 2011, 53).

Learning of the imminent publication of the translation of the *Cours* in late July 1853, Comte was delighted to hear that the work was being done by a "celebrated woman whose heart does not stand in contrast to her mind" (Comte 1973, 1990, VII: 82). He knew of Martineau's *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* and praised her for daring to reject "expressly" belief in God in England, "the very center of the system of hypocrisy." He was happy to have another person on his side in this war against traditional religion. In effect, he welcomed her as an atheist despite his public claims not to embrace this position. To be endorsed by a woman with a "great reputation" would surely validate his work, especially with the female sex, which appeared to be the most religious (Comte 1973, 1990, VII: 121)

Martineau's abridgment and translation, called *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, was published in two volumes in early November 1853. She was sufficiently well regarded that the volumes were published by John Chapman, the famous owner and editor of the *Westminster Review*. He persuaded a friend, Edward Lombe, to contribute five hundred pounds to make sure that the price of the volumes was "extremely cheap" in order to fulfill Martineau's dream of propagating positivism among the working classes (Martineau to Comte, January 16, 1854, Archives of the Maison d'Auguste Comte).

Martineau sent the two volumes to Comte in December 1853 without any note whatsoever. Indeed, what is striking is how much distance she kept between herself and him, despite her enthusiasm for his work. She never contacted him while doing the revisions to seek his permission or advice. She wrote to him for the first time in January 1854 only after he thanked her for the books. She told him that she would share the profits with him. Then she wrote him a very short letter in April, acknowledging the receipt of three volumes of the *Système de politique positive* and his *Catéchisme positiviste* and keeping him up-to-date on the sales and reviews of her translation. These were the only two letters that she wrote to him. Never responding to his third letter of April 6, 1854, she resisted Comte's suggestions for further collaboration. Perhaps she did not seek much contact with him because rumors circulated that he was dangerous, insane and marginalized in France (Martineau 1877, II:420).

However, given her boldness in embracing unpopular causes, it seems more likely that Martineau disapproved of the direction Comte's thought was taking. In the preface to her translation, she did not allude to any disagreements because she thought it would be inappropriate to do so in a work that was designed to "present M. Comte's first great work in a useful form for English study." She warned her readers, however, "not to mistake my silence for assent" (Martineau 1853, I: xi). Discerning readers noted, however, some problems. In his introduction to the 1896 edition of Martineau's translation, the positivist Frederic Harrison commented on the fact that Martineau did not include the last ten pages of the sixth volume, where Comte discussed the religious characteristics of the future positivist society (Wright 1986, 66). In her translation, she seemed loathe to use such expressions as a new "spiritual association" or "spiritual power" (Comte 1975, II: 782; Martineau 1853, II: 467, 557). She preferred the phrases "speculative authority" or "theoretical authority." In addition, she left out Comte's reference to the Positive Church in

Lesson 57 of the *Cours* (Comte 1975, II: 696; Martineau 1853, II: 495, 532–44). Harrison was also dismayed that Martineau did not mention the *Système*, several volumes of which had already been published by 1853 (Harrison 1896, I:xvi-xvii). This work outlined the Religion of Humanity. However, as Susan Hoecker-Drysdale pointed out, Martineau believed "that what was needed was not a positivist 'religion of humanity' but a humane, rational, secular philosophy of living" (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992, 168). Omitting the parts of the *Cours* that anticipated the themes of the *Système*, Martineau contributed to the theory that there was a distinct break in Comte's trajectory, that is, that he was a scientific philosopher in the beginning of his life and a prophet ready to create a new formal religion replete with a clerical bureaucracy at the end. Martineau did not want anything to do with the latter. In general, Comte's stress on a hierarchical, inegalitarian society with central planning and an authoritarian government, and his patriarchal attitude toward women dampened her enthusiasm; she believed in the value of positive philosophy and indeed boasted about being a "positive philosopher" but did not wish to be a slavish follower of Comte's political, social and religious ideology (Harriet Martineau to Chapman, July 22, 1857, MS, Eng.Lett d2, f. 199v, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; Pichanick 1986, 195; Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 64–65; Hoecker-Drysdale 2001, 185–89). Indeed, one reason she may have done a "free translation" of the *Cours* rather than a word-by-word translation was to assert her own independence in shaping this text. She was more than a passive disciple; she was deciding what to keep and what to omit, thereby tailoring the French text to the English public (Scholl 2010, 97).

Comte was not attuned to these nuances of her allegiance. Because he refused in general to read much of anything in order to preserve his sanity and originality, he perused only her preface, the table of contents, and a few sections. That was enough for him to conclude that she had done an excellent job. In the three letters that Comte wrote to her in total, he expressed his appreciation for her "wisdom" and help in promoting his ideas. Eager like her to spread scientific knowledge among all classes, he thanked her for sparing people in the future from the "painful study" of the original *Cours*, which henceforth should be read only by specialists (Comte 1973, 90, VII: 158–59). He liked her work to such a great extent that he substituted it for his original *Cours* in the second version of the Positivist Library of 150 great books (Comte 1929, IV: 561).

Martineau was very gratified by all the compliments Comte showered upon her. On January 16, 1854, she wrote, "Your approbation now completes my happiness, and confirms my decision that the last year was the happiest of my life." She agreed with his hope that positivism would provide the common people with a new worldview. She told him.

> My hope is in the educated and thinking portion of the working classes, who, released from theological bonds, are anxiously sounding for some anchorage of principle, and are, while engaged in the search, occupying themselves with physical science in a desultory manner. You and I may live to see the eagerness and joy with which that class of men will accept our philosophy and repose upon it their perplexed minds and worn hearts. (Martineau, Archives of the Maison d'Auguste Comte)

Reviews of Martineau's book appeared in a variety of journals in Great Britain and the United States. Some reviewers praised her for making Comte an eminent thinker; others criticized her book for its authoritarianism, scientific errors and atheism (Pickering 1993, 2009, II: 150–53). Disappointed that the reviews were not more positive, Martineau complained that few people seemed to understand the meaning of Comte's great work. She also bristled at reviewers who assumed that because she no longer was a theological dreamer, she must be immoral. This assumption angered her, considering all the "pious frauds" and "open lying" that marked the religious world (Martineau to Comte, January 16, 1854, Archives of the Maison d'Auguste Comte). On May 10, 1856, she wrote a letter to her friend Maria Chapman, in which she defended herself against those who accused her of being a religious skeptic, lost in the darkness of doubt:

> All this shows so entire an unacquaintance with even the first principles and main characteristics of positive philosophy as surprises me a good deal, after the progress which I have hoped and supposed it was making in our country. By positive philosophy I mean not any particular scheme propounded by any one author but the philosophy of fact. [… P]ositive philosophy is at the opposite pole to scepticism, […] it issues in the most affirmative (not dogmatical) faith in the world, and excludes unbelief as absolutely as mathematical principles do; […] there is no 'darkness' in it, but all clear light, up to the well-defined line which separates knowledge from ignorance.

Proclaiming her secular faith, she emphasized that positive philosophy was "the brightest, clearest, strongest, and only irrefragable state of conviction that the human mind has ever attained" (Martineau 1877, II: 435–36). Resentful of the poor reviews, which seemed to dampen sales, she wrote eloquently to Comte in her second and last letter of April 1, 1854,

> It is the men who do not write that are your true disciples. The book is read; and it must be by such. Down in that lowly valley, where human life goes on under the feet of the proud, the seed is sown and will flourish. You and I shall never see the gathering of the harvest, except with the eye of faith: but I am sure that is all that we desire. (Martineau, Archives of the Maison d'Auguste Comte)

In 1874, hearing that her book was going out of print, she insisted that her translation be reprinted so that it could be "at the call of the working classes" for "generations to come" (Sanders 1990, 233).

   In considering her life's work in her *Autobiography*, Martineau presented her translation of the *Cours* as the best indication of her influence (Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 53). Similarly, Comte thought Martineau's name would be forever inseparable from his own (Comte 1973, 90, VII: 159). Both were correct. By translating the book that established positivism and sociology, she helped spread his ideas; her gift as a translator and abridger of a book that was otherwise fairly unreadable bolstered her reputation. In fact, as her fame as a writer decreased after her death, she became chiefly remembered until recently for her work as Comte's translator.

Martineau also believed *The Positive Philosophy* gave her life a certain direction (Hoecker-Drysdale 2000, 53). It reinforced her self-confidence and her desire to be an investigator, recording developments around her in an empirical, objective fashion. Less than two years after its publication, Martineau hurriedly wrote her multi-volume *Autobiography* because she thought she had a terminal illness and felt she had a "duty" to record her "own experience" (Martineau 1877, I: 1). She presented herself as an example to instruct others on how to live. Her *Autobiography* related a series of conversions, fleshing out one individual's experience of the Comtean three stages of history, which provided the framework. She used herself to investigate the evolution of human consciousness just as Comte did in his preface to the sixth volume of the *Cours*. As Valerie Sanders points out, Martineau ended the book as a proud "rationalist and unbeliever," whose creed was simply what she called "the science of human nature" (Sanders 2004). At the same time, one cannot help but be struck by Martineau's streak of independence, that is, her desire to show she was not a simple Comtist; in a sense she responded to Comte's misogyny by daring to write an account of a successful, happy, unmarried female intellectual and did so by using a traditional male form, the autobiography.

Besides investigating herself, Martineau continued to inquire into the nature of society. Before her death in 1876, she wrote in total 70 volumes, including opinion pieces, commentaries, editorials and other articles on India, the American Civil War, public health, social conditions in England and economics. Her main goal was to examine how morals influenced social behavior and how people shared a certain understanding that brought them together, certainly topics that Comte would have endorsed. Some scholars have argued that because she lived in a patriarchal society that did not recognize women's scholarship, her contributions have been neglected, although more contemporaries read her works, which were published often in periodicals, than Comte's more difficult tomes. Only recently have scholars acknowledged that she did more than translate Comte, and in truth influenced the developing science of society (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992, 1–2, 164–70). In most recent surveys of classic sociologists, Martineau has earned a chapter all to herself. Indeed, she is now considered the "first woman sociologist" (Rossi 1973, 118).

George Eliot

Martineau's contemporary, George Eliot—pen name for Mary Anne Evans—was born in 1819. Her middle-class parents were members of the Church of England. Like Martineau's, her family gave her an excellent education, particularly because she showed intellectual promise. One of her teachers at the boarding school she attended from 1828 to 1832 was a fervent Evangelical who exerted a significant influence on her. Eliot herself became an enthusiastic Evangelical in 1834. Anglican Evangelicals were interested in social reform and took the Bible literally. Like Martineau, Eliot went through an intense religious phase, going so far as to adopt an ascetic life style akin to severe Calvinism.

Yet in 1841, shortly after her family moved from Warwickshire to Coventry, she became acquainted with a radical freethinker and his wife, who gave her readings that made her doubt the Bible. By 1842 she rejected the Christian faith altogether, though her Evangelical concern with social duties remained with her for life. In 1846, she translated

from the German David Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, whose devastating critique of the New Testament became very influential. After her last remaining parent died in 1849, Eliot traveled to the Continent, where she read voraciously and studied the sciences, a subject that always intrigued her. It was at this time that she read the *Cours* for the first time (Nestor 2002, 2–3; Henry 2008, 1–4, 18; Hesse 1995, 25–31; Cunningham 2000, 102–4) Writing in Paris on 24 October 1849, she told her freethinker friends about the *vérités positives* she wished to impart to them (Haight 1954, 55, I: 316). In 1851, she moved to London to board with John Chapman, a friend of one her freethinker colleagues. He was the publisher of her translation of Strauss, Martineau's translation of the *Cours* and Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*, which borrowed from Comte's approach to sociology, though Spencer denied it. Eliot became editor of Chapman's journal, *The Westminster Review*, and met Martineau and Spencer as well as Mill, a writer for the journal. Eliot stayed with Martineau for a few days in 1852, while she was translating the *Cours*, and found her "charming" (Haight 1954, 55, II:62). Eliot admired Martineau's translation of the *Cours*, made her a trustee of a fund to promote Comte's ideas, and later used her as a model for Dorothea, the central character in *Middlemarch* (Logan 2002, 200). Eliot became close to Spencer. He introduced her to George Henry Lewes, who had written about Comte in his *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845–46). Lewes's *Comte's Philosophy of Sciences* came out in 1853, around the same time as Martineau's translation of the *Cours*. Lewes gave Eliot a copy of his book, which summarized positivism, in October 1853 (Ashton 1996, 105). She and Lewes became a couple around this time and lived together until his death. Her position as a consort to a married man was as unusual as Martineau's spinsterhood. Unfortunately, Martineau strongly disapproved of their relationship, making it hard for the two women to be close friends.

It is evident that, throughout her life, Eliot showed a great interest in positivism. She reread the *Cours* in 1861. She agreed with a friend that positivism may be "one-sided," but she still considered Comte "a great thinker," one who "ought to be treated with reverence by all smaller fry" (Haight 1954, 55, III: 438–39). Between 1863 and 1866, there are references in her letters to the *Système*, which she was slowly reading, often with Lewes next to her. They enjoyed "interrupting each other continually with questions and remarks" (Haight 1954, 55, IV: 333). In 1865, they eagerly visited Comte's apartment at 10 rue Monsieur le Prince. She wrote to a friend, "I think the most interesting sight we saw [in Paris] was Comte's dwelling. Such places, that knew the great dead, always move me deeply; and I had an unexpected sight of interest in the photograph [of Comte] taken at the very last [moment]" (Haight 1954, 55, IV: 176–77). The next year, she read Comte's *Synthèse subjective*, which covered his philosophy of mathematics (Myers 1984, 252n17). Only someone very interested in positivism would read this difficult work.

Positivism was a frequent topic of conversation in her circles, for Eliot was friends with the leading positivists in London. In 1859, she and Lewes became neighbors of Richard and Maria Congreve in the Wandsworth district of the city. That very same year, Richard launched the Religion of Humanity in England, and Eliot went often to hear him lecture on Comte. The year before, he had translated Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste*, a work that Eliot closely annotated and shared with her friends. Eliot became very close to Maria Congreve, Richard's positivist wife. He introduced Eliot to three

other positivists, who had been his students at Wadham College, Oxford, and helped disseminate positivism: John Henry Bridges, Edward Beesley and Frederic Harrison. Eliot became especially friendly with Harrison, who soon afterwards set up a different branch of the Positivist Church (Congreve's Church of Humanity was on Chapel Street; Harrison's was in Newton Hall). She gave money to support both his and Congreve's organizations but, chiefly on aesthetic grounds, did not accede to his repeated requests to write a novel or poem that illustrated positivism (Haight VII: 260; Collins 2010, 54; Hesse 1995, 55; Ashton 1996, 287, 362). In addition, she was a friend of Francis Otter, an Oxford mathematics professor who contributed to Comte's upkeep, and of Godfrey and Vernon Lushington, who helped found the London Positivist Society along with Congreve in 1867 (Pickering 1993, 2009, III: 430; Wright 1986, 199; David C. Taylor, personal communication, December 12, 2014). All in all, she was friends with almost a dozen people deeply interested in Comte.

Yet the extent to which Eliot was a positivist is very controversial. Benjamin Jowett, the famous Oxford professor, found Comte's idea of a religion without a god contemptible and wrote to a friend in 1881 that George Eliot "told me that she was never a Comtist" (Collins 2010, 233). W. M. Simon, who wrote the only book surveying Comte's influence in the nineteenth century, claimed to find only a dozen passages in "The Spanish Gypsy" and *Daniel Deronda* that showed any hint of positivism (Simon 1963, 210). Gordon Haight, her main biographer and the editor of her letters, wrote with some condescension that "the extent of George Eliot's concern with Positivism has been greatly exaggerated. Most of her references to it occur in her letters to Mrs. Congreve, which must be read in the light of the strong emotional involvement between them" (Haight 1968, 301). So their strong friendship led the weak Eliot to exaggerate her interest in positivism? This argument makes no sense. Indeed, many scholars have found significant references to positivism in Eliot's works, and they number Comte among the people who most influenced her; others include Feuerbach, Lewes, Darwin, Spencer and Alexander Bain. In his study of Eliot, William Myers maintained that Comte was a "major presence in her work." He bluntly stated, "George Eliot was a Positivist" (Myers 1984, 11, 71). David Maria Hesse wrote a four-hundred-page tome, tracing Comte's impact on Eliot and on each of her novels. He made the interesting argument that because Comte usually cuts a ridiculous figure, Eliot herself loses value if it can be shown that he influenced her. So, his impact on her may be greater than Eliot scholars wish to acknowledge (Hesse 1995, 59). After all, she wrote in 1867, "My gratitude increases continually for the illumination Comte has contributed to my life" (Haight 1954, 55, IV: 333).

It seems clear that Eliot remained a religious soul, deeply affected by Comte's worldview. Like Martineau, she felt uncomfortable with atheism and approved of Comte's position on First Causes: "There is no denial of an unknown cause, but only a denial that such a conception is the proper basis of a practical religion." His anti-religious stance might provoke unease, but she insisted that it was "pre-eminently desirable that we should learn not to make our personal comfort a standard of truth" (Haight 1954, 55, IV: 367). Like Martineau, she disliked skepticism and assumed their contemporaries suffered from the vacuum of unbelief—a vacuum that positivism could fill. In 1859, she wrote to a friend that after her father died, that is, when she was reading Comte's

early work, she was very antagonistic to any religious belief, but now after ten years of struggle, she was sympathetic to "any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves" (Haight 1954, 55, III: 231). Whereas Martineau most appreciated the intellectual foundation for moral convictions that positivism provided and the certainties that its scientific method generated, Eliot seemed more taken by the support Comte gave to morality through his new secular religion, something that did not greatly attract Martineau. Even Simon admits that Eliot was sympathetic to Comte's Religion of Humanity for twenty years (Simon 1963, 212). Haight also said, "GE, having long outgrown the crude antagonism of Strauss and Feuerbach, yearned for some rational faith to replace the one she had lost. […] the Religion of Humanity appealed strongly to her feelings" (Haight 1954, 55, 1: lxii). Indeed, she referred to Comte's *Système*, which outlined the Religion, with the same enthusiasm that Martineau expressed while translating the *Cours*. While on vacation in Biarritz in 1867, Eliot read volume four every morning with Lewes: "That morning study keeps me in a state of enthusiasm through the day–a moral glow" (Haight 1954, 55, IV: 333). She offered to help pay for its translation into English, just as she had agreed to help financially with Martineau's translation of the *Cours*. There was no decrease of her interest in Comte, as Simon alleges (Simon 1963, 212). In late 1880, a few months before she passed away, she noted in her diary that she read Bridge's new English translation of the *Système* aloud to her American husband, whom she married after Lewes's death in 1878 (Haight 1954, 55, VII: 36)

What she appreciated about Comte's religion was its emphasis on everyone's duty to humanity, that is, to society, which was in keeping with her previous Evangelical faith (Hesse 1995, 46). She wrote, "My rooted conviction is, that the immediate object and the proper sphere of all our highest emotions are our struggling fellow-men and this earthly existence" (Haight 1954, 55, III: 231). People's duties consisted of helping these fellow men and women and improving life on this earth; that was true progress. Though Jowett downplayed her Comtism, she told him that "she acknowledged a debt to him [Comte]" and "wanted to have an Ethical system founded upon Altruism," in which people acted in accordance with their "better feelings towards others" (Collins 2010, 168). According to Hesse, she was constantly investigating the problem of the individual's relationship to society. In her novels, the protagonist, usually a female, becomes unhappy and alienated from those around her and seeks change. How she will adapt to the needs of society, that is, to people's demands, and attain maturity makes up the drama of the book (Hesse 1995, 15). This structure is very much in keeping with Comte's dictum that society has to come before the individual and that people had to learn to submit to what they could not change, that is, to the natural and social environment around them. Both she and Comte were by nature moralists, wedded to the social order. Both appreciated the discipline and rituals of religion for enhancing people's understanding of their duties to others, that is, social solidarity (Myers 1984, 26).

Eliot also fully embraced Comte's notion that one could achieve immortality by making contributions to society, in both minor and grand ways, and thereby live in the memory of posterity. She thought that Comte's notion of praying to honor the dead was a

fine way to concentrate the mind (Collins 2010, 92). Like him, she believed the past governed the present. This sentiment of social continuity can be seen in her poem written in 1867: "O May I Join the Choir Invisible," which Congreve later made a part of the positivist liturgy:

> O may I join the choir invisible
> Of those immortal dead who live again
> In minds made better by their presence: live
> In pulses stirred to generosity,
> In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
> For miserable aims that end with self […]?

In her opinion, it was best to live appropriately to achieve immortality in the imaginations of others, who would themselves be improved by such memories. Tradition and veneration for the past were critical (Hesse 1995, 403; Ashton 1996, 362)

In addition, Eliot embraced Comte's interest in science and sociology and his concept of the artist. Like Comte, she believed that novelists and poets had to be teachers with a moral mission; they had to counter individuals' isolation and egoism and to enlarge their sympathies (Hesse 1995, 22). Eliot asserted that "the higher moral tendencies," which were innate and not God-given, were "yet in their germ," and she wanted her readers to grow morally (Haight 1954 55, II: 85; Hesse 1995, 122, 404). Novelists could help. In their own way, her novels are oeuvres of social investigation. She wrote, "My writing is simply a set of experiments in life" (Haight 1954, 55, VI: 216). Committed to improving human existence on this earth, she sought to depict society in a realistic manner, an endeavor that depended on scientific observation and research and appealed to people's reason and notion of the concrete. She wished to be a realist, a social investigator as much as Martineau did. It was part of their public duty. She explored the whole swath of society in *Middlemarch*, her masterpiece, which featured workers, farmers, shopkeepers, professional men and manufacturers. The point of these descriptions was to encourage people to feel sympathy for others and to develop their sense of good and evil, a goal Comte would have applauded. She wrote, "A picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment" (Eliot 1883, 144). Recognizing the needs of the "other" and suffering along with him or her led to the development not only of the sympathies but of social harmony. Another of her objectives was to teach. She was not as much as a scientific popularizer as Martineau, but she nevertheless contributed much to the spread of scientific thinking in the nineteenth century by having characters in her novels refer to scientific ideas (Nestor 2002, 3–5, 13). Discussing the interests of Lydgate, the doctor in *Middlemarch*, gave Eliot the opportunity to explain at length the tissue theory of Marie-François-Xavier Bichat, whom Comte considered one of the founders of modern science (Eliot 1964, 146–47). Eliot showed great familiarity with Comte's views of science and, like Martineau, supported his hierarchy of the sciences (Scott 1972, 60).

Written in the early 1860s, *Romola* was in many ways the novel most deeply affected by positivism. While writing it, Eliot was rereading the *Cours*, enjoying the "luminous ideas" in the chapters on history (Haight 1954 55, III: 438). Like Comte, she wanted to show respect for the past, especially because it always shaped and dominated the present (Hesse 1995, 403). *Romola* reflects Eliot's interest in history. It is telling that the only time Eliot ventured outside of England in any of her novels was in this one. The setting is fifteenth-century Italy. Italy fascinated Comte, who thought the Italian city-state represented the ideal republic, Italian was the most expressive language, Dante and Alessandro Manzoni were among the West's greatest writers and the Italian people, with their emotional warmth, were ripe for conversion to positivism (Pickering 1993, 2009, II: 538). As a good social scientist, Eliot studied Florentine history, speech and fashion at the British Museum and in Florence itself. The book is full of historical details relating to the Medici and Savonarola.

The main fictional figure is Romola, a beautiful young woman who objects to her erudite father's disparaging remarks about her intellect. Eliot was rebuffing Comte's misogyny by showing that a well-educated, inquisitive woman in the fifteenth century could think and act independently and contribute to history (Paxton 1991, 123–24). She was proud of Romola, who in truth had many of her own characteristics. When Eliot later gave money to help found Girton College at Cambridge in 1869, she referred to herself as the "Author of *Romola*" (De Jong 1984, 81, 85)

Romola develops in the novel along Comtean lines. Like Martineau, Eliot was taken with Comte's three-stage version of history in terms of both social and individual development. As one critic says, "Romola embodies, in her personal development, the cultural development of mankind from paganism via monotheism (of sorts) to positivism" (Hesse 1995, 282). A Renaissance scholar, her father (who is blind) raises her in the classics and teaches her to ignore the Church. He belongs to the pagan world. In keeping with Comte's denunciation of the "pedantocracy," he is also too focused on his studies and tends to be hard and proud. Her brother rebels and seeks a vocation in the Catholic Church. Yet he becomes as absolutist in his beliefs as his father. After losing her brother, Romola comes under the spell of Savonarola and considers Christianity a good alternative to Stoicism (Myers 1984, 40; Nestor 2002, 96; Hesse 1995, 287). Listening to him lecture on the French conquest of Florence, she grows interested in public affairs and becomes more integrated into contemporary society, whereas before she was secluded in her home with her blind father. This integration into society reflects her moral development; an individual, according to Comte, begins life as an egoist and has to learn to develop sympathy. A little later her father dies, and her husband Tito sells the scholar's library, contrary to his wishes. Romola becomes alienated from Tito. A wandering Greek, he is another representative of the pagan world and of people who live solely for their own self-interest. Due to her estrangement from Tito, the death of her father, and the departure of her brother, Romola now has no family at all. She flees Florence, but Savonarola chastises her, reminding her of the necessity of submitting to moral laws, of seeing herself as part of a larger social fabric, the one in which she was born, and of the importance of fulfilling her "duties" to her fellow people, the Florentines, who suffer in poverty and hunger. "Man cannot choose his duties," he reminds her (Eliot 1996,

357, 359). These notions of submission and doing one's duties are redolent of Comte's philosophy (Myers 1984, 23). Romola returns to Florence, aware that she must be more involved in society and more trusting of others (Hesse 1995, 292).

Eventually, as she has a questioning mind, Romola recoils at Savonarola's fanaticism and his over-involvement in politics, which leads him to execute her aristocratic godfather unjustly for treason. Savonarola's belief in "abstract absolute forces" and in his party's cause seems metaphysical and destructive (Uglow 2002). Eliot suggests that party politics and the involvement of religious figures in politics lead to destruction, to social disharmony—a very Comte-like conclusion. In her mind, it is better for individuals to do good and work to improve society rather than expect politicians to do so (Collins 2010, 65). As Nancy Paxton points out, Romola distances herself from Savonarola because she also does not wish to be under the authority of a controlling man, whether it be her father, Tito, or a religious prophet; her rebellion is a reference to Eliot's wish not to become a completely devoted follower of Comte, Congreve, Harrison or any male thinker (Paxton 1991, 124).

After her godfather's death and her shock at learning that Tito has had two children with a peasant woman, Romola devotes herself to caring for people suffering in a nearby plague-stricken village. By helping outcasts and fulfilling her duty to Humanity, she learns the importance of social sympathies and is in a sense reborn. She becomes a "post-Christian philanthropist," exuding love, duty and sympathy, as Valentine Cunningham characterizes Dorothea in the final pages of *Middlemarch* (Cunningham 2000, 104). In the end, Romola returns to Florence, and when Tito is murdered, she supports his mistress and her children.

In short, thanks to the moral choices that Tito and Romola have made, the former becomes the epitome of egoism, while the latter becomes the ultimate practical altruist, interested in improving human conditions and taking responsibility for others. She is the true moral force in the novel, exemplifying Comte's theory that women, being more emotional, are responsible for social values and social harmony (Hesse 1995, 307; Uglow 2002; Myers 1984, 49; de Jong, 1984, 76). Just as Martineau used a typically male genre, the autobiography, to show the evolution of the individual to a positivist state, Eliot employed the male Bildungsroman to the same effect (de Jong 1984, 76). Martineau's ideal person is closer to that of a scientific thinker or philosopher, whereas Eliot's is more of an altruist, a universal citizen responsible for humanity. Eliot goes beyond Comte in giving women a broader field, all of society, in which to act as moral agent rather than simply within the family. *Middlemarch* and *Romola* are far from celebrations of domesticity; both Dorothea and Romola are disillusioned with their husbands. They gain more authority and independence as widows, something anathema to Comte, who believed in "eternal widowhood," that is, that widows should never remarry and should remain constant to the memories of their dead husbands. Positivists were aghast when Eliot herself married after Lewes's death (Wright 1986, 177).

Annie Besant

Like Martineau and Eliot, Annie Besant (née Wood) chose different aspects of Comte's philosophy to inform her ongoing crisis of faith. Born in 1847 in London to middle-class parents of Irish descent, she received a solid education, as did Martineau and Eliot. Just as Eliot was influenced by an early Evangelical teacher, so was Besant. She became intensely religious under the tutelage of the Evangelical, "somewhat Calvinist" Ellen Marryat, with whom she lived for seven years (Besterman 1934, 1, 13). Marryat imparted to her a sense of "duty toward others less fortunate than herself," which was a "leading tenet of the Evangelicals." Annie's Irish mother and a tour of Catholic churches on the Continent made her interested in more emotional forms of religion. She enjoyed reading about the saints, martyrs and Church Fathers. All of these impulses led her to practice religion with enthusiasm, fasting, flagellating herself, and looking forward to weekly communion (Besterman 1934, 16). However, although close to converting to Roman Catholicism, she stayed within the Anglican Church.

Just as Martineau was engaged early on to a minister, so was Besant. Like Martineau and Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, she hoped to fulfill her "growing desire for usefulness" (Besant 1939, 53). When she was just twenty, the Anglican clergyman, Frank Besant, became her husband, but he was cruel and abusive. Around 1871, her daughter became deathly ill, and she began to lose her faith, questioning why God would make her child suffer for no reason. Her own unhappy marriage and the depressing condition of workers, which a Chartist lawyer pointed out to her, added to her doubts about divine justice (Taylor 1992, 22, 36).

Like Eliot, she came into contact with freethinkers. Charles Voysey, a former Anglican minister who founded the Theistic Society, suggested she read *Discourse on Religion* by Theodore Parker, the American Unitarian theologian and Transcendentalist (Nethercot 1960, 46). Published in 1842, it was the first English language book deeply influenced by Comte. Parker wrote, "One of the most remarkable Atheists of the present day is M. Comte, author of the valuable and sometimes profound work Cours de Philosophie positive[. …] He glories in the name [atheist], but in many places gives evidence of the religious element existing in him, in no small power" (Parker 1859 31n2). Parker covered Comte's ideas about the innateness of the religious impulse and the history of religion (especially the fetishist, polytheist and monotheist phases). Shortly after reading this work, Besant secretly began to write pamphlets denying the divinity of Christ. Yet she was still a theist. Finally. in 1873, her deepening crisis of faith made her separate from her husband, who had beaten her and could not tolerate her religious doubts. After years of painful custody battles, she sadly gave up on motherhood for the sake of her children's emotional health (Williams 1931, 37, 106; MacKay 2002, 101). A young woman separated from her husband and children, living on her own, and bereft of material wealth was most unusual, especially as she veered toward atheism, which suggested that she was without moral substance. Society wanted nothing to do with a woman who abandoned her husband and the church (Taylor 1992, 331; Besant 1939 118). She resembled Martineau and Eliot in being on the outskirts of conventional society.

Shortly after this separation from her husband, Besant read Mill, Darwin, Dean Mansel, Spinoza and Comte. She examined the *Cours* very carefully and wrote, "I recognised the limitations of human intelligence and its incapacity for understanding the nature of God." Having already abandoned prayer as "a blasphemous absurdity," she dropped her remaining theistic beliefs on both moral and intellectual grounds. She then read more "Comtist" publications as she wrote a tract questioning God's existence (Besant 1993, 113, 114). While searching for similar literature at a radical bookstore, she came across a copy of the *National Reformer*, the periodical connected with the National Secular Society, which was devoted to Free Thought. She read an article on this organization and decided to join in 1874. She became close to its head, Charles Bradlaugh, an atheist and social reformer. Besant was a bit wary at first because she, like Mill, Martineau and Eliot, did not like the label "atheist." Bradlaugh, using a Comte-like argument, explained that an atheist does not deny or confirm God's existence because there is no evidence either way. God is an unknowable entity. An atheist simply lives without a conception of God. She then "gloried in the name" atheist, shunning the notion of an "Almighty" who was indifferent to injustice and inequality, and proclaimed her belief in "Man" and his "remoulding energy." She explained the happiness her new position brought her: "Amid outer storm and turmoil and conflict, I found it satisfied my intellect, while lofty ideals of morality fed my emotions" (Besant 1939, 126). Soon, she was at working writing atheistic essays and giving public speeches. Shining as an orator, Besant eventually became vice-president of the National Secular Society. She also joined the staff of *The National Reformer* and wrote many articles for it. Through her activities, she came to know the atheistic founder of the Secularist movement, George Holyoake, who was friendly with Lewes and Martineau. Like them, he was profoundly influenced by Comte, whom he had met in Paris. The Secularists met in a place whose name Comte would have applauded: The Hall of Science. Besant was so taken by the sciences that she matriculated at the University of London to get a Bachelor of Science degree in 1879, a year after it opened its doors to women (Oppenheim 1989, 39; Besant 2009a, 152–56).

Comte's emphasis on the positive method clearly influenced Besant, who as a young woman yearned for scientific proofs and evidence for her beliefs and noticed inconsistencies in the Bible years before her daughter's illness led to her crisis of faith. Her disillusionment with the Bible and Christ's divinity were similar to Eliot's. This scientific part of positivism was crucial to discredit Christianity and make room for other worldviews. According to Catherine Wessinger, Comte's Religion of Humanity also had a "lifelong influence" on her when she was searching for a new faith (Wessinger 1988, 127, 308). Besant even wrote a *Secular Song and Hymn Book*. She was much more taken with both parts of Comte's oeuvre than were Martineau, who preferred the first, and Eliot, who was enthusiastic especially about the second.

Besant paid tribute to Comte in a series of articles that she wrote on his life and thought for the *National Reformer* in 1875. Later that year, the articles were published as a short book, *Auguste Comte: His Philosophy, His Religion and His Sociology*. Relying on Mill's *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, Littré's biography of Comte, and Lewes's and Comte's own books, she presented him as a brave champion of free thought and an opponent of all arbitrary authority. Lashing out at his critics, she denied that he was "'a crazy genius'" or

a "cold-hearted and selfish man" (Besant 2009b, 1, 11). She implied that secularism and virtuous behavior could go hand in hand. This concern with showing that one could be moral without believing in God was something she shared with Martineau and Eliot. In words they could have used, Besant wrote in her *Autobiography*, "the total loss of all faith in a righteous God only made me more strenuously assertive of the binding nature of duty and the overwhelming importance of conduct." As she cared so much about improving the world and elevating "humanity," "a lofty system of ethics was of even more importance than a logical, intellectual conception of the universe." After all, mistakes in belief were "inevitable" and "of little moment," while mistakes in morality had widespread, deep consequences and could destroy happiness (Besant 1936, 132–33).

Besant defended both women in Comte's life as well as the philosopher himself from a moral point of view. Her eagerness to present the women in a favorable light is understandable, for she was still smarting from insults that had been thrown at her for leaving her husband and children. She sympathized with Caroline Massin, Comte's wife. They separated in 1842. Besant praised her brave and "noble qualities" and lamented that she was "unsuited to the quick-tempered philosopher" (Besant 2009b, 7). Besant did not mention the controversy over whether Massin had been a prostitute. She also praised Clotilde de Vaux, who had a close relationship with Comte—perhaps one that Besant wished to replicate with Bradlaugh, who, like Comte, was unhappily married (Nethercot 1960, 105; Taylor 1992, 90–91; Williams 1931, 75). Besant pointed out that Clotilde de Vaux had a "magic touch" that made Comte's nature blossom into something beautiful and revealed the "real worth of his character" (Besant 2009b, 7). Referring to Comte's beloved Renaissance figures, Besant wrote, "All and more than all that Beatrice was to Dante, that Laura was to Petrarch, was Clotilde de Vaux to Auguste Comte. He loved her passionately, and yet most purely, with a deep, reverent, faithful love. She was to him the ideal of noble womanhood." Having herself been traumatized by the sexual demands of her husband and not recognizing at all Comte's own lust, which is apparent in his correspondence, she praised his "austere morality" and continued, "It is impossible for a moment to suspect this friendship of the least touch of secret impurity [...]. Those who are too base themselves to believe in a true and noble friendship between a man and a woman will alone try to cast any slur on the frank and loyal love which bound together these two great souls." Thanks to de Vaux, Auguste Comte became the "High Priest of the Heart" and dedicated himself to humankind, after having boldly established positivism with its emphasis on factual knowledge and the hierarchy of sciences (Besant 2009b, 16). Besant hoped to have a similar uplifting impact on Bradlaugh. As Anne Taylor points out, Besant was much "beguiled by Comte's view of woman as angel, a being whose spirituality was higher than that of man" (Taylor 1992, 91).

Upbraiding his "most devoted adherents" for neglecting the *Cours*, Besant discussed at length the importance of this "great work, "which was his "greatest achievement" and "the basis of a wise and broad education." She wrote, "He points out how ideas always govern action, and having proved that the theological and metaphysical schemes have failed to construct society satisfactorily, he claims that the field is left to the positive philosophy" (Besant 2009b, 23, 26). As a student of the sciences, she appreciated how

positivism brought them all together in a hierarchy to illustrate their development and their interconnections. She, too, believed in the inevitability of progress.

Besant emphasized that the *Système*, "the crowning glory of his life," followed logically from the *Cours*, and that it was "a great injustice" to separate his life "into two hostile divisions." Yet, like Martineau and Eliot, she was critical of Comte's positive polity for being too rigid, Catholic, authoritarian and regulatory; it would be the "tomb of individuality of thought and of action" and thus the end of liberty. She found his sketch of his "Positivist polity […] to be] noble in its scope, but childish in its details; grand in its aspirations, but puerile in its petty direction." She also condemned as "pernicious" his idea that "feelings ought to rule the intelligence." She had learned to use her reason to undermine her Christian faith. Despite her criticisms of aspects of Comte's philosophy, Besant, like Eliot, lauded his view of "altruism" and his motto "Vivre pour Autrui." His insistence that girls receive the same education as boys also met with her approval. She concluded, "We may yet wisely learn from the mighty brain and loving heart of Auguste Comte much that will help us in a struggle towards a purer and more settled social state; and at least we may strive to realise in our own lives […] his] fair ideal of charity and self-devotion" (Besant 2009b, 26, 28, 29, 39).

In 1877, two years after writing this pamphlet on Comte, Besant joined Bradlaugh, Holyoake and several others to draw up the "Principles and Object of the National Secular Society." These tenets were similar to Comte's. They included the importance of understanding "relevant facts" without worrying about punishment from the state or Church, pursuing and publicizing the "truth," and making sure everyone had a good education. Like Martineau and Eliot, Besant believed that one's "highest duty" was to promote "human improvement and happiness" on this earth, keeping in mind the "general good" (Besant 2009a, 180–81). The "true basis of morality" and a noble life was serving the "general welfare" as a means of spreading happiness (Besant 1939, 134).

She did consider her own duty to be one of serving others. She disseminated birth-control information to women, helped unionize the London Match Girls, agitated in favor of Irish Home Rule, fought to improve the lives of workers and became an elected member of the London School Board, where she worked to offer free public education to children of both sexes. In 1885, she joined the Fabian Society, becoming a socialist because she felt frustrated with the individualism of her secularist friends and wanted something more community-oriented and more focused on social problems and human suffering (MacKay 2002, 106). Socialism soon disappointed her, however, because it lacked inspiration for the establishment of a truly loving "Brotherhood of Man" and a spiritual component (Besant 1939, 238). Like Eliot, Besant remained spiritually at loose ends. Indeed, her dying mother had told her that her "'main fault'" was that she had "always been too religious" (Besant 1939, 13).

Besant's search for a more emotional, vibrant faith led her in 1888 to create, along with W. T. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the Law and Liberty League. It was to fulfill her dream of creating a new humanistic religion based on the brotherhood of man. *The Link*, its magazine, endeavored to generate enthusiasm for a "New Church dedicated

to the Service of Man" (quoted in Nethercot 1960, 253). But the religion never took off. This was Besant's last experiment with secular religions.

After the failure of this project, Besant adopted a recently established religion, Theosophy, in 1889. Influenced by Eastern religions and marked by spiritualism, which was fashionable at the end of the nineteenth century, Theosophy sought to bring together religion and science and claimed to be a universal religion, one that went beyond sectarianism. It appealed to Besant because she was tired of the warring sects in the atheism and socialist movements, whose members seemed more egoistic than altruistic. Although Theosophy's notions of the occult, of divinity as imbedded in every individual, and of reincarnation were sacrilegious to secularists and positivists alike, its proclamation of the universal brotherhood of man, the solidarity of all things, and the importance of service to society were similar to the tenets of Comte's Religion of Humanity. It also encapsulated his idea that history was driving humanity toward a more perfect state (Wessinger 1988, 314–15; MacKay 2002, 108–9).

Besant's interest in this faith led her to India, the location of the Theosophical Society's headquarters. Settling there in 1893, she became involved in educational and humanitarian work, promoting schools for girls. She also was one of the leaders of the Indian movement for independence, becoming president of the Indian National Congress in 1917 (Oppenheim 1989, 15–16). As Geoffrey Claeys points out in his book, *Imperial Sceptics*, "She was well acquainted with the Positivist critique of empire, which was often advertised in the paper [*National Reformer*]" (Claeys 2010, 191). Besant also condemned British imperialism in South Africa and Egypt as contrary to human solidarity. She was thus far more of an activist in her notion of service to what she called the "Great Orphan Humanity" than were Martineau or Eliot, who remained content with changing the world through their writings (Besant 1939 58). Indeed, Hymn 32 in Besant's hymn book ends:

> Petitions are but empty air,
> Brave action is the only prayer,
> Thus learn to pray. (Besant, 2009a, 342)

Comte's philosophy reinforced not only Besant's desire to serve and bring people together, which he saw as the essence of religion, but her drive to investigate. Like Martineau, she studied the social world and commented frequently on issues relating to women and laborers. She produced five thousand articles and four hundred books and pamphlets on a wide variety of topics (Besterman 1934, 269). Like Martineau, she also wrote about herself.

In her book on Comte, Besant remarked, "The women of this century may well be proud of their sex when they point to such glorious hearts and intellects as those of Mary Somerville, Harriet Martineau, Harriet Mill, and Clotilde de Vaux" (Besant 2009b, 17). Pride in her own service-oriented and intellectual accomplishments led Besant to write her autobiography twice, once in 1885, after she was attacked for being an unfit mother, and again in 1893, after she became a Theosophist. She composed the story of her life to "throw light on some of the typical problems that are vexing the souls" of her

"contemporaries" especially those who are "struggling in the darkness." Reflecting her continuing struggle to find a substitute for traditional religion, a struggle that had also preoccupied Comte, she wrote,

> Since all of us, men and women of this restless and eager generation—surrounded by forces we dimly see but cannot as yet understand, discontented with old ideas and half afraid of new, greedy for the material results of the knowledge brought us by Science but looking askance at her agnosticism as regards the soul, fearful of superstition but still more fearful of atheism, turning from the husks of outgrown creeds but filled with desperate hunger for spiritual ideals—since all of us have the same anxieties, the same griefs, the same yearning hopes, the same passionate desire for knowledge, it may well be that the story of one may help all. (Besant 1939, xiii–xiv)

Dissecting the story of her soul's wanderings, Besant related her series of conversions and de-conversions, prompted by her innate skepticism and search for an all-encompassing, unifying religion (MacKay 2002, 102–3).

Though an autobiography is typically male, Besant's version was a woman's tale, full of rebellious feelings aimed at her husband and patriarchal religions and secular creeds. It was no accident that she finally latched onto a religion, Theosophy, whose founders included a woman, Madame Helena Blavatsky. Instead of rebelling against it, as was her wont, Besant became president of the Theosophical Society, which she headed for 25 years, increasing its membership to 45,000 before she died in 1933 (Chandra 2001, 156–58). Like Eliot and Martineau, Besant was attracted to Comte's doctrines, but she eventually sought a more active leadership role for women than the founder of positivism would sanction.

Beatrice Webb

Beatrice Webb (née Potter) was more anti-religious than Besant, though not at the beginning of her life. Born in 1858 into an upper-class family, she was given a good education at home by various governesses and encouraged by her father to read. However, like Martineau, she was sickly throughout her childhood, lonely and depressed; she felt the need for a faith (Nord 1985, 38). Like the other three women, she went through a religious period, though her family home was "free-thinking" (Webb 1979, 56). While her Nonconformist mother was brought up in utilitarianism, her father was born a Unitarian. Webb became enthusiastic about traditional Christianity and took her first communion at age 17, when she attended a boarding school for a short while for health reasons and met there an inspiring Low Church Evangelical (Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie 1982, I: 20). But doubts crept into her mind upon her return home, for like Annie Besant, she was entranced by science. Ever since Webb was a young girl, Herbert Spencer had been a frequent visitor to her parents' house and was indeed her only real friend. An admirer of her intellect, Spencer found her to be the only woman comparable to George Eliot (Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie 1982, I: 8; Cole 1945, 15). He impressed upon her the importance of factual evidence and the "religion of science" (Webb 1982, 85, I: 24). Learning about the scientific method made her begin to doubt the myths of the Bible and Christian

claims to universal validity (Cole 1945, 22–23). After flirting for a time, like Besant, with Catholicism due to its ability to fulfill an emotional void within her, she finally gave up on God altogether and became an agnostic (Harrison 2000, 102; Nord 1985, 43–45).

Webb then put her faith in science. She even sought out Thomas Huxley and Francis Galton for conversation (Cole 1945, 3). But her faith began to wobble. In March 1877, she wrote, "I have no religion whatever, for I have not yet grasped the religion of science. Of one thing I am quite certain, that no character is perfect without religion." Two weeks later she read Martineau's autobiography, which invigorated her interest in science. "Her life", she wrote (Webb, 1982, 85, I: 24–25), "unlike most lives … religion of science." Henceforth, Webb intended to live "a more serious life," following Martineau's model— a model that had also inspired Eliot and Besant (Webb, 1982, 85, I: 24–25).

Yet Webb still doubted that the "religion of science" could be the "the religion of a 'suffering humanity.'" (Webb, 1982, 85, I: 27). Science was too unfeeling and thus unable to address adequately social problems (Nord 1985, 3). She also did not think it possible for "a woman to live in agnosticism," which might satisfy her rational side but not her "emotive thought," a phrase she borrowed from her favorite novelist, George Eliot, whom she admired for her depiction of "noble suffering" (Webb, 1982, 85, I: 41). As she sought a social purpose to her life to find happiness and as she was motivated by a sense of moral obligation to something higher, Webb began increasingly to doubt Spencer and his emphasis on individualism, materialism, rationalism and a minimal state. It was fine to believe in science, but to what social purpose was it to be used? She would soon drop Spencer as her mentor (Webb 1979, 142, 192, 270; 1982, 85, I: 141; 1978, I: 22; Bevir 2002, 225).

At some point, Webb came to positivism which, according to her biographers, influenced her throughout her life (Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie 1982, I: 10). Indeed, some of Comte's "learned tomes," as she called them, were in the family library (Webb 1979, 56). In 1879, when she was 21, she came into contact with Frederic Harrison and his wife at a party. He had a major influence on her and encouraged her to order all the works of Comte from the London Library. She and her older sister took a picnic, smoked cigarettes, and discussed at length their readings, accepting immediately Comte's law of three stages (Webb 1979, 144, 146). Whereas her sister made fun of Comte's spiritual power and cult of woman, Beatrice was immediately taken with his Religion of Humanity. In 1881, she began to read about Comte in Lewes's *History of Philosophy*. In 1884, she read Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste*. A little later, she dined with Harrison and heard him lecture at the Positivist Hall on Comte's motto of living for others (Webb 1982, 85, I: 119–20, 168, 276). She also read Mill's *Autobiography*, *System of Logic*, and *Principles of Political Economy*, all of which reflected Comte's influence. She discussed Comte with other people, making a point to note that, besides reading, "social intercourse" influenced her; after all, she was a sociologist interested in social influences (Webb 1979, 1).

Unlike Besant, Webb appreciated Comte's principle that emotions had to direct the mind (Webb 1979, 143). This approach was lacking in Spencer, who encouraged

cold detachment as part of the correct scientific mindset. In addition, Webb's mother, who had been raised by men and disliked women, and her father, who treated his nine daughters as intellectual sons, had not nurtured her emotional side (Harrison 2000, 161–62). Comte seemed to sanction her sentimental feelings and gave them direction.

From her various readings, Webb determined that there had to be a "flight of emotion […] to the service of man" (Webb 1979, 150). She copied out the following passage from the *Catéchisme positiviste*:

> Our harmony as moral beings is impossible on any foundation but altruism[. …] To live for others is the only means of developing the whole existence of man. Towards Humanity, who is the only true Great Being, we, the conscious elements of whom she is the compound, shall henceforth direct every aspect of our life, individual and collective. Our thoughts will be devoted to the knowledge of Humanity, our affections to the Love, our actions to her service." (Webb, 1982, 85, 1: 119–20)

Webb appreciated the spiritual energy that Comte retained from religion and the way he directed this energy to improving society rather than to serving God (Webb 1979, 221). Like Comte, she did not like the selfish aspect of Christianity, its demand that each person work for his or her own salvation (Nord 1985, 43). Spencer's individualism seemed similarly selfish and bankrupt. Webb took up Comte's quest for moral values to guide science and industry. In her mind, social questions relating to how to run society for the common good had to "take the place of religion" (Webb 1979, 149).

So taken was Webb by Comte that she married a man who was likewise enthusiastic about positivism, much as George Eliot may have been attracted to Lewes for the same reason. Sidney Webb had heard Congreve lecture in 1881 and eventually gave up his mother's evangelicalism to take up ethical positivism (Bevir 2002, 7). According to Royden Harrison, his biographer, Sidney Webb was influenced throughout his life by many of Comte's tenets. "He was in some essential particulars a positivist." Webb believed that philosophy should resist theological and metaphysical notions and consist only of scientific truths and that this scientific philosophy should harmonize with religious feelings. He gravitated toward Comte's ideas that a new society could be established on the basis of sociology (with its grounding in history), that capitalists and administrators could be taught moral duties, philosophers or intellectuals could be allies of workers, ordinary people could learn social obligations and order and progress could be reconciled. Like Comte, Sidney Webb privileged the collectivity over the individual, considered property to be a social institution and disliked the abuse of laissez-faire. Yet he and his socialist colleagues wanted regulation of capitalism by laws and institutions rather than simply by moral pressure as Comte recommended (Harrison 2000, 56, 67, 69). Nevertheless, he agreed with the Comtean principle that society evolved gradually, building on the old order and respecting continuity; this approach became part of Fabian socialism. Like Beatrice, he wanted to act on these ideas, convinced that human solidarity demanded it and that it was our moral duty to be selfless and to improve

society (Harrison 2000, 16, 19, 20, 23, 40, 48, 59; Mackenzie 1979, xxxviii). Referring to another person influenced by positivism, he wrote, "We are not isolated units free to choose our work: but parts of a whole[. …]I think George Eliot meant to say this to Maggie Tulliver [in *Mill on the Floss*]. We have no right to live our own lives. What shall it profit a man to save his own soul, if thereby even one jot less good is done in the world?" (Webb 1978, I: 158)

Beatrice Webb appreciated Sidney's semi-positivist approach when she first came into contact with him. In October 1889, she was given a copy of *Fabian Essays*, which had just been published. She liked Sidney's chapter the best because it reflected a solid sense of history. She decided to contact him to get information for a book she was writing, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*. After they met in January 1890, she wrote, "Above all, he is utterly disinterested, and is […] genuine in his faith that collective control and collective administration will diminish, if not abolish, poverty." At age 34, Beatrice overcame her reservations about his physical attractiveness and marriage in general and agreed to a wedding, chiefly to have an intellectual partnership to serve social ends. After all, she pointed out, they had a "common faith" (Webb 1979, xxxviii, xxxix). The biographer of the Webbs wrote, "Both of them had an overwhelming sense, ascetic and evangelical, of duty: of self-denial, renunciation and submission" (Harrison 2000, 76). Their duty was to society. Sidney Webb was appealing to Beatrice because he worshipped her just as Comte did de Vaux, thinking that women were the "inspirers and guardians of morality" and could develop the "better side" of men (Webb 1978, 1: 155, 244). He, too, was an admirer of George Eliot, who often depicted women in her novels as morally superior. Beatrice and Sidney married in July 1892. Marrying a man beneath her socially, and a socialist in addition, marginalized her. Most of her friends, except Frederic Harrison, abandoned her; after all, she was the daughter of a prominent businessman, while he was the son of a hairdresser (Cole 1945, 56–57).

Both of them were vital members of the Fabian Socialist movement, which advocated changing society through reform, not revolution, and using collective or state controls to assure everyone obtained a decent standard of living. Sidney had joined in 1884, a year before Besant. Beatrice joined in 1893. She met Besant, but though Beatrice respected her, she regarded her as bitter, power-hungry, unfeminine (because she was a great orator), and too "rabid" in her socialist beliefs (Webb 1982, 85, I: 277).

Nevertheless, according to Bertrand Russell, Webb, like Besant, was a "deeply religious woman" and had had repeated crises of faith (quoted in Nord 1985, 9). Indeed, Webb wrote in her diary in 1886 that she had a "duplex personality." Her "gloomily religious" side, replete with asceticism, came from her mother. Her "natural vocation and destiny was the convent." But this part was challenged by her other side, the "lover of thought" and "enthusiast for Truth," who was a "realist in intellectual questions and a "sceptic of religion" (Webb 1982, 85, I: 188–89). The battle between these two sides within her had led Webb to reject the path of conventional marriage that her eight sisters had taken. Instead, as mentioned above, she saw it as her duty to devote herself to work on behalf of society. Her sense of duty came in part from her upper class religious background, which encouraged women to do philanthropic work. As we have seen, Comte's Religion also encouraged that predilection and endowed it with a certain scientific seriousness. In

Webb's mind, her efforts were part of an ongoing movement of social evolution, that is, progress. Comte's philosophy allowed her to reconcile the two parts within her.

Webb was indeed devoted to society. At first, in the early 1880s, she engaged in various types of social work and did case work. But unlike many other wealthy middle-class women, who thrived on being do-gooders, she grew disenchanted with charitable organizations' inability to tackle the causes of poverty (Radice 1984, 24–25). Beginning in 1886, she worked in close association with her cousin, Charles Booth, who taught her the importance of statistical research, interviews and personal observations—all tools of social science. He himself was much influenced by Comte due to his many discussions with Bridges, Beesly, Harrison, the Lushingtons and his two cousins, Harry and Albert Crompton, both of whom were active in the Church of Humanity (Webb 1979, 218; Harrison 2000, 134–35). Beatrice Webb and Booth worked together on *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which started appearing in 1889 and soon became a classic empirical study of society. She felt that she had a duty to work in the slums of East London and on the docks, investigating the life and organizations of workers. After interviewing scores of them, she wrote reports and articles on housing, sweatshops and Jewish immigrants; she hoped to counter laissez-faire arguments and provide policy to politicians in favor of interventionism. In 1890, she became a socialist bent on setting up controls on capitalist activity. A few weeks after her conversion, she met Sidney Webb, whom she married because he allowed her vocation to flourish. They wrote together *The History of Trade Unionism* (1894), *Industrial Democracy* (1897), ten volumes of history of local governments and cooperatives, and *Methods of Social Study* (1932). Beatrice Webb hoped to provide hardcore evidence of the evils of capitalism and solid arguments based on facts in favor of socialism. Her scientific methods made socialist propaganda far more effective; Fabian socialists, who supported democracy, believed strongly that public opinion could evolve and force through changes (Radice 1984, 7). In writing and publicizing these well-researched, well-argued pieces, Beatrice became a noted sociologist and economist. It is no surprise that she helped found the London School of Economics, which was devoted to the social sciences, and a left-wing journal, *The New Statesman*, to spread her radical ideas. Becoming active in politics, she served on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, which she hoped to end, and wrote a Minority Report in favor of social security, which became the basis of the Beveridge Report. Her social investigations contributed to the establishment of the welfare state, which incorporated her belief that social harmony and progress could be encouraged by disinterested, altruistic civil servants—that is, an enlightened elite, devoted to the common good. She and Sidney recognized that this idea of a controlling, enlightened elite was close to Comte's. (Mill had also been attracted to the idea). They took from Comte the concept that planning, organization and institutions, not class conflict, represented the key to resolving social problems (Harrison 2000, 68, 249; Bevir 2002, 249; Lengerman-Niebrugge-Brantley 1988, 282). Beatrice later joined the Labour Party and became an enthusiast of the Soviet Union, whose Communist system, she proclaimed in 1932 to be "Comtism—the Religion of Humanity. Auguste Comte comes to his own" (Webb 1982 85, IV: 132). She called herself a Communist because she believed that that doctrine embraced the "service of man," that is, altruism, and wanted that purpose "carried out […] exclusively by the scientific method of making

the order of thought correspond with the order of things" (Webb 1878, 3: 406). But she worried about the sacrifice of freedom (Nord 1985, 244–45)

Like Martineau and Besant, Webb wrote her autobiography, charting her intellectual and social development as a social investigator. The first volume, *My Apprenticeship*, was published in 1926. The second volume, *My Partnership* was published posthumously in 1948. Her autobiography, like those of Martineau and Besant, was a story of how she sought a creed and discovered her calling in social service (Webb 1979, xxiii). She became a serious "social investigator" because of her devotion to society and "faith in the scientific method"; she based her reports and articles on disinterested "personal observation," interviews and "statistical calculation" (Webb 1979, 150). She explained how her environment also led her to become a social investigator. To understand how she practiced her craft, her readers had to grasp her life experiences, her evolution within society. Readers learned that what she retained from her evangelical religion and positivism was the idea that moral principles were needed to make people better citizens. Moral and social improvement went hand in hand (Webb 1979, xxxvii).

Conclusion

In sum, Comte's doctrines helped alleviate the religious anxieties of Martineau, Eliot, Besant and Webb. They had lost their Christian faith partly due to the increasing authority of science, which led them to question the Bible, the essential text, especially for Evangelicals, but at the same time, they disliked skepticism and worried about being atheists (Bevir 2002, 222). Embracing secularism was particularly dangerous for a woman during this period, which lauded the pious angel in the household. Without God, what would be the basis for morality, that sense of duty to others that pervaded their lives as Victorian Christian women from the middle class? Perhaps to offset that threat, these women embraced morality with a special fervor to show that it could exist in a godless world. Positivism with its scientific standards of truth, Religion of Humanity, doctrine of the innateness of sociability, and sense of regenerative possibilities, gave them the intellectual groundwork upon which they could base their morality, especially their altruistic impulses and desire for reform. As Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie point out, positivism had a big impact in England because it allowed the English to direct their "evangelical fervor to social ends" (Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie 1982, I: 10). Martineau was the only woman among the four under consideration who was not influenced by Evangelicalism. She was also the one least interested in the Religion of Humanity. Nevertheless, she resembled the other three women in thinking positivism offered a big boost to morality. It demanded honesty, truth, a focus on improving life on this earth, and attention to the common welfare. All four women—Martineau, Eliot, Besant and Webb—felt they were moral in performing their social duties, and that is precisely what positivist morality demanded; they were fulfilling themselves and forging an independent identity not by seeking their own happiness or salvation but by devoting themselves to society, which was at least something beyond the individual, a greater good. These four intellectual women believed they could serve social justice and also fulfill the demands of the science they respected by carrying out realistic investigations of society, whether in fictional form or

in some type of reportage. They felt obliged to be social investigators and to instruct their readers, for they believed that individuals would come to similar conclusions about how to proceed effectively once they saw the concrete facts of social inequality (Hesse 1995, 126–27; Bevir 2002, 226, 243). These four women were eager to contribute to progress, one of Comte's watchwords.

Yet they were not blind followers of the Frenchman. Comte did not approve of women taking an active part in the public sphere. Nevertheless, three of the four women, Martineau, Besant and Webb, found social progress wanting and became prominent active reformers working on liberal or left-wing causes. Eliot covered political reform in novels such as *Middlemarch*. Although Comte had misogynist tendencies and saw women chiefly in terms of their relations to men, all four of these women valued independence and looked askance at traditional marriages and conventional domesticity. Martineau never married. Eliot lived with a married man and never had children. Besant separated from her husband and her children. Webb married someone beneath her socially for intellectual and political reasons and never had children. All four women also took a particular interest in education. Comte himself had supported girls' education, a position noted with approval by Besant (Besant 2009b, 34). However, he believed women needed instruction chiefly to be better mothers, more informed wives and better moral counselors in the public sphere (Pickering, 1993, 2009, 330). These women had wider views of education. Besant, the victim of violent marital abuse and an outspoken advocate of women's rights, helped set up the Central Hindu Girls School in 1904. Webb was the least insistent about feminism. She came late to the suffrage movement. Nevertheless, in 1895, when she and Sidney founded the London School of Economics on the model of Sciences Po, she quickly found a wealthy woman to endow a woman's scholarship (Harrison 2000, 288). Martineau, who claimed to be "probably the happiest single woman in England," argued that women should have more options besides marriage (Martineau 1877, 1: 102). She wrote articles on the need for better education to increase women's opportunities. Although not a feminist, per se, Eliot sought to help women reach their potential by supporting the establishment of Girton College. Besides bolstering female education, these women rejected social taboos against women having a public presence. Three wrote their own autobiographies, which proudly charted their intellectual, social and political development. The one woman who did not produce an autobiography, George Eliot, wrote long novels articulating her views and her own conflicts at a time when women writers were viewed with suspicion. Comte saw George Sand as something of a monstrous figure and discouraged Clotilde de Vaux from writing. Yet Martineau, Eliot, Besant and Webb were remarkably prolific writers, using their words to establish their authority as legitimate observers of society, critics of its ills, and instigators of change. In short, each sought to give other women the ability and the right to think for themselves, challenging Comte's more restrained view of the female sex as one associated with the emotions and the home. They might have stressed social obligations as the essence of morality, but in their personal lives they considered their foremost duty to be the development of their own individualism. John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor would have felt vindicated, but Comte would have also perhaps been somewhat pleased for, in their

own ways, they were acting as moral agents, the role he prescribed to women. Comte had repeatedly proclaimed with pride that in the future positivist society women would have "first place" (Comte 1973, 1990, 210–11). However, Martineau, Eliot, Besant and Webb asserted that same role in a more activist, independent, public manner than Comte would have condoned.

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COMTE AND HIS LIBERAL CRITICS: FROM SPENCER TO HAYEK

Mike Gane

The progressive development of civilization is subject to a natural and irrevocable course, derived from the laws of human organisation, which in turn becomes the supreme law of all political phenomena. (Comte, [1822] 1998: 93)

As Auguste Comte vigorously critiqued liberalism, it was only to be expected that a counter-critique would be returned. It is clear that Comte remains as relevant today as Spencer and Marx. They share the common project of developing a science of society, and this took a new form in the nineteenth century. After a long period in which Comte and Spencer were considered merely proto-social scientists, they re-emerged with the rise of neo-liberalism's attack on social planning as crucial references. Comte's own analyses of European history identified a number of pathways from feudalism to industrialism, and he predicted the rise of a new autocratic system in which an intellectual elite would oversee and govern a temporal order run by a patrician stratum. The parliamentary democratic order would be a transitional phase to a "sociocratic" one (Gane, 2016). Against Spencer and Marx, Comte argued the state would not wither away: The democratic state, which he called the metaphysical polity based on principles of equality and human rights, would be replaced by a new hierarchical system legitimated by social science (a thematic developed from Saint-Simon). If we examine the main players in the politics of the world today, America, Europe, Russia, India and China, for example, it is clear that the entry of neo-liberal economics has created new and rather strange combinations—a new condition of "post-democracy," new levels of inequality, the rise of new autocracies. It is instructive to view this new condition through the Comtean optic. Before discussing the critiques of Comte, it is necessary, however, to contextualize the emergence of his theories, and then finally turn to the relevance of Comte today.

Essential Context: Revolution

The revolution that began in 1789 in France was an event that dominated the political theatre of Europe at the opening of the nineteenth century. The radical theory written by Mary Wollstonecraft in the early 1790s, influential on the young Comte, was beginning to pose the revolution in the framework of social progression: "An aristocracy […] is naturally the first form of government. But clashing interests soon

losing their equipoise, a monarchy and hierarchy break out of the confusion of ambitious struggles, and the foundation of both is secured by feudal tenures. […] But such combustible materials cannot long be pent up; and getting vent in foreign wars and intestine insurrections, the people acquire some power in the tumult, which obliges their rulers to gloss over their oppression with a show of right." She continues, "had Rousseau mounted one step higher in his investigation […] his active mind would have darted forward to contemplate the perfection of man in the establishment of true civilisation" ([1792], 1985: 21–22). Radicals who lived through the revolutionary period—Bentham in England, Hegel in Germany, de Staël, Constant and Henri Saint-Simon in France—concurred in their different ways that what was at work was the action of Reason, moving in a progressive direction—that had been subverted by reaction—and that the new century would be a reactivation of this progress. The question became: What kind of knowledge would facilitate and guide this progression, and to what end? And then, given a continuation of general enlightenment, what kind of political leadership would take up and apply it? And in any case, what had actually diverted and subverted the revolution? What had it nevertheless produced? The years 1789–1814, from the point of view of 1815 might have seemed to have been a movement from monarchy back to restored monarchy through a period of violent, terrorist aberration. What did this episode signify other than a complete breakdown of normal society?

The intellectual formation received from Saint-Simon himself in the years Comte was employed as his secretary (1817–24), although disavowed, was crucial, just as is the continued presence of the Saint-Simonian school after the death of Saint-Simon in 1825. The Saint-Simonian "sacred college" under Bazard and Enfantin was conceived as a kind of utopian microcosm of the society to come, an anticipatory cult with its religious hierarchy and rituals, and its "missions," one of which was to Britain. It attempted to synthesize the progressive elements of European cultures—the utilitarian, the romantic, the scientific. Yet the Saint-Simonian influence became divided—into socialism, into industrial enterprises (this included engineering, commerce and banking), into feminism and into communism. What united these orientations was the basic idea that the eighteenth century was negative, critical, destructive, while the new century would be creative, organic, and would construct a new kind of society and civilization after the miscarriage of the Revolution and the disasters of the Napoleonic Wars. At the end of the nineteenth century Saint-Simonianism was seen to include Comte's work, and Durkheim's balanced account saw it as the progenitor of sociology and socialism (Durkheim, 1962). Looked at from the point of view of the mid-twentieth century, however, the whole project was seen as a progenitor of totalitarianism; almost all early nineteenth-century ideologies became suspect in this manner if they did not embrace a celebration of individualism and a rejection of socialism. Eric Voegelin held that "the satanic Apocalypse of Man began with Comte and has become the signature of the Western crisis" (1999: 161). Franz Neuman's early critical review of the blame literature remains instructive: There was no such connection ([1942] 1966: 459–67).

Periodization

After the Napoleonic Wars (ending in 1815) the period from 1815 to 1870 was domi-nated in Britain by the small-scale capitalism and the demand for "free trade," liberalism and the minimalist state so celebrated by Herbert Spencer. The crucial turning point in Europe was the development of state socialism by Bismarck, the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 and the rise to European dominance of a new German state. This state had universal male suffrage, a representative assembly, a legal code, sin-gle monetary system and free trade, social welfare and a secular education system—but inside this confederation there existed the Prussian constitution, which maintained the predominance of a military elite in a hierarchical class system (Anderson, 1979: 269–78). The latter part of the century saw a change of scale and organization of industrial enterprise and the emergence, in the major European powers, of the social state and imperial expansion—of course leading up to war. Eduard Bernstein in the 1890s tried to reconfigure Marxism as an evolutionary socialism to adapt it to the new state structures of mass citizenship, as Durkheim attempted to do this with Comte in a neo-Kantian framework in France. At the same time, Lenin vigorously opposed the new social–liberal Marxism. Both moves (within Marxism) were to have dramatic consequences for the world in the twentieth century: one in social democracy in Western Europe, the other as it was practiced in Russia and then China. Marcel Mauss, looking at the new Soviet state in the early 1920s, said Lenin had tried to use an obsolete model of social theory drawn from the heroic age of social theory and ironically drew lessons from Comte (Mauss in Gane, 1992: 165–212). Regis Debray in 1981 went further and, looking at the USSR, noted it appeared more and more like Comte's utopia: "The revenge of Auguste Comte" (1983: 228ff). In a parallel move, Raymond Aron suggested that the neo-liberalism of Friedman and Hayek was a return in its own way to the purity of the heroic age of Spencer as an inverted Marxism (Audier, 2012). Far from being consigned to history, the theories from the mid-nineteenth century (socialism, communism and liberalism) had a delayed impact, and still resonate.

Comte's persistent question was: In what sense was the dramatic period 1789–1815 a revolution, and what would it mean to complete it? (Baker, 1989, Tilly, 1978, Bourdeau, 2006: 15–18). In his early essays, he notes simply that overturning the monarchy and sub-stituting the sovereignty of the people is just an inversion within a given framework: *regis voluntas suprema lex*—the king's will is the supreme law.[1] This is not a revolution in the most profound sense of the term—that would come only if the new power worked on a new principle. The revolutions and counter-revolutions literally revolve as an exchange of sovereign wills, even if the legitimation changes from divine right (theological) to the sovereignty of the people (metaphysical). The analysis and diagnosis Comte makes is that the revolution was primarily destructive; its efforts at construction failed to go fur-ther than critical internal modification of Catholic-feudalism into the metaphysical–deist polity and back again. His early essays of 1820–24 trace the buildup of forces that led

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1 This motto was claimed by Kaiser Wilhem II and noted by Engels (Marx, Engels, 1968: 666).

to the collapse of the *ancien régime*, placing the revolutionary episode in a long revolu-tion. The basic thesis is that the true revolutionary transition, one that goes beyond the transformed forms of feudo-theology, has still to be accomplished. Against liberals like de Staël and Constant, the development of liberal democracy on the English model was not to be a final objective but at best regarded as an institution that could facilitate a rapid transition to a final state. Comte sought to identify the basic logic of social development and progression through this blocked situation: The model for this conception was not the puritan national model, but scientific revolution—one that was universal. He needed therefore a scientific revolution in social analysis and produced sociology upon which he could elaborate a scientific politics. And, when he found that was fruitless, he elaborated and began building a scientific religion in the style of the Saint-Simonian religion he had previously critiqued: He called it the Religion of Humanity. Ruled and regulated by sociocrats in a new organism, it would be composed of four organs: priests, industrialists, women and proletarians. Yet, paradoxically, right from his first essays the object of such a scientific politics was to prevent violent political revolutions from occurring (1998: 101).

Comte's Intervention

Can all this, the view that cultures will pass from theological to positive states via a met-aphysical stage, be thought within the one law? The answer is that in Comte's hands this law is both a complex and a unifying one (and as each science is founded on one basic law, fundamental for the new science of sociology).[2] Comte, it must be remembered, announced from the start two fundamentally opposed ideas. This argument from Comte sometimes comes as a surprise, as Mary Pickering has suggested: "The belief that indus-try was the foundation of modern civilization reflects the impact of political economy on Comte's thinking. This materialistic position seems at odds with his insistence that ideas and feelings ruled the universe, and that the negative movement of history was stimulated by freedom of inquiry and intellectual speculation. Yet he asserted that indus-try developed first. […]" (Pickering, 1993: 656). Some have argued that Comte adopts a

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2   It is important to clarify his complex approach as involving (a) both objective and subjective methods, the first in CCP, and the second in SPP; (b) the conception of the object is either at the very abstract level (humanity) or more concrete level (specific societies); (c) each analysis can be either synchronic (static) or diachronic (dynamic). Thus, the law of the three states is stated at the level of, in the first place, civilization and later as humanity as an abstract law that proposes the series: theology, metaphysics, science. At a concrete level, Comte analyzes the various pathways of various routes through this order. It is important to note that he did see a problem within the internal logic of this progression of the separation of Church and state so important to his analysis; he came to see as arising conjuncturally: "the result of external influ-ences […] the consequences of the social environment, which in the one case [the Catholic Church] tended to encourage, in the other [the Orthodox Church to] obliterate, the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual power" (2001, iii: 354–55). His method was to construct two dynamic series since the Renaissance: The series that charts the rise of science and indus-try against another series that charts the decline of theology and feudalism. Only rarely did he study this dual movement in any one society at a given time (Gane, 2006: 76–86).

base-superstructure model very similar to that of Marx and, indeed, Comte does use the word base in this sense (Comte, 1975, ii: 493, see Wernick, 2001: 81–115).

Comte does not conceive this base as an independent economy, for industrialism becomes more systematically organized in step with the growth of new capacities and a special kind of leadership—one that is quite different from military command, and different from transitory bourgeois exploitation and speculative activity.[3] Industrialism is centered on production (whether capital or labor) and is not essentially exploitative if its leadership is a patrician stratum. It becomes so when the new class of proletarians are cut adrift from society. It is essentially urban, and promotes liberty, commerce, invention and can be defined in opposition both to "idle" classes and to a warrior elite culture. The industrial spirit is evident in one of modernity's key inventions: gunpowder. And it is with the example of gunpowder that we can see the complexity of Comte's conception, since most accounts simply point to the increasing control over natural forces this produces, as claimed by Francis Bacon. Comte, however, points to its articulation in relation to the transition from military to industrial society, and it is a key example of how the analysis of the series of the decomposition of the feudal and the rising series of the industrial society are interconnected in a complex fashion. The new technology enables the new forces organized around the industrial towns to defend themselves and do so with newly instituted and trained paid armies to defeat feudal coalitions, while there are also important "services rendered to natural philosophy by the scientific pursuit of war—by means at once of the common interest in those departments of knowledge, and of the special establishments which seem to make the military spirit an instrument, as it were, of modern civilization" (1975, I: 512–14, and indeed this discussion simply repeats that made in his early 1820 article, 1998: 29).[4]

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3   But it is important to remember Comte's definition of industrial society. Weber's definition is very different (1961: 97). As Aron puts it: This takes "the word 'industry' in a broad, not narrow sense—to include any kind of collective effort transformed by the application of scientific method or the scientific spirit […] the type of society which […] I have called industrial, could also be called scientific[; …] the qualitative difference between present-day and earlier science and technology is obviously the indispensable pre-condition of all the other features usually attributed to modern societies" (Aron, 1967: 98–99). Krishan Kumar picks up this position to show that in this Saint-Simonian tradition there is no expectation or need for redefinition of modern society with the demise of factory production or the rise of services or knowledge: these are also still within the frame of Comte's notion and Weber's notion of rationalization. Only those theorists concerned to define industrialism in the narrow sense could raise the prospect of post-industrialism (Kumar, 1978: 235–36).

4   Although his writings concentrated on science and culture, there is an important strand that considers material culture, which he consistently maintained was the predominant side of the equation. But his writing is extremely uneven in its accounts of the two sides. The references and discussion of industry and technology are surprisingly limited, even though they are viewed as the basic material support of the progression of cultures. He does not seem to have been aware of the case and the circumstances of the Japanese abandonment of guns (Jared, 2005: 257–58). If, with Marx, for example, we can find expressions such as "the handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, with the industrial capitalist," these come from the Saint-Simonian doctrine (Marx, 1969: 109). With Comte, from his earliest writings there are discussions of three inventions: the compass, gunpowder and printing. The origin of this

In Comte's analysis of industrialism there is no economic or technological deter-
minism or reductionism. Certainly, there is no claim that evolution should be catego-
rized in terms of the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age and so forth, or the movement
from hunter-gatherer, agrarian to industrial society, a classification in terms of the
technical or material basis of a culture or civilization. To be clear on this, it is essen-
tial to examine the analysis of the way in which agriculture emerged within fetishism,
and industrialism emerged within the feudal framework. And to do this it is neces-
sary to acknowledge the fact that, although Comte worked with an abstract linear
model of the evolution of humanity (as an ideal), his actual analyses were charac-
terized by focusing on specific paths taken in different socio-political conditions. It
was here, as some have argued, that sociology breaks away from history, although it
seems more accurate to say that he invented comparative social history within soci-
ology.[5] His schemes outlined the importance of absolute centralized monarchy or
decentralized aristocracy, religious differentiation in Europe, urbanization, economic
stratification and diverse cultural formations. The analysis is quite different from what
might be expected from our current appreciation, so inflected by Marx's analysis of
Manchester, of what became known as the Industrial Revolution; although Comte
says of the process he is describing that it is the "most fundamental transformation
humanity has yet experienced" (1975, ii: 493). What he refers to is the development
of pacified occupations of the predominant occupations of the leading strata (he
did indeed note the exception, that of the Protestant and militarist configuration of
Prussian development). And, he notes, commerce, manufacture and agriculture all
become industrial in that order, since this order follows the generality of the activities
concerned (497), as the oppressive structures of slavery and then serfdom are abol-
ished (or not, in the case of the Byzantine or Islamic monotheisms). With the freeing

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trilogy can be found in the work of Francis Bacon, in his *Novum Organum*, first published in
1620 (1905: 292) (Braudel, 1992: 385–430). Comte was an avid reader of this tradition from
Bacon, which runs alongside that of the Protestant ethic, and it is this line, technical industrial
and scientific, out of Christianity taken by Francis Bacon rather than that toward a capitalism
identified by Weber (with its emphasis on work ethic, bookkeeping and accumulation) that
Comte develops. In his final elaboration of the utopia of the positive polity with its elaborate
system of festivals, Comte includes a festival of machines, and he refers to "these admirable
instruments which give to labour its productiveness, to the labourer his true dignity[; …] the
festival of machines will encourage brotherly subordination on the part of all working classes to
the class which is marked out as the normal leader […] of the proletariat" (2001, iv: 365–68).

5   See the position of Charles Tilly: "In 1844 Auguste Comte's 'Lecture on the Positivist Outlook'
proposed the name 'sociology' for the general science of humanity. […] From that moment
onward, however, professional history and professional sociology moved in different directions"
(2001: 6753). Leidentop argues that it was from the slightly early period of the debate (1815–
30) about the two routes, France and Britain, that this problematic was initiated. It has always
been something in between history and sociology, and Comte was a major player in initiating
it with major contributions in 1820 and 1822 that were widely circulated (Pickering, 1993).
Comte disagreed with the solutions of the liberals and developed the principle of the sepa-
ration between new spiritual and temporal powers. It is here that the differences between the
Protestant liberals and Comte played out.

up of the towns, and the liberation of the occupations, a "new motor of humanity" emerged, one that was to reflect this predominance of the "practical" over "speculative life" (500–501).

This concrete analysis of routes through to industrialism concentrates on a comparative analysis of Italy, Britain, France and Germany, suggesting great unevenness in its development in relation to the precise conditions of Catholic-feudal Europe in different locations and traditions (and Comte throughout shows an acute awareness of geographical factors). His position is that activity and thought as two levels reflected in the Catholic-feudal combination go together as a mutually determining body–mind couple. The unique Catholic evolution of the separation of spiritual and temporal powers in the medieval period opens the possibility of a pathway to industrial-positivism that takes on a new impetus from Protestantism. The development of industrialism itself, however, produces an antagonism between practical productive industrial activity, militarism and the predominant modes of thinking that are still metaphysical in the spiritual authority. It is curious that the law of the three states operates in the spiritual domain, but there are only two states in the transition in practical activity—to be explained by Comte's repeated assertion that the metaphysical state is a modified, secularized theological one. It is possible that Comte began to be aware of an industrial revolution after his initial formulations had been set out.[6] Thus, for Comte the revolution will only come to an end with a new harmonization of base and superstructures by extending the principles of science into politics. This would regulate the new elements of industrialism and organize them into a systematic whole, only then ending the reigning intellectual anarchy.[7] In other words an as yet unimagined polity, beyond the utopian sketches in Saint-Simon, was in the process of being constructed beyond the democratic model in Britain. France was about to take the lead, not only because of the specifically rationalist character of its Enlightenment, but because of its unique pathway. Paradoxically, Comte recommended that France be broken up into 17 "intendancies" to become republics (2001, iv: 365, 401), mirroring the divisions east of France when he was writing. The reverse happened: all the many small principalities were to be swept up into large states later in the nineteenth century in wars of unification, followed by wars of national liberation.

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6   Comte planned to write a volume in 1861 on industry, called "System of Positive Industry, or Treatise of the Combined Action of Humanity on her Planet" (2001, iv: 471).

7   In relation to the law of the three states, this analysis raises a fundamental issue, and this can be approached via the debate between Raymond Aron and Ernest Gellner. Does the arrival of industrial society determine the basic characteristics of all modern societies, or are there intermediate structures that override them? For Aron, the similarities of Soviet society and Western capitalist societies were greater than their differences: Capitalism is a second-order category (the Saint-Simonian, and Comtean doctrines). For Gellner that is an error (See the account of the debate by Merquior, in J. Hall et al. (eds.) 1992: 317–42). The question arises again with contemporary China: will the industrial state remain guided by an autocratic party, or will there be the rise of a new wealthy class that will demand a more complex system of representation of their interests?

Spencer's Scientific Liberal Sociology as a Response to Comte

Writers surveying nineteenth-century social thought just at the period of World War One, such as Ernest Barker and Bertrand Russell, noted that the figure most in vogue during the late Victorian and Edwardian epoch was Herbert Spencer. Curiously influential on the development of sociology elsewhere in the world, he made no lasting impact in Britain, for his influence suddenly waned after 1918. At the mid-twentieth century, Borges lamented the development of the social liberal state and recalled nostalgically Spencer's lucid denunciation (Borges, 2000: 310). Hayek, at the same time, developed his passionate commitment to a radical reversal of the state's growth (Hayek, 1944). This curious history should not obscure the fact that sociology was very much a mid-nineteenth-century product after its coinage and elaboration by Comte and then Mill and Spencer and others in the 1840s and 1850s. Spencer claimed this new terminology was in all essentials his invention. It was in fact an effort to correct the errors of Comtean positivism by altering the details, inverting the utopian elements of the frame and providing a new metaphysical epilogue (which was to have wide ramifications via Bergson and Heidegger). But in 1937 Talcott Parsons—who composed an influential synthesis of Durkheim and Weber, the high point of liberal sociology—famously queried: Who reads Spencer now? By the 1960s, it was widely held that there had been no classical sociology in Britain, such was the total eclipse of Spencer's social thought. Yet there were the beginnings of a reassessment in the popular editions of Spencer that appeared in the 1960s as neo-liberalism began to look again at the roots of liberal theory before its dramatic return with Reagan and Thatcher, who wanted to cut back the overblown state and return its assets to the private sector.

It would be possible today, given the impact of neo-liberal thought since the 1980s, to suggest that those who want to understand the contemporary world have to read not only Adam Smith but also Herbert Spencer, for Spencer took up the social thought of the mid-eighteenth century with its concepts of division of labor, specialization and national wealth in a perspective of an economy driven by natural laws, and gave this problematic a decisive inflection (see Dardot et al., 2013: 35–36). Spencer's conceptual matrix became that of progressive evolution and, before Darwin, conceived this progression as a selective process of elimination or, as he famously expressed it, the "survival of the fittest." As a theorist of competition in a bio-social optic, this idea was taken up and later baptized as "social Darwinism." As a first approximation, it would be possible to say that Spencerian sociology combined scientism, biology, economics, sociology and positivism in a lethal cocktail. Yet the twist that Spencer gave to the physiocratic and utilitarian doctrines was actually of a different character, since his thought was critical of the late Victorian celebration of imperialism and social engineering. His main ideas were worked out in mid-century around the theme of the natural vitality of the social outside of the state. In contrast to the social logic of Comte, but in line with Marx, social evolution could be shown to lead to a society in which the state would be reduced to very minimal functions. It is not surprising that Durkheim and then Parsons argued there was a similarity here with Marx's idea of the withering away of the state, a latent anarchic element in

these theories that retained a concept of the primordial individual who could and would be liberated from the state (whether oppressive or not).

Readings of Spencer now tend to emphasize his formation in the English tradition of dissenting Nonconformist Protestantism (Francis, 2007). A basic celebration of individual independence was retained throughout his intellectual career, even if this seems at variance with a project for a new sociology. Spencer wanted to show that the development and progression of individual liberty was a fact that could be scientifically demonstrated, not simply revealed within a religious tradition. Thus, he had recourse to a theory of science and scientific development that aimed to correct that of Comte, but it gained little support from philosophers like Mill who knew Comte's classification. Although both Comte and Spencer gave phrenology a place in their theories, it was only Spencer who developed an individual psychology. Comte had no space between the biological and the social: the individual self was a metaphysical illusion, the product of the metaphysical polity. Spencer on the other hand held that the individual was an essential reality whose emancipation was dependent on the withdrawal of the state from all but the essential function of sanctioning a minimal legal framework of individual life. It is the vitality of the individual in civil society, not the state, that has always been the creative force in history and society, and so the encroachment of the state into education, economics, health, family—even the postal service and the money supply—was an aberration. Unlike the physiocrats of the eighteenth century, Spencer was not supportive of enlightened despots but favored democracy simply as a lesser evil, and thus his sociology contrasted industrial democratic forms with autocratic militarism. Yet all governments and public administrations tend to be inefficient in comparison with private organization, thus growth of the state leads not just to a curtailment of liberty of the individual but also to a considerable increase in legalism and bureaucratic incompetence.[8]

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8 It is therefore wrong to say that Spencer's thought is the ideological expression of the Victorian ethos. As the various expansions of public authorities and their reforms took place in the latter part of the nineteenth century in an imperial context, Spencer was forced into a more and more defensive position since the basic thrust of his sociology was to identify these developments as out of line with scientifically defined social evolution. Imperial authority was destructive of native cultures, and state socialism was destructive of local cultures. Altruism through the state was destructive of genuine natural altruism that arises spontaneously in any society. State development beyond a minimal level that can be precisely defined leads to a deformation of creative evolution and to a whole series of perverse effects. Increases in taxation that might be required for state developments of this kind were, in effect, a kind of regression by hidden theft of the freedom of action of the taxed. His reactions to late-Victorian developments included a revision of his ideas on social and gender equality, which should not be legally engineered. Spencer placed his laws of social evolution in the wider frame of universal evolution, and his philosophical reflections were thus cosmically attuned and legitimized; but this ran counter to the drift of Victorian social developments, and he found himself out of line with the new social liberalism of sociologists favorable to Comte, such as Beesly (see his influential lecture of 1868 (1881)), and L. T. Hobhouse. His sociology emerged and seemed perfectly attuned to the world after the revolutionary Napoleonic Wars and before the new tensions after 1880. In this perspective, even though Halévy suggests in his study of utilitarianism that Spencer put an end to "philosophical radicalism" (1972: 514) it is clear that Spencerian sociology was radical, critical

So how did Spencer's critical ideology work as a science? The basic program was the same as that of Comte: the identification of the specific stages of social evolution through the vision of a philosophical logic of the general law of philosophical evolution. In Spencer, the stages were simple, compound and doubly compound social structures. Taking biology as the science providing the models for living organisms led Spencer to a sociology of structures, functions, systems and processes of differentiation, integration at different levels of development, and creative evolution through selection (survival or elimination). But Spencer did not simply chart a linear evolution. The hierarchy of orders of developmental levels was a backdrop for his key sociological analyses. The pattern of stages was both a complex outcome and a development of a cross-cutting feature: the dynamics of variation between what he called military versus industrial activity within each stage. Earlier societies tended to be more militaristic, later ones more industrial; and, with Comte, at each stage a society could be drawn into militarism. Thus, it was a simple matter to define where social development was leading from the 1880s, since he had identified Bismarckian state socialism as essentially connected with militarism, as was late Victorian imperialism. With relentless effort, Spencer's work became a prolonged and sustained critique of the lurch of more complex social forms toward those that were more and more violent, hierarchical, state-led, and anti-liberal. The essential point was that this was not a new evolutionary stage. He idolized the slow development of a civil society within the spontaneous creation of the web of private contracts: the intimate connection of unregulated small-scale capitalism and individual freedom with its natural and unsentimental processes of selection by elimination. This did not mean the elimination of the uncivilized by the civilized, by militaristic imperialists. Spencer's volumes on scientific ethics emerge from a sociology against the grain of big organized capital and imperial expansion. It became defensive and conservative while retaining its radical utopianism. It did not seek to transform society by violent revolution in order to bring it to a new level of complexity. It sought to draw society away from what he saw as "re-barbarization." Whereas Comte outlined a utopia in which a new priesthood would exercise hegemony based on neo-fetishism over profane industrialism, Spencer advocated a utopia, and he drew this conclusion from his theoretical analysis of evolution, in which the "priestly authority" that had almost completely disappeared among the Dissenters "will entirely disappear" (1885: 824). But would this happen? Spencer's verdict was that the condition that could make this happen, the arrival of the free industrial society, "will not be fulfilled during an epoch on which we are entering"—an epoch threatening both militarism and "a system of production and distribution under State-control" (1885: 824).

It has often been suggested that there is a key opposition between Comte and Spencer on a central issue of social theory. The former holds that modern society tends to dissolution if not held together by specific forms of government, while

and utopian, and that the virtual anarchic capitalist utopia he espoused survived in a strand of economic thought that became somewhat eccentric until it made its dramatic reappearance in the 1930s as a critique of liberal socialism.

the latter holds that government should withdraw as much as possible to allow the hidden mechanisms of solidarity to work naturally (see, for example, Lukes, 1973: 140–45). It has also been suggested that two lines of theory that give rise to this opposition should not, however, be allowed to stand as an absolute antagonism (see Seidentop, 1979).[9]

One could ask therefore to what extent the two kinds of legacy, the two sides of the equation, which we could call liberal and socialist, are bound together or are in antagonism? It would seem on first view that Spencer pushes to extreme in the direction of the natural harmonies that arrive from egoism (and the survival of the fittest, as mentioned, a phrase he coined), and Comte pushes to extreme in the elimination of egoism and toward organized altruism (a concept he coined in the 1840s). As for Marx, it is clear that there was no "sociology" in the sense of a general theory of the nature of the social bond, although the stages of social evolution (from early communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and then to communism) are taken from Saint-Simon. Up until the mid-1880s, there is an embarrassing silence in Marx and Engels on the concept of basic social solidarities. In 1884 Engels drew the stages of social evolution together, avoiding all reference to religion, in his analysis of technology, kinship, property, gender, class and the state, in the new ordering of savagery, barbarism and civilization. It was also Engels who provided the detailed analysis of the Bismarck revolution as a new kind of conservative capitalist revolution "from above" in a distinct pathway to autocratic industrial militarism.

The sociological questions that arise are: firstly does the superstructure of religion and political formation set limits on, or promote the growth of, industry and technology, and secondly what is the extent to which industrialism (not capitalism) sets limits to the kinds of political regimes that can co-exist with it? Spencer suggests that social planning tends to be inefficient, and it is this argument that becomes a crucial issue for later liberalisms. And at this point it is important to register the large-scale cultural change that signaled the move against individualism at the last third of the nineteenth century. Bourdieu noted this fundamental change in his lectures on the state: It involved a move away from the direct allocation of responsibility of action to the free individual, to "a system of complex factors each of which has to be given some weight" in assessing an individual for the whole situation in which a lived action occurs, the results of the action, and the consequences of the action (2015: 364).

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9   Seidentop's argument is that, in the period 1815–30, there was a "great debate" that decisively influenced the development of the social sciences as it concerned the mode in which the reactionary politicians could be countered with a new conception of an institutional balance of institutions to produce liberty. In particular, they developed the notion of two quite different routes forward: the British and the French. They particularly analyzed the way in which French centralization led to an administered and bureaucratic society, as opposed to the free development of local culture, as in Britain. Evidently, as Pickering points out, this was too Protestant a view, and he worked out as early as 1822 a view that it was necessary to restore the separation of Church and state in a new way to bring the new "social organization" into harmony with its level of civilization, best achieved within the Catholic, not Protestant, tradition (Comte 1998:71).

The New Liberalism(s) after Spencer

The major revised take-up of the Comtean approach was by Lester Ward in the United States and Durkheim in France, both of whom saw it as charting a path that was quite different from the liberal sociologists such as Spencer. The sociology of Max Weber can also be read as a response to the changed circumstances of the social state introduced by Bismarck. The other positivist tradition, that of Marx and Engels, also went through parallel mutations: in Germany with the reformism of Bernstein and in Russia with the mutations in theory introduced by the Bolshevik group that very specifically made a return to the pure Marx of revolutionary theory and practice and that had the most consequential long-term effects. Durkheim drew the distinction between socialism and communism as a fundamental divide and suggested social theory is often mistaken in thinking the state is either a purely repressive machine, or that the purely political division of powers can deliver political and social liberty in the fullest sense, or that socialism can be delivered by law, or by force. Durkheim critiques the Spencerian thesis that freedom is freedom from the state. Against the political illusion of power, for example as found in Montesquieu, Durkheim in effect tried to show that liberty is based on a particular form of the total social division of power: The state "must even permeate all those secondary groups of family, trade and professional association, Church, regional areas, and so on." (Durkheim, 1992: 64). This historic struggle, central to Durkheim's own "grand narrative" of the movement from societies based on "mechanical" to those based on "organic" solidarity, is also the narrative of the modern state's intervention in closed kin and occupational groups, and it opens the route to modern conceptions of "freedom." The central theoretical issue here was addressed in Durkheim's essay of 1900, called "Two Laws of Penal Evolution" (Gane, 1992: 21–49) in which he criticized Spencer for thinking that the degree of absoluteness of governmental power is related to the number of functions it undertakes. Yet Durkheim worked toward a very Spencerian formulation: that the degree of absoluteness of a governmental power is not an inherent characteristic of any given social type (1992: 24). If Durkheim revealed the full extent of Comte's debt to Saint-Simonians (1962), he also deepened Comte's conception of the division of labor, and of early religions, continued the Comtean idea of normal and pathological social phenomenon and conceived sociology as a therapeutic discipline. At the same time, he rejected his project of a new Religion of Humanity as artificial. "It is life itself, and not a dead past that can produce a living cult" (1995: 429).

Weber's last writings present a very clear analysis of complexity of the inherent conflict of values in social life. Instead of leading to a therapeutics, Weber insisted on the irreducible nature of ethical choice and responsibility, and that sociology belongs to a kind of knowledge that provides at best a critical clarification of the structures and forces at work in modern civilization: It does not itself, and cannot, produce values, ultimate, intermediate or provisional. Weber seems to work, at one level at least, with a Comtean idea that scientific progression is part of a wide process of rationalization of cultures that produces new forms of secular metaphysics. And he agreed with Spencer's view that, far from eliminating metaphysical speculation, science widens the spheres for such reflection. There are two major critiques launched by Weber. One is his engagement with

Marx and the analysis of the emergence of capitalism that registers his distinctive difference with Comte and Durkheim. Weber found Marx's analysis, and "historical materialism," reductive, and the tradition that focuses on industrialism alone rather than on capitalism and industrialism misses an essential level of analysis. Whereas Comte simply noted industry had flourished in the Protestant period (M: 704), Weber's "The Protestant Ethic" outlines the thesis of the decisive role of religion in opening the economic to modern rational capitalism; and to do that Weber worked toward a conception of types of capitalism that has become, in addition to the analysis of the division of labor, essential to modern sociology. The term is to be differentiated from simple exchange, money, banking, trading, "booty" or even finance capital, that are widespread in many different types of cultures. For the purposes of his analysis Weber very explicitly identifies capitalism as "the rational capitalistic organisation of (formally) free labour […] and two other important factors[: …] the separation of business from the household, which completely dominates modern economic life, and closely connected with it, rational book-keeping" (1930: 21–22). What interests him is the continuous activity of production in the form of the employment of wage labor and that products are marketable in a way that is calculable as a commercial exchange. This conception is very close to that developed by Marx, of course, but what is new is the emphasis on rationality, calculation in relation to markets, including labor markets, and competition, as well as rational administration and law. Weber is intrigued by the fact that this formation is not even identical with a bourgeoisie—for this class can exist on other foundations. Above all it only came into existence within one unique cultural configuration—not in Asia, nor in European antiquity, but only with the emergence of the Protestant-dominated cultures of Northern Europe: "We are dealing with the connection of the spirit of modern economic life with the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism. Thus, we treat here only one side of the causal chain" (1930: 27). His other studies, he says, "follow out both causal relationships, so far as it is necessary in order to find points of comparison with the Occidental development. For only in this way is it possible to attempt a causal evaluation of those elements of the economic ethics of the Western religions which differentiate them from others, with a hope of attaining a tolerable degree of approximation" (1930: 27). But clearly Weber is writing in terms of the pathways to modernity, reformulating Comte's comparative national framework into a world historic comparative of great religions, repeating a refrain about the dangers of communism and militarism that integrates Marx's reading of capitalism into the story of rationalization while rejecting economic reductionism.

Weber does not hesitate to follow Comte in thinking that the industrial order is modelled on military discipline. He gives this transition an unexpected turn for, while acknowledging the importance of technological advances—the iron tool, horse-drawn chariot—his discussion insists that the main determinant is not technology but the factor of discipline itself: "It was discipline not gunpowder which initiated the transformation of warfare" and it was also the effectiveness of discipline that "gave birth to the Hellenic Polis […] Swiss democracy [… and was] instrumental in establishing the rule of the Roman patriciate and, finally, the bureaucratic state, Egypt, Assyria, and modern Europe." The development of the standing army, the importance of which was underlined by Comte, is for Weber the sign of an "increasing concentration of the means of

warfare in the hands of the warlord" and the professional army, financed from public funds, represents a step toward the separation of the warrior from the means of warfare, an advance toward a new "mass discipline" (1978, 1152–55). Thus, along with the critique of economic reductionism, Weber also provided a powerful critique of technological reductionism in suggesting that the transition from military to industrial society is not simply a question of rationality or occupational formation, but also the transposition of a form of solidarity.

It seems that in the United States, Great Britain and France, Comte's influence on writers such as Beesly (whose lecture of 1868 rejected the direct organization of cooperatives and supported trade unions, with an expanded role for the state in education and welfare) made a major contribution to a new liberalism. This is a contribution against Spencer's minimal state utopia, toward a much-enlarged range of social interventions following the perceived success of Bismarckian state socialism in the final third of the nineteenth century. In Britain, the positivists had hounded Spencer relentlessly (Eisen, 1967) and with L. T. Hobhouse found an influential sociologist (who wrote an important paper on the law of the three states) who advocated the extension of the state into social provision. In the United States it was not only Lester Ward's monumental sociology that tried to move beyond the Comte–Spencer debate, but important figures such as Henry Croly (actually baptized into the Church of Humanity) who, with Walter Lippman, pressed for a new liberal state interventionism (Harp, 1995). The older framework of Catholicism minus Christianity was abandoned. The general orientation, from Ward through to Durkheim and Weber, was to support the new liberalism and give it intellectual legitimation. A significant and symbolic meeting of those leading the project for a new type of liberalism against totalitarianism was held in Paris in 1938, called the Walter Lippmann Colloque (Audier, 2012), and it was from this meeting that the Mont Pellerin Society emerged as the location of neo-liberalism after 1945 (Mirowski, P. et al. (eds.) 2009).

The Emergence of Neo-Liberalism: Hayek, Popper, Friedman and Voegelin

The whole edifice of the liberal welfare state came under attack from a movement to provide an alternative liberalism based on the market. Two writers in particular, Friedrich Hayek and Eric Voegelin, linked this to an attack on Comte. Hayek's critique was outlined in two books, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) and *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (originally 1941–44). Karl Popper's essay, "The Poverty of Historicism" (originally published in 1944), seems to have been in some respects merely an elaboration of Hayek, especially with regard to Comte. Hayek refers to the diffusion of Comte's ideas coming principally through Mill and others: H. Carey, T. Veblen, J. K. Ingram, W. Ashley, L. T. Hobhouse, K. Lamprecht and K. Breysig (Hayek 1955: 188), a list that is in its own way very bizarre since there is no connection made with the specific theories of the Nazi leaders (for which, see Lepennies 1988: 334–46); in fact, there is some doubt as to whether Hayek or Popper actually read Comte's work, since they use the same quotations and have the same misunderstandings over the same points that can be found in Mill (1961).

The delayed impact of these three essays was considerable across the intellectual and political spectrum. Basically, Comte was charged with being not only misguided in his project for sociology and positivism, but that this project led directly to fascism and communism—Popper dedicated his book to the "countless men and women of all creeds who fell victims to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny" (1961: iii). It is important to remember, before considering the critical onslaught, that Popper said, "I wish to make clear that I believe both Comte and Mill have made great contributions to the philosophy of science and methodology of science" (1961: 119). It soon becomes very clear that Hayek and Popper are not against the idea of progress, and they want to advocate a theory that runs against that of Comte: "I suggest an institutional (and technological) analysis of the conditions of progress" (Popper: 1961: 154), and Hayek says the liberal position has suggested

> the inevitably slow progress of a policy which aimed at a gradual improvement of the institutional framework of a free society. This progress depended on the growth of our understanding of the social forces and the conditions most favourable to their working in a desirable manner. Since the task was to assist, and where necessary to supplement, their operation, the first requisite was to understand them. The attitude of the liberal towards society is like that of the gardener. (1944: 13–14)

Hayek cites "that nineteenth century totalitarian" Auguste Comte's reference to "the perennial Western malady, the revolt of the individual against the species" and says, on the contrary that was the "force which built our civilization" (p. 12). We should note that Popper specifically identifies modern statistical economics as the real social science ("The success of mathematical economics shows that one social science at least has gone through its Newtonian revolution" (1961: 60)), and the claim to that was surely made by Milton Friedman—and, crucially, as "positive economics." For, strange as it may seem all these philosopher-economists are positivists (in the broad sense of the term). Their objection to Comte was that he was the wrong sort of positivist, holding indeed that his ideas were in some important sense an influence on the rise of fascism and totalitarianism in general.

Hayek's real purpose was to show in what way Comte had been a malign influence, influencing the growth of social liberalism. He thus adopts the rhetorical strategy of presenting Comte as dangerously bizarre, even insane, an author who was pressing for a collectivist, planned, anti-liberal order run by a scientific elite that demanded obedience to its regime as a set of prescribed duties. Popper added the gloss that this assemblage was welded together by the ideology of progressive necessity ("historicism"), a misguided application of the idea of evolution in which the future is a known given. Hayek stressed the reactionary nature of some of Comte's analyses in economics (the "individual as an abstraction" from de Bonald), against the background of Comte's almost total ignorance of the debates within political economy. The famous generalization that neo-liberalism at this point asserts against Comte is that all attempts at socio-economic planning via the state, even Keynesianism, lead to Nazism, which is no anomaly but a logical outcome of any such project (Foucault refers to this as the neo-liberal's theoretical "coup de force" (Foucault, 2008: 109)).

This thesis is expressed as an inevitability, as if it were the law of the three states (the neo-liberal project is to rewrite this law, maintaining in its own way the omnipotence of thought). In Hayek and Popper there is, however, no attempt to present a full picture of Comte's critique of liberal-democratic society and the economics that thrives in it, nor any account of Comte's alternative. It is simply noted that Comte regarded economics as a pseudoscience, as a "scientism"—but Hayek was obviously loath to admit that this very idea of the emergence of pseudoscience is Comtean, and quickly passes over this point. Hayek does not conceal the fact that Comte advocated private property and foresaw the rise to prominence of the bankers and did not therefore support a program of total planning. Why, then, did Hayek believe that Comte was a precursor of fascism? It was, it seems, because Comte did not promote liberalism as a doctrine of freedom and individualism, and praised the virtue of obedience. Hayek says, "When, in the concluding section of the first sketch of the future order, he [Comte] discovers a 'special disposition towards command in some and towards obedience in others' and assures us that in our innermost heart we all know 'how sweet it is to obey,' we might match almost every sentence with identical statements of recent German theoreticians who laid the intellectual foundations of the doctrines of the Third Reich. Having been led by his philosophy to take over from the reactionary Bonald the view that the individual is 'a pure abstraction' and society as a whole a single collective being, he is of necessity led to most of the characteristic features of a totalitarian view of society" (Hayek, 1955: 184).

It is worth looking at the words Comte uses:

> If men were as rebellious as they are at present represented, it would be difficult to understand how they could ever have been disciplined; and it is certain that we are all more or less disposed to respect any superiority, especially any intellectual or moral elevation, in our neighbours, independently of any view to our own advantage—and this instinct of submission is, in truth, only too lavished on deceptive appearances. However disorganised (désordonnée) the universal thirst to command may be in our spiritual anarchy, there can be no one who, in a secret and scrupulous self-reflection, has not often felt, more or less vividly, how sweet it is to obey (il est doux d'obéir) when he can have the pleasure of consigning the burdensome responsibility of his general self-conduct to wise and trustworthy guidance, and probably the sense of this is strongest in those who are best fitted for command. In the midst of political convulsion, when the social economy is threatened with dissolution, the mass of the people manifest a scrupulous obedience towards the intellectual and moral guides from whom the accept direction, and upon whom they may even press a temporary dictatorship, in their primary and urgent need of a dominant authority." (Martineau's version slightly amended, MG, (1997: 77, in the CPP: 1975, vol. II, 200))

Thus, Comte's position is rather more subtle than Hayek suggests. Comte notes the universality of a spontaneous submission to spiritual authorities that are accepted as intellectually or morally superior, but that this can be misplaced. Indeed, this tendency to obedience, which is described as in its own way inevitable and indispensable, is always a temptation since it might relieve the individual of a heavy responsibility. The phrase "il est doux d'obéir" can be found in many Catholic text books

that consider spiritual obedience in Christianity, from the fifteenth century onwards. Yet, it is Hayek who could write, with considerable naiveté (considering Comte's own observation that it was the social economy on the point of dissolution that was problematic): "It was man's submission to the market that in the past has made possible the growth of a civilization which without this could not have developed; it is by thus submitting that we are every day helping to build something that is greater than anyone of us can fully understand" (1944: 151–52). Comte, Hayek thinks, advocated the wrong fetish.

The high point of criticism of Comte, however, was to be the analysis by Eric Voegelin, like Hayek a participant of the famous *Privatseminar* (1920–34) of von Mises in Vienna. Voegelin interprets Comte as a thinker who realizes that he is dealing with a religious crisis, not just an economic or social one. For Voegelin, Hayek was wrong to concentrate on an epistemological critique. Voegelin's critique therefore runs in a different direction from that of the liberals, for he warns that the view that Comte was insane comes from Mill and Littré, and for precise reasons: a defensive rejection of the new religious obligation implied in the positivist program. From this perspective, the method of "cerebral hygiene" was a logical step to a religious meditative mode, and as this practice began in 1838 the whole of the construction of sociology was completed in this meditative frame. The elaboration of positive rituals which monumentalize the details of Comte's own life was an attempt to live the solution to the crisis, and must be given recognition as a strength of "prophetic charisma": for Comte is an "intra-mundane eschatologist" (1999: 174). Whereas most commentators regard Comte's writing as inelegant, Voegelin sees it as perfectly attuned to a mode in which "nothing remains unsaid" (p. 182), for Comte's life is a "true apocalypse in the religious sense of the word" (p. 185). This is a reading that aligns itself with the neo-liberals in their rejection of totalitarianism, as it identifies its mass religious character, which leads to Lenin and Hitler: "The satanic Apocalypse begins with Comte" (p. 185). Not just a totalitarian, but "sinister" and an evil "demonic closure." But Voegelin did not stop there. He also wrote critically about the failure of liberalism itself. Mill and the liberals were living in the ruins of a Christian civilization unable to face the consequences of their analysis. The religious positivists and the positive liberals are "brothers" (p. 172). The question Voegelin poses is that of the divine ground and its recovery. His solution is not without an appeal to mysticism that all too often conflates very different forms of involvement of thinkers in their political and religious movements. It seems more accurate to suggest that the positive polity was an answer to a political question and a religious question, and that, given Comte's important change of definition of religion, the new church was conceived as a centralized political organization: *larvatus prodeo*. It was, as Vernon suggests, "an Augustinian theme, fantastically reconstructed" (1984: 565). The history of the positivist church after Comte was one of political, not religious or even scientific, analysis; it did perform religious ceremonies, purged of theology, that constituted one of its forms of ensuring solidarity, and prayer ritual as a "psychotechics" (Tresch, 2014: 271). Instead of uniting the positivists and scientists in one movement, however, it split them, and turned them against each other, the classic tendency to sectarianism.

The Impact of Neo-liberalism

Hayek, the actual target of Voegelin's attack on Comte, was in fact no purist when it came to freedom and liberty. Over the course of his career he had maintained that certain transition periods required strong right-wing dictators or, as he expressed it, "authoritarian" regimes. He visited Pinochet in Chile, advised him, and Pinochet responded to being "understood" (actually, of course, completely misunderstood) and he attempted to integrate Hayek's ideas into a new constitutional form. Pinochet was greatly admired by certain neo-liberal leaders as having stopped a Marxist totalitarian adventure, even if it had to use extreme repression to do so. Hayek followed this line, never criticizing Pinochet's crimes, and considered him as the lesser evil. Hayek and Friedman sent in "the Chicago boys" to Chile to sort out the economy (Steger and Roy, 2010: 100; Fischer, 2009). There is political liberalism and there is economic liberalism; the two are not essential to each other. The difference between Allende and Pinochet is a question of different pathways, democratic socialism and planning versus autocracy and free market. The latter mode has become widespread in various forms, notably the two sub-variations of Russia and China. Yet, this is not a simple return to Spencer's model, for the state remains active in a number of different kinds of interventions.

In conclusion, it is possible, no doubt with a degree of oversimplification, to say that this discussion has pointed to the importance of three types of political states—democratic or authoritarian in either a single or divided structure—and three types of industrial economies—free market, highly planned or regulated (directly or indirectly). The various combinations that have arisen have been examined in the light of Comte's comparative social history and projections. Looking at the way social theory has developed, it is clear that in Comte's time it concerned the different routes of national cultures and states, principally Britain, France and Germany. With Weber, it became an enquiry into world religions and capitalism. In the 1960s this became a problem of routes to democracy in a global context: To Britain, France and Germany were added the United States, India, Japan and China (Bourdieu, 2014: 71–83). At about this time there also re-appeared the question: Why the rise of the West? (Ashworth et al., 1987, and see Fergusson, 2011). Today the question appears to concern the routes to civilizations: that of the West (America and Europe), Russia, China, India and the civilization that is Islam. In the eighteenth century, civilization was one process and universal in its progression, and Comte's first formulations concerned the universal law of civilization, which set limits to the possible forms of "social organization." Today there are "civilization states," and discussion of the possible clash of civilizations. Perhaps it is instructive to turn to a point made by Tresch in his discussion of Comte and his "romantic machines". Tresch looks specifically at the positive calendar and the attempt to regulate time. But in the discussion, he refers to another Saint-Simonian, Michel Chevalier, who also regarded religion as a project of rebinding, linking up, and notes that Chevalier talked of the railways in this sense, as a religion. Both Comte and Chevalier rallied to Napoleon III after the coup d'état in 1851, the former advocating a spiritual religion the latter a material religion.[10]

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10 Comte planned to write a volume called *Morale Pratique ou le perfectionnement de la nature humaine* (see Pickering, 2009: 514).

Tresch suggests that Comte's work could be regarded as weaving "multiple rates and scales of progress into a single, developing order. If each discipline was a train moving at its own rate, the *Cours* was the station master who synchronised their arrival" (2014: 265). It might be suggested, then, that the project of the religion of Humanity was to harmonize all the lines of social progress into the final terminus, "the perfection of man in the establishment of a true civilization." Comte, like Wollstonecraft, was an optimist, both in relation to the terminus of knowledge and of social order, just as the liberals are optimists that the world market will harmonize a global social order.

In retrospect, it is possible to identify the 1980s as the crucial decade: the arrival to power of neo-liberal politicians (Reagan and Thatcher), the collapse of the USSR and its empire in Eastern Europe, and the decisive shift of policymaking in China under the influence of Deng Xiaoping. The latter added to the general five-year plan system under the control of the Chinese Communist Party a new motor of industrialization: regulated market capitalism. The new theory is that China has become a "civilization state," one that must be seen in the long view, in which Mao's achievement was the unification of China. The new China appears to be the paradoxical combination—not of Bernstein, Durkheim and Weber, but of Marx, Comte and Spencer—in a formation that has unleashed the most rapid and most extensive industrialization of a peasant society, or indeed any society, the world has ever seen.[11] With its practice of order and progress, a "social organization" governed within the limits of its "civilization" (see Comte of 1822, (in 1998: 92)), we might ask: Is this not the second "revenge of Auguste Comte?" Perhaps so, but in a form he did not predict, for both the liberal and the social positivists charge each other with having produced merely pseudoscience that belongs to the metaphysical stage of social evolution, a war of simulacra. Yet, Comte would say, all sides seem to resist the democratic solution: in Russia, the transition to a new oligarchy; in China, the one all-powerful Communist Party machine; and, in the West, the transition, via neo-liberalism, to "post-democracy," in which the political process loses out gradually to private power.

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11 See Brown, (2006). Keith et al. (2014) argue that China has a new form of capitalism altogether, but there is no account given of the Party and the planning system. There is a large literature on China; the most relevant here are Arrighi (2009), Ferguson (2011), Jacques (2012) and Zhang (2012). A quite different story, that of a power structure that works above the law—given in an account influenced by Agamben—is Sapio (2010).

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Chapter Ten

LIVING AFTER POSITIVISM,
BUT NOT WITHOUT IT

Robert C. Scharff

Everyone knows there are no longer any positivists. The pinched epistemology that makes everything from moral principles to Shakespeare's sonnets "cognitively meaningless" is a relic of the past—as are the emotivist ethics, the hopelessly formalist conceptions of "unified" science, the strict behaviorism in social research, and the scientistic hostility toward history and the humanities that went with it. Thanks especially to Quine and Kuhn, the epistemological dogmas and factual misperceptions of scientific practice endemic to positivism—and especially to its logical empiricist version—have been exposed and put behind us. Today we are all post-positivists; perhaps most of us were never really positivists in the first place.

Yet like most of what everyone knows, this popular narrative is wrong. Old traditions are not like worn-out clothes, specific and fully accessible items to be taken off at the end of the day. Shedding a philosophical orientation by renouncing its explicit doctrines is as ineffective as "deciding" not to be prejudiced. The fact is, we still live with positivism, and our long and problematic relation to it runs deeper than the level where theories and methods come and go. To see how much positivism we still inherit, one must look past the self-congratulatory post-positivist renunciations of twentieth-century logical empiricism and focus more carefully on the actual transition from logical empiricism to the various species of post-positivism as they were made—something, in fact, that a number of historians of analytic philosophy have begun to do.[1]

From this better-informed perspective, it is obvious both that logical empiricists themselves should be given credit for taking at least some theoretically transformative steps against their own initial claims, and also that Quine and Kuhn were never as "post-" positivist as they might have seemed at first. Yet if recent studies are a welcome corrective to the textbook narratives, they remain concerned primarily with the hidden continuities and internal transformations that took place regarding theories and methods, and even more specifically in connection with the reformation of the philosophy of science. The features of our positivist inheritance that I consider in this chapter require both a less

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1 See, e.g., Uebel (1992); also Zammito (2004, esp. 6–14 and n.1, Ch. 1); Carus (2013); and Skorupski (2013).

intellectualist and a less specialized perspective. I want to argue that while all the attention was being drawn toward the noisy arguments over theoretical and methodological reform in the philosophy of science, something like Comte's "positive spirit" passed silently into our general inheritance, so that today, this "Comteanism" remains for us a kind of culture-wide positivism-by-default. "We" in the rich part of the Western world call it the spirit of "development."

Comte thought that humanity is ultimately destined to live under the auspices of a fully flourishing third and final "stage" of intellectual and social development—that is, prosper in a never-ending age in which scientific naturalism rules epistemology, and technoscientific planning structures our lives in a way that promises an existence so deeply satisfying that any further intellectual and social transformation of the sort that prompted our move beyond theological and metaphysical ways of thinking and acting would seem self-evidently unnecessary. This ultimate eventuality, says Comte, expresses the basic law of all human development—in each individual, in every quest for knowledge, in our societies, and in the whole history of the species. Of course, in the eyes of his philosophical progeny, Comte's "law" is no law at all. At best, it is an easily discredited empirical hypothesis; at worst, it is the linchpin of an old-fashioned speculative philosophy of history. In either case, it has no place in a "scientific" philosophy, and many logical positivists felt so strongly about this that they rebranded themselves as logical *empiricists* precisely to drive the point home. Yet in fact, Comte's vision of a third and final "positively" scientific stage has outlived their objections. It survives not in pre-scientific speculation or post-positive theories, but in life—for example, in the widespread privileging and overextension of the idea of technoscience in popular images of the good life; in the notion that human practices are at their best when understood scientifically and guided by science-like advice; in our allegedly scientific but actually ideological concepts of the political economy and rational economic actor; and in the belief that the whole drift of world history is necessarily toward what "we" in the capitalist West call "development." And perhaps still more problematically, Comte's vision is alive and well in the common philosophical assumption that anyone who objects to any of the above must necessarily be wishing for a return to the bad old pre-scientific days of supernaturalism and speculative metaphysics."[2]

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2   A recent collection makes what might seem to be the same point, by criticizing a "scientism" that grew out of the Enlightenment and now constitutes the basic (and intellectually oppressive) outlook in the Western world (Williams and Robinson 2015). In support of their argument, Williams cites Heidegger's famous characterization of our age as set up and "enframed" technoscientifically, such that "the rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth" (Heidegger 2008a, 333). Here, says Williams, Heidegger "expresses the concern of many, that successful effective technology subtly invites us to entertain the possibility that all problems are merely technological problems" (Williams and Robinson 2015, 2). However, Heidegger thinks of enframing as an eventuation, a way of revealing everything, in which we already find ourselves "dangerously" caught up, whereas Williams treats it as something the human mind constructs, using "technology" as a "sweeping metaphor," in order to produce a scientistic metaphysical system. The emphasis in the collection as a whole is thus

In the four main parts of this chapter, I consider further just what sort of positivism it is that I think "survives" in our inheritance after the demise of logical empiricism. First, I explain why this issue is better addressed in Comtean rather than anti-logical empiricist or post-positivist terms. Second, I discuss Comte's conception of the third stage of intellectual development, in order to highlight a few of its familiar-sounding themes (part two) and consider why we could never be as unrelievedly happy about them as Comte was himself (part three). Finally, I offer a brief characterization of how Comte's focus on the "spirit" of positivism, not just on doctrines and methods that might be defended in its name, might now be reinterpreted so as to help us address our own misgivings concerning precisely this spirit. Throughout this discussion, a secondary thesis will be that *opposition* to positivism cannot in principle assuage these misgivings because such opposition tends to be rooted in the same philosophical spirit as positivism itself.

The Positivism behind Post-Positivism

The position against which we usually think of ourselves as being post-positivist is, of course, not Comte's but that of the logical empiricism whose basic orientation is laid out in a famous 1929 manifesto, "The Scientific Conception of the World."[3] The main task for the (no adjective) philosopher, it declares, is philosophy of science; and philosophers of science need make only two basic commitments. They must provide a formal-logical analysis (i.e., a rational reconstruction) of the scientific method, and they must be strict empiricists about the effective range of this method's application. These two commitments together constitute what all logical empiricists regard as philosophy's "scientific

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focused on certain ideas or ideological beliefs the contributors regard as a product of an excessive and ultimately unscientific science-mindedness. Scientism, says Williams, "entails a metaphysical commitment to naturalist, reductive or emergent [basically mechanistic] materialism and tries to define science in a way that includes not only a commitment to empirical methods, but also to this particular metaphysics" (Williams and Robinson, 3; cf. 6–7, 11–12). Not all the contributors define scientism in precisely these terms; but all of them appear to follow the editors in treating scientism as a position, one involving an unjustified elevation of certain concepts or methodological features of science into an extra-scientific worldview, and they focus primarily on either the historical issue of how this happened or the current epistemological issue of how science can be separated from scientism. However, I do not think scientism stands or falls on the basis of the embrace or modification of a conceptual system; nor do I think our remaining problems with Comte's legacy, insofar as it is scientistic, can be solved by achieving better clarity about the real nature of science. Hence, my discussion focuses on what Heidegger (and I think Comte also) regard as the prior question, viz., how must everything already seem to be given to us and how must we already understand our relations with it—in other words, how must we already be-in-the-world—such that the formulation of a scientistic metaphysics might seem appropriate in the first place?

3   Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap and Hans Hahn (1973). The pamphlet is described as a joint production, with Neurath writing the initial draft (318n.1). Hereafter cited as Neurath, et al. Among the best brief accounts of logical empiricism during its heyday are Uebel (2013) and, more comprehensively, the somewhat earlier essays in Richardson and Uebel (2007) and Hardcastle and Richardson (2003).

view of the world." Statements of this basic mission were repeated countless times, in both professional and popular form, but always with these two commitments prominently displayed.[4] And, of course, it is toward the logical empiricist "position" portrayed in these explicit statements that subsequent critiques were directed.[5]

There is, however, another voice in this manifesto. The authors explain in strikingly unpositivistic terms that all philosophers who possess *epistemologically* the "spirit" or "attitude" of the formal and empirical sciences, also tend to share similar ethical, social and political *opinions* (i.e., views on "questions of life"), both with each other and with all those who display the same "intellectual attitude which presently manifests itself in many other walks of life … we feel all around us."[6] Especially given the recent turn in world events, this claim certainly seems exaggerated today, but what is important here is the authors' insistence that this personal fact about those who embrace the scientific worldview, interesting as it might be, is not a philosophical topic. There is, they say, "*no such thing as philosophy as a basic or universal science alongside or above the various fields of the one empirical science*" (Neurath, et al. 1973, 316, authors' emphasis). Strictly speaking, there are no "philosophical" assertions, no substantive pronouncements about life's meaning or its norms. To the

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4   The other *locus classicus* for the movement, generally regarded as the source of the phrase, "logical positivism," is Blumberg and Feigl (1931). In similarly manifesto-like terms, they explain that it is precisely because logical positivism proceeds "by means of the theory of knowledge […] constructed [in accordance with recent developments in factual and formal sciences]," that it "goes beyond the Comtean and pragmatic rejection of metaphysics as useless or superfluous and shows that the propositions of metaphysics, in most senses of the term, are, strictly speaking, "meaningless" (282). Friedrich Stadler summarizes the outlook as "a basic scientific orientation grounded in logical and linguistic analysis, an explanatory and epistemological monism in terms of methodology and research subjects, and finally a sort of fallibilistic epistemology with interdisciplinarity featuring as a program that opposes any sort of foundationalist 'system'" (Stadler 2003, xii). As Stadler's statement shows, "logical and linguistic analysis" is the *vehicle* for establishing the sort of epistemology the movement deems appropriate, but the appropriateness of this epistemology is *already* understood scientistically. Hence, it would be to confuse the means of defense with the thing defended to argue that logical empiricism must be interpreted above all as constituting a mathematico-linguistic turn.

5   Alan Richardson makes the important historical point that because Kuhn and others perhaps too often framed their critiques of logical empiricism in terms of the movement's more manifesto-like writings, they too easily (and sometimes quite wrongly) concluded logical empiricism cannot in principle acknowledge that scientists often use very unscientific ideas and methods in their search for knowledge, when in fact all that their epistemic position requires is that when scientists finish their research, their *assertions of scientific law* must satisfy certain formal conditions (Richardson 2007, 351–53). The same thing can be said about work that assumes logical empiricists cannot acknowledge the political and cultural significance of science. See, e.g., Howard (2003, 25–93). However, neither of these historical corrections changes the equally important point I am emphasizing here, viz., that there simply *is* a fundamental distinction between what logical empiricism can and cannot in principle acknowledge philosophically, and this distinction figures crucially both in how logical empiricists handled their own extra-"philosophical" concerns and in post-positivist critiques of the position.

6   This specific phrasing is from Carnap (1967, xvii-xviii); cf. Neurath et al. (1973, 304–5, 317–18).

extent that there is philosophy at all, it consists in the "logical clarification of scientific concepts, statements and methods" that " provides science with as complete a range of formal possibilities as possible, from which to select what best fits each empirical finding" (317). Philosophy establishes the conditions of meaning and truth. It does not contribute to "the metaphysical and theological debris of millennia." Hence, "philosophy" (again, typically with no modifying adjective) cannot officially recognize as a proper topic its own shared sentiment about the importance of what it is doing.

But an interpretive trap lies in wait for us. The textbook conclusion usually drawn from this apparent conundrum is that here the Vienna Circle positivists are caught in one of their notorious attempts to reject metaphysics metaphysically. In fact, however, something more serious—and potentially more instructive—is going on. Certainly, if we simply take its adherents at their anti-metaphysical metaphysical word, it seems easy to conclude that logical positivism is indeed, as Passmore puts it in a much-quoted remark, "as dead as a philosophical movement ever becomes."[7] Yet even if all the main features of the positivist program have been rejected, this rejection is not as "*post*-positivist"—that is, as radically beyond logical empiricism's scientific view of the world—as advertised, and this fact ultimately has little to do with the logical empiricist program and everything to do with the scientific attitude or "sentiment" we were assured philosophers do not have to talk about.

In one respect, the survival of positivism in post-positivist thought is perfectly understandable. As is often the case with positions that start out as reactions to other positions, the underlying "spirit" of the original position still tends to be shared by its opponents. Atheism, for example, often embarrassingly resembles the theology it rejects, that is, by being a contrarian position formed with negative signs placed in front of the original articles of faith.[8] Thus similarly, much opposition to logical positivism involves rejecting overt features of its analysis of science while continuing to rely on the orthodox conception of science itself. For example, to push for epistemological pluralism by arguing that there are "other" sciences with "other" purposes using "other" methods (e.g., to "understand" rather than "explain") depends upon one's leaving in its hegemonic position precisely the positivist sense that the "real" sciences are the mathematical and physical sciences.[9]

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7 Passmore (1967, 56; 2006, 529). Less quoted is his qualification a few lines earlier that he is talking about logical positivism "considered as the *doctrine of a sect*" (emphasis supplied).

8 I am thinking here of those whose atheism is motivated by intellectual commitments to scientifically conceived epistemology, rigorous naturalism and ethical humanism like Stephen Hawking, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins and Samuel Harris, who are primarily concerned to produce arguments that "refute" religious beliefs and believing. For recent critical discussion see, e.g., Amarasingam (2010). Very differently motivated are those (e.g., Marxists) concerned primarily with socio-political reform who see religious superstition, dogmatism and monotheistic belief systems as mainstream vehicles for supporting the status quo (or worse). The former group is more anti-theological than anti-religious, though of course there is often some overlap (most famously, perhaps, in the case of Bertrand Russell). The worry I am expressing here is above all about the way scientific theory is wielded as an extra-scientific weapon as if this were self-evidently a good philosophical procedure.

9 In fact, this approach adds problems of its own, e.g., by implying that there are two (or more?) "ontologies," one (or more?) for natural science, one (or more?) for the human sciences. This

And to insist that considering the discovery of scientific theories is philosophically just as important as their justification, does little to undercut the positivist assumption that the confirmation of predictive theories is the "essence" of scientific practice.[10] Nor does positivism go away because one is currently inclined to "contextualize" scientific thinking so as to rid philosophy of science of the notoriously ahistorical conception of rationality promoted by logical empiricism. For "adding" an account of the circumstances within which thinking takes place does nothing by itself to challenge the assumption that scientific rationality—never mind who uses it and under what conditions—remains a topic hegemonic unto itself.[11]

In spite of the impression one might still get from mainstream textbooks, such "science studies"-based criticisms of post-positivism as these are now widely recognized.[12] However, the problem is not just that logical empiricist doctrines and methods have often been opposed in a positivist way. The real problem lies in the fact that, in spite of convincing appearances to the contrary, by assuming that one becomes post-positivist through opposing doctrines or methods, one actually *revitalizes* the positivist sentiment Neurath, et al., urged everyone to ignore. Granted, the analysis of right thinking has now been pluralized and deformalized and contextualized. First-person input is now generously allowed to supplement third-person analyses. Philosophical contact is now permitted between the history of science/philosophy and the current practice of science/philosophy. And even if epistemology does still tend to favor *natural scientific* rationality, we are assured that all our pluralizing, contextualizing and historicizing has rendered this traditional gambit harmless. Yet if all these moves can make one appear post-positivist, everything that every positivist since Comte has understood to be definitive of scientific philosophy is silently reaffirmed. One still starts with epistemology, privileges the epistemology most suited to the natural sciences (where science is already "really" happening), tacks on the naturalist "metaphysics" that is actually presupposed by this epistemology and then, with great generosity of spirit, allows discussion of "other features" of scientific practice that logical empiricism rejected, writing this rejection off as merely the temporary effect of an excessive enthusiasm for the new project of defending reason and truth without reference to mere history and the "slag" of natural languages.

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only exacerbates the already problematic essentialism in traditional philosophy of science that is one of the factors that led to the campaign for epistemic pluralism in the first place. See Rouse (2002, 81–95; 1987, Ch. 6).

10 So, e.g., the two pioneering collections by Thomas Nickles (1980a; 1980b) that quite explicitly try to legitimize the idea that discovery "also" has its own "logics." Nickles's later work reflects the degree to which this silent deference to rational reconstruction, together with the underlying adherence to the context of discovery/context of verification dichotomy itself has disappeared with the rise of science studies (Nickles 2010).

11 How to relate what philosophers, historians and natural and social scientists themselves now say about the practice of science is certainly not a settled question. See, e.g., Gavroglu and Renn (2007).

12 This does not mean, of course, that everyone who recognizes them agrees on what they imply for either philosophy of science or philosophical critiques of positivism. A good survey of the terrain might start with Laudan (1996) and Biagioli (1999), as well as Zammito (2004).

But what of this deeper set positivist preferences? By what right is lifeworld experience designated as "first" person-like? (Implicit answer: because it is the "third" person perspective that has already been determined to be the detached, objective and truth-seeking outlook, which makes the first-person perspective deserve at best to be supplementary, incurably subjective and feeling-bound)?[13] What good does it do to admit that the natural sciences are just as "interpretive" as the human sciences—that is, just as much a particular sort of articulation of what is "practically pre-understood" in life as any other kind of science—if one then fails to face the much more disruptive conclusion, namely, that if all scientific activity is interpretive, then all science is in this respect ontologically on par whether we are engaged with material nature, other people or things like "the social" and "the political"? (Implicit answer: Because it is already settled that we must all be ontological naturalists—in a way that covers any use of reason and any reality whatever—and that the primary purpose of language is still to picture, represent, mirror or perhaps even constitutively fashion Nature). Instead of answers to questions like these, we get positivism lite.[14]

Asking questions like these might seem to make one a spoil sport in an era of generously revisionary philosophical tendencies. Yet that is precisely what is bothersome. *Something* (that is already deeply in place) is merely being *revised* (in terms of another set of articulations). As is well known, some philosophers (e.g., Heidegger, Derrida, Rorty, perhaps the later Wittgenstein) argue that this "something" is the continuous playing-out of

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13 It should be remembered that the title of Thomas Nagel's famous book is often employed to be more critical of the Cartesian–Comtean–Logical Empiricist philosophical stance than its author. For in *The View from Nowhere* (1986), Nagel makes it very clear that his efforts to find room for the first-person perspective are designed only to give it a carefully limited value and distinctively secondary status. As he later explained, *Nowhere* was certainly interested in establishing that first-person reports are useful, e.g., in reminding us that reason's quest for "unqualified results" is nevertheless "something *we do*" (Nagel 1997, 6–7; and Ch. 1); but he insists that he himself has always been someone whose objectivist "sympathies are with Descartes and Frege" (Nagel 1997, 7). Hence for Nagel, although we can expect that even our best efforts at scientific knowing will always be superseded, this means only that we should keep trying to develop a detached perspective that can coexist with and comprehend the individual one— and then at least be confident that "the objective self, *though it can escape the human perspective*, is still as short-lived as we are" (Nagel 1986, 86; cf., 9–10).

14 Actually, as Rouse explains, there are at least two competing conceptions of what it means to say that all sciences are interpretive, or "hermeneutical"—a Wittgensteinian–Heideggerian hermeneutics of practice and a Quinean–Davidsonian hermeneutics of (linguistic) translation. For the latter, it is still "a question of my deciding which sentences to accept." It is only for followers of Heidegger and Wittgenstein that the question becomes: "How can I be freed to encounter what is at stake, what is truly questionable, in living now" (Rouse 1987, 48–49). Quinean hermeneutics thus reaffirms the traditional empiricist-positivist aim to "interpret what is the case"; whereas a Heideggerian hermeneutics embraces a phenomenological alternative and "interprets what[ever] is the matter" (48; also 50–80) It goes without saying that, at least in the Anglophone world, since the Quinean–Davidsonian view still shares most of the commitments of traditional philosophy of science, it tends to win by default. Appeals are then made to Heideggerians just to prove how open-minded the mainstream has become, and to mine Continental texts to further orthodox aims.

a basic understanding of what is real and what to do about it that was already established at the beginning of the modern era—or perhaps even earlier, when the pre-Socratics responded in wonder to cosmic presence, asked how we can know it, and assumed that since we are part of the cosmos, acquiring knowledge of it will in the process tell us who we are and what we should do, and also reveal the proper meaningfulness of everything else as well. This longer, controversial story we obviously cannot consider here. However, a quick review of its Comtean chapter—set up in the form of a renewed analysis of the differences between logical empiricism and nineteenth-century positivism—is worth the space.[15] For Comte is a self-reflective positivist who can show us a way to criticize logical empiricism that has nothing to do with its claims, theories, methods or closet metaphysics.

Comte actually defends positivism, and his way of doing so can remind us that *having* what is misleadingly labeled philosophical sentiments, or attitudes or a general sympathy (or antipathy) for the "spirit" of an age is not only normal but unavoidable. *Articulating* such sentiments is possible and philosophically desirable, for they live at the very heart of any philosophical practice—always most importantly, one's own—and thus present us with a forced option: Either fall for the self-deceptive idea that we might "choose" to philosophize with or without them, or be honest about this situation and make it one's philosophical obligation to critically analyze the sentiment one inherits. Logical empiricists—and many later philosophers who seem to embrace post-positivism—take some variant of the first option; Comte rightly insists upon the second.

Comte on "Third-Stage" Life

For Comte, it is in fact a philosopher's first duty to develop a reflective self-understanding of how it is to properly philosophize in "the present era" and for him, that means at the dawn of the technoscientific age in which we ourselves are now more fully installed.[16] Hence, what Comte calls "positivist" or scientific philosophy is his articulation of what he takes to be intellectually central to the general situation that he already finds himself inheriting and developing—rather like the way that we at a certain point identify the native language we already have and are developing. We can thereafter consciously enact it and adapt it to new circumstances, reflect on it, cultivate a feel for the variability of its uses, stretch and reshape its possibilities by learning another language, but we cannot choose to walk away from it in favor of another primary choice. Without pushing this analogy too far, we might say that Comte discovers himself intellectually already becoming a positivist as much as he finds himself already speaking French. His famous three-stage law explains this.

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15 I have argued for this "Heideggerian" interpretation of Comte—and especially of his three-stage law—elsewhere. See, e.g., Scharff (2014b, 318–28). I doubt, however, whether acceptance or rejection of this longer argument makes much difference to my claim here. That Comte's positive spirit is still demonstrably the dominant underlying sense of things that informs our current talk about the "developed" world can certainly be established without Heidegger's help.

16 This section is a condensation of several other discussions, with extensive citations to Comte's writings (Scharff 2014a, 103–54; 2010, 441–58; and 2002, 73–91).

Under the right conditions, he says, human intelligence goes through three developmental periods: a "childhood" of theology and superstitious belief; an "adolescence" of abstract reasoning and metaphysical (= ideological) doctrines; and finally a "maturity" involving observation-based (i.e., positive) scientific theorizing and the technological application of its results. These periods reveal themselves in all human development, first through intellectual growth, and then through the emergence in human societies of religious, military, industrial and legal activities suited to each stage. Overall, Comte's law tells the story of the failure of our initial "ways of philosophizing" in the first two stages. The events in our surroundings turn out to be unexplainable, respectively, in terms of either supernatural or natural powers hidden behind what we actually experience. Yet it is precisely through these failures that we eventually realize that one must limit the search for knowledge to what can actually be experienced and turn ordinary experience into instrument-aided observation. Positivism is a species of what we call empiricism.[17] Although reason should not be a slave to feelings or faith (as in theology), it is not suited to be its own authority (as in metaphysics). Mature minds eventually abandon all efforts to solve life's ultimate mysteries, confine their quest for knowledge to the study of observable phenomena and develop a hierarchy of sciences. The last, most complex and, to us, ultimately most important of these sciences is sociology. Comte coined the term, having at first and more revealingly called it "social physics." His point is that the study of "*social motion*" is the only proper basis for the "engineering" of our proper social organization. For although it is certainly good to have power over material nature, it is knowledge of ourselves as social beings that facilitates an even higher purpose—namely, establishing truly peaceful, flourishing societies.

In Comte's picture of the human story, the ultimate promise of Descartes's famous "tree of philosophy" is spelled out. According to Descartes's metaphor, the tree has three main parts. Metaphysics tends the roots; "physics" (the old-fashioned term for the sciences of nature) constitutes the trunk; and medicine, morals and mechanics form its three main branches.[18] Here, in condensed form is modernity's foundationalist elaboration of Bacon's slogan, knowledge is power (*scientia potentia est*): Descartes's seventeenth-century projective anticipation of what was to become Comte's full-blown Enlightenment-style, naturalistic, global, instrumentalist sense of gaining knowledge "of everything useful in life" (Schouls 1989, 173). Descartes himself, of course, is famously focused on

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17 Comte himself uses this term in a derogative way, to describe the kind of philosophy that overreacts to "mysticism" (i.e., any appeal to *knowable* realities lying beyond all experience) by becoming a philosophy of "the barren accumulation of unrelated facts." See Scharff (2002, 30–32, 61–63 and references cited there).

18 "Preface" to *Principles of Philosophy*, in Descartes (1985, 186). The idea of the "tree of knowledge" is, of course, biblical, but the interpretation of Nature as a kind of "second book" developed in the Middle Ages, when an outlook that emphasized the spiritual and allegorical symbolism in both the Bible and in nature began to give way to the Protestant idea that the literal or grammatical sense is the Bible's true sense—with the implication that "natural" objects, "freed from their subsidiary role in the business of biblical exegesis," were made "susceptible to new ordering principles," to be discovered by direct study, with no "religious intermediaries" telling them what they must find. For summary, see Harrison (2006).

philosophy's roots—and not just by inclination or because he sees himself from the out-set as specializing in epistemology or philosophy of science. Rather, he says, humanity requires it, and he has requisite talents to contribute. The problem is not just that physics needs a rational rather than theological foundation. More importantly, all the "other sciences" (and the "arts" derived from them) rely on physics and thus indirectly depend upon its grounding; for it is from the "ends of [these] branches" that humanity will receive most of the "fruits" of philosophy. This, says Descartes, makes the current situation especially fortunate for me. I have "always had the earnest desire to render service to the public," but I realize that "the principal benefit of philosophy depends on those parts of it which can only be learnt last of all," and I am "ignorant of almost all of these." But given what is now most needed, he notes, I can make precisely the right contribution by publishing only "on those matters where it seemed to me I had learnt something" (Descartes 1985, 186).

The mock-modest character of these prefatory remarks is unmistakable. Yet what-ever Descartes's "true intentions," his image of philosophy's tree took hold, and all the principle features of the outlook carried by this metaphor are still part of our twenty-first century inheritance whose critical reexamination, I contend, should constitute for us the first order of business in science and technology studies. Here, beneath our allegedly post-Cartesian, post-Comtean, post-logical empiricist doctrines/methods/standpoints, an implicit transcultural understanding endures, and Descartes's systematic account of the order and relationship of the parts of philosophy survives. The *Meditations* tell us that figure, number and nature are what can be known. The *Discourse on Method* and the unfin-ished *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* tell us that we can know these things by becoming objective, mathematicizing minds that have first put aside theology, politics, aesthetics, city planning, common sense and anything else that is historical, cultural, social or oth-erwise merely "relative." And the *Principles of Philosophy*'s metaphorical tree brings into focus the overall conclusion.

Then as now, crudely put, the two leading philosophical concerns are "What is knowl-edge?" (to be answered, of course, in terms of some kind of "realist" and "naturalist" epistemology, albeit today one equipped with a much more sophisticated scientific ontol-ogy than Descartes's own) and "What do we use it for?" (to be answered by one of the currently recognized schools of "ethical theory"). With this scheme in place, it is settled that philosophy's core discipline is epistemology (and now that we are all post-positivists, this again includes for us as it did for Descartes an accompanying metaphysics of "phys-ics"). Following along behind this core discipline are the technical "arts" (what we call engineering), guided by some sort of "policy planning." And the whole scheme validates the central norm of modern philosophy: Theory first, then practical application, mani-festing always a human nature defined by the activation of Reason and Will.

From a Comtean standpoint, Descartes's version of this scheme is still tradition-bound. Properly revised, however, it prefigures the character of "third stage" philoso-phizing. Descartes still sees the question of how we should live in non-scientific terms; and focused as he is on what scientific thought "will" be like once its method is widely accepted, he does not think through the full (and entirely secular) consequences of his claiming, rightly, that the fruits of science will be plucked primarily from its branches.

To bring this Cartesian picture up to date, Comte begins by stating flatly what Descartes could only project, namely, that positive or scientific philosophy is "mature" philosophy, insofar as science and its technologies constitute a *culminating occurrence*—that is, a way of achieving, at least in principle and to the extent that it is possible at all—the aims of the earlier stages, namely, control of nature and social peace.[19] Even the Big Questions (e.g., about the "meaning" of life and afterlife), which initially overstimulate our minds in the absence of real data about the natural world, are regarded in retrospect as deserving of the legitimate responses of awe, wonder, a sense of mystery and good literature—though not of a hopeless search for pseudo-theoretical answers about topics where nothing "observable" can ever be found. But most importantly, regarding empirical questions that can actually lead to knowledge, we now see that for two reasons, the third stage is an end*ing* stage that cannot and need not ever *end*. First, we finally understand that real knowledge is only "relative" to whatever we have been able to observe, record and theorize so far. And, second, we realize that "in every case [the positive spirit] emanates from practical activity," so that the satisfactoriness of a given claim to knowledge will henceforth be judged by what it allows us to do, not what it allegedly permits us to intellectually "see."[20] It is precisely by understanding and taking to heart the fact that we lack the outlook of a Divine Mind from which everything might be observed completely and all at once, that we can become mature, scientific reasoners. For we see clearly that our knowledge is never "absolutely" guaranteed by the a priori authority of feeling, superstition, faith or even reason; and this at last leaves us free to handle new disruptions to the natural and social order, not with a tradition-bound Handbook of Practice, but with more observation, modified theories, and subsequently altered practices.

Sound familiar? Comte's vision of a technoscientific future is neither dead nor surpassed. Rather, it continues to function underground, as a legacy, defining in advance a kind of ontological atmosphere that lingers in the "developed" West even after all the specific epistemological and socio-political theories once urged in its light have been repudiated or transformed. For a while, Comte's logical empiricist progeny made this background sense of things harder to treat philosophically by rationalizing away the "inner spirit" of the scientific worldview as something obvious but inconsequential, something psychologically or culturally interesting, perhaps, but something philosophers can safely ignore. A contemporary variant of this rationalization is the widespread, but false, philosophical confidence that one can become post-positivistic by *deciding* to do so. All grand narratives have been left behind, so goes the story. All positivistic conceptions of knowledge and of global technoscientific optimism and pessimism are being avoided, and in

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19   The italicized phrase is deliberately and, as I have argued elsewhere, appropriately Heideggerian (Scharff 2014b, 321–24).

20   The point, Comte continues, is that "even the universal principle of invariable natural relations … is itself an essentially empirical acquisition. *So far from originating in the dogmatism of earlier times*, [the positive spirit] *was directly opposed to it*; and this accounts for its slow and gradual formation, which has only just been completed by the founding of sociology" (Comte 1851, 54, vol. 1, 428–29 (Comte 1875, 77, vol. 1, 347), my emphasis). This "gradual substitution" is, obviously, at the expense first of theology and then also of metaphysics.

place of traditional essentialist talk of Knowledge or Reality or Science or Technology *Überhaupt*, we are all engaged in empirical, or pragmatist, or phenomenological, or some other sort of post-positivist analyses of claims, or practices, or technoscientifically mediated experiences, drawing always on the latest research, being alive to interdisciplinary possibilities, and steering clear of mere "speculation."[21]

Yet this surface-inspired picture of contemporary philosophical confidence is neither accurate nor innocent. It silently leaves in place the inherited technoscientific optimism of an earlier time, even when it is not explicitly embraced with Carnap's self-congratulatory label of "the basic orientation … with which we all feel an inner kinship." To bring this "basic orientation" to light for critical reconsideration, one must go back to Comte, not stop with Carnap. Now that the age Comte anticipated seems to have arrived, can we still assume, as he did, that our most satisfying future lies in ever more technoscience in ever-improving conditions? Is he right about a "developed" Western civilization—namely, that it is moving inevitably toward the fulfillment of all our most fundamental material and spiritual needs?

Third-Stage "Life"?

For us, living to a much greater degree in the technoscientifically realized world Comte projected, the present and likely future seem more Janus-faced. One face still smiles and beckons to us with seemingly unlimited promise, just as it did for Comte; but the other face frowns with discomforting implications. Indeed, it is difficult to ignore the depressing, retrograde, and even dystopian threats that often seem just as constitutive of technoscientific life as the many happy outcomes Comte predicted. It now makes very good sense indeed to ask if there are human problems that do not have technological fixes. Can we, for example, just engineer our way out of air and water pollution? Is human mentality really best understood by closely following the latest conceptual revisions in cognitive neuroscience? Are there are important ways of thinking about human health that a scientistic or "medical" model of fix-it-when-something-abnormal-happens can never articulate? Is it really the case that what used to be called spiritual concerns can be adequately covered by Comte's idea of "artistic" celebrations of awe and mystery?

For Comte—and for many of his later sympathizers and inheritors whether they put it this candidly or not—these questions are "immature." The very idea that there could be *extra*-technoscientific issues in life tends to be seen as empirically uniformed and onto-logically regressive. To show that one is really educated and worldly (no pun intended), first and foremost one simply must be, as contemporary analytic philosophers often say, some sort of naturalist. For the only "known" alternative to naturalism is the return to some sort of *super*-naturalism. In my view, however, one need not be a technoscientific

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21 For a sampling of this post-positivist spirit in contemporary schools, see, e.g., for analytic philosophy generally, Leiter (2004); for philosophy of science, Zammito (2004, esp. 6–14); for philosophy of technology, Achterhuis (2001); Ihde (1993); Verbeek (2005); Hickman (2007); and Feenberg (2010).

dystopian—and certainly not something like one of Comte's recalcitrant nineteenth-century theologians or metaphysicians—to be suspicious of this claim. Should we continue to assume that positivism—that is, a position the rests upon the idea that something like Comte's ever-improving technoscientific existence is the ideal human situation—still constitutes the appropriate philosophical orientation, now that this age is actually *arriving*? This is not a question about the reformation of epistemology; nor is it the expression of some specific moral or political outlook; nor does it depend upon any particular image of available technologies (e.g., machine, as opposed to digital). It is a question, as Heidegger nicely puts it, of our experience of *being in* a technoscientific age in a way that has come to seem at least as "distressing" as it is satisfying. No matter how upbeat we may often be about a world known by science and a life lived through ever better technological mediation, the nineteenth-century optimism of the classical positivists can seem remote indeed.

But how remote is positivism, really—I mean the spirit, not the unbounded enthusiasm for it? As I have been suggesting, one should not be fooled into thinking we have moved past positivism because many historians, social scientists and philosophers tell us they have turned to the things themselves and become sufficiently practical-minded to face squarely the problems of a technoscientific culture. Yet *how* to answer this question is just as important an issue as raising it in the first place. On the one hand, a realization of the importance of *becoming* post-positivist should not tempt us (as it tempted, e.g., Mumford, Ellul, Ortega y Gasset, Jonas, Jaspers) into expressing our misgivings about modern life in dystopian terms—and worse, dystopian terms expressed in Cartesian fashion, so that "scientific philosophy and technoscientific heaven" is reduced to an idea that has been fully brought before the mind and then rejected, radically reformed, or overcome by acts of choice. On the other hand, we should also not be seduced by analytic philosophers of technology, pragmatists or phenomenologists into concluding that all talk of Technology *Überhaupt* is too abstract to make any real difference, and imagining that we can instead simply decide to confine ourselves to either a (somehow magically liberalized) "way of doing [analytic] philosophy" that now acknowledges the legitimate epistemic status of "engineering knowledge"; or a (somehow non-ideological, yet engaged and utterly concrete) pragmatic "thinking about humanity at work" and "the real world interaction between doing science and engineering"; or a (non-Humean, extra-scientific yet somehow) "empirically turned" phenomenology of mediated experiences with various actual technologies.[22]

In fact, however, none of these options can make us post-positivists. If we now find ourselves dissatisfied *in principle* with Comte's technoscientifically optimistic understanding of human practices and human life, it is in the context of our already existing as happy Comtean pragmatists much of the time, and being just as unwilling as he was to return to the bad old days of theology and metaphysics. The point is that a full understanding of the problems bequeathed to us by the idea that human life fulfills itself in something like a Comtean third stage, requires nothing less than a radical reconsideration of just how

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22   For the specific quotes, I have drawn on Franssen (2009, 184–88); Pitt (2000, 11); and Acherthuis (2001, 6–8), respectively.

much of Comte's consummatory dream we really still want to keep dreaming. To him, third-stage life is the fulfillment of what all human life, from the very beginning, predominantly promises to *be*—ontologically, epistemologically and practically.[23] For him, positive thought and action are *actually becoming* the successful and comprehensive response to the general understanding of reality (i.e., that the world is mostly benign, predictable and thus at least restorable to an accommodating condition) that he thinks is already displayed in primitive life.

As Comte understands the matter, when practice is guided by a scientific rather than a theological or metaphysical articulation of our experience, life can really *be* what it most deeply *is* when we make ourselves part of an endless "maturation" process. Against the background of this understanding, the very idea that in its eventual unfolding, the positive stage might mark out an essentially oppressive and occlusive ontological site could only have seemed like utter nonsense to him. Slogans like "Science doesn't have all the answers, yet," and "Every human problem has a technological fix" had not yet lost their innocence. To Comte, a technoscientific age was still mostly a projection—though certainly in the form of an empirically suggested anticipation, not merely a utopian dream. In one of his late essays, Heidegger asks whether "the world civilization just now beginning might one day *overcome* its technological-scientific-industrial character as the *sole criterion* of our journey through the world" (Heidegger 2008b, 437, my emphasis). Comte could never ask such a question, because one cannot consider—except as a useless logical exercise—the "overcoming" of what has not yet arrived. To his nineteenth-century eyes, the emergence of science and its technologies could only *be* a happy and thoroughly progressive eventuation. A "scientific view of the world" was therefore the only plausible position for enlightened minds—not because it goes well with a formalist mentality and a special fondness for metaphors of knowledge drawn from nineteenth-century physics, or because Comte is theoretically or socio-politically committed to thinking "dogmatically" in terms of three stages and no more, but because it points the way toward fulfilling humanity's deepest needs.

For us in the so-called "developed" West, however, this same conclusion, whether actually defended or just assumed, seems increasingly naïve, out of touch, perhaps even dangerous, especially when the context for its expression is multinational corporate boardrooms, or Pentagon offices or one of the research labs they fund—to say nothing of how it sounds in all those areas of the globe that "we" chauvinistically call [merely] "developing" and resolve to "help." Unlike his twentieth-century philosophical progeny, however, a twenty-first century Comte would understand and welcome Heidegger's *kind*

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23 For Comte, of course, mature thinking and technoscientifically guided practice will never be more than "predominant," given that at any given moment the world is not populated only by adults, and it is highly unlikely that worldly conditions will ever be so ideal that everyone has an equal chance to gain maturity. For a logical positivist's alternative to this way of reading the history of pre-scientific thought, see Neurath (1983). Neurath argues that scientific thinking constitutes a mathematics- and natural scientifically inspired *rejection* of religious and metaphysical forms of "magical" thinking, not a transformation of pre-scientific attempts to accomplish the same thing as science. Where does this leave those who are still "maturing"?

of question. He would recognize it as a properly philosophical question about how to interpret what he calls a "stage" of human life—that is, a whole general way of existing, involving a pervasive vital understanding of what things mean and what we should do about it. I think he would even agree that, were it ever to become necessary to question whether the positive stage really is the sort of "ending" it initially seemed to be, this is not an issue that can be addressed piecemeal, occasionally, between the lines, in strategic discussions focused primarily on how to plan, control or conceptually clarify this or that specific methodological or practical problem.[24]

Concluding Remarks about "Distress"

So is something like a fourth stage, that is, a post-technoscientific way of thinking and acting, desirable or even possible? Of course, taken one way, this is a silly question. Why should the world not become endlessly *more* technoscientific? Even for the most disillusioned critics of the capitalist/democratic West, there is obviously something profoundly right about Comte's projection—that is, something both existentially true and "developmentally" appropriate about his image of what is everywhere in fact already technoscientifically "occurring." But does this mean that alleged dystopians like Heidegger simply need to "grow up"? Is it true that the only alternative to (a properly updated, pragmatically fine-tuned, and phenomenologically respectful) philosophical naturalism is the return to some sort of *super*-naturalism (or anti-modern romanticism, or mysticism, or ...)? Moreover, when critiques of technoscientific life come from those who are already its major beneficiaries, isn't there something unseemly about their calling for a slowdown? In the end, so goes this familiar line of reasoning, the worst sin would be to dream of a world that is not *at least* as predominantly technoscientific as ours. One can always logically entertain such a dream but doesn't Heidegger himself admit we cannot really "think" it?

These questions, however, are misguided. Heidegger, in response to his distress at actually living through an age that grows more Comtean every day, asks a question that is just as internal to twentieth- and twenty-first century experience—and just as two-sided—as Comte's nineteenth-century articulation of the three-stage law. For Comte, the issue was how to further an age of technoscience that he sensed emerging all around him, but in a still predominantly theologico-metaphysical world. For Heidegger, the question is whether "the world civilization just now beginning might one day overcome its technological-scientific-industrial character *as the sole criterion* of our journey through the world." This is no abstractly speculative question or dystopian rant; it is not even a sign of opposition to third-stage life. Rather, Heidegger asks how, in the midst of our current "civilization" as it is *shaped in a Comtean age turned Janus-faced*, its "enframing"

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24 I ignore here the fact that Comte would not have understood Heidegger's insistence that one must see this first and foremost as an "ontological" question, not just a socio-historical (i.e., "ontic") one. My only point is that they both agree that how it is with life and who a philosopher must "be" are questions that no shuffling around of theories, positions, and methods can grasp.

character might cease to define the ontological atmosphere of our lives *with such pre-dominance*. In other words, since Comte, the experiential center of the living-through of life in a so-called developed world has shifted. No longer is it a matter of asking how a genuinely technoscientific life might more freely emerge from a still predominantly theologico-metaphysical atmosphere. Rather, it is a question of how, as Heidegger puts it in *The Question of Technology*, we might "prepare a free relation" to the technoscientific existence that has since Comte's day more fully arrived.[25]

Like all positivists, Comte believes that science-minded cultures are intellectually (and therefore eventually also practically) superior to those ruled by theology and ideology. But with the rejection of all the logical empiricist doctrines that once supported a crudely scientistic distortion of this belief, it is now obvious that Comte's positivism, like that of our own age, is much more expansively worldly, humanistic and not at all a mere "sentiment." For Comte, philosophy must be positivistic before, not when it turns to epistemology. It is because scientific philosophy is that final "way of philosophizing" which can truly satisfy our deepest desires (i.e., control of our surroundings and social peace) that it must develop a science-minded epistemology, not the other way around. Here, then, is the historically grounded, critically self-reflective, lifeworld-oriented robust positivism that we still inherit—albeit indirectly and with the two added burdens of, first, a more immediate inheritance of a later positivism that tells us to feel it but look away from it and second, and more importantly, a greater experiential familiarity with what it is actually like to live the kind of technoscientifically defined life Comte could only project.

We all arrive in the present, Nietzsche says, as already having-been, which means we discover ourselves at once existentially informed but also "burdened" by what we inherit.[26] In Nietzsche's descriptions of this determinate but unsettling condition, there lies an appropriate ruling image for a technoscientific age—as differently experienced both by Comte and by us. For us, as for Comte, life has two faces. But for us, the tension is no longer between the grim face of a pre-scientific tradition and smiling face of nascent scientific practices, as it was for Comte. For us, *technoscience itself is our two-faced, inform-ing burden*. It sets up a dominant sense of what-it-all-means in a "developed" world. It determinately renders us who and how we already are, and how we are already inclined to think and act, but it does so in a way that is *both* happily unavoidable yet ultimately unsatisfying. On many occasions, of course, this situation leaves us without any particular sense of burdensomeness. Indeed, at least for the privileged, it is often the case that everything seems perfectly acceptable as "one" technoscientifically finds it. At such times, the experience of technological mediation and the idea that science is the best guide for our actions feels perfectly comfortable. Engineered efficiency trumps any other model of production; medicine is unproblematically superior to empirics; human communication is everywhere better with IT—in short, every problem seems ultimately open to a

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25 Heidegger (2008a, 311). See also, Thomson (2011, 192–212) and Dreyfus (1995). The point to stress is that Heidegger's question is as "global" in its reach as is Comte's in formulating his conception of the third stage.

26 Nietzsche (1997, 61–62). For discussion, see Scharff (2014a, 195–98).

technological fix, even the ones created by our technologies in the first place, and all of this can seem for the most part to be satisfactorily working itself out in everyday practice, accompanied by the kind of "empirical" philosophy suitable to it.

And yet at other times, especially for the less privileged and in moments when events seem much less easily explained and handled, this same general sense of things can feel deeply and systemically unresponsive to what is actually being lived through. Successful technologies can appear manifestly invasive, distracting, even soul-deadening; appreciation for science spills over into cultural scientism and AI-worship, medicine cures too late what might have been prevented; and the ways of technoscientific life seem inevitably to disproportionately enrich those who are already well off. In short, how-it-has-all-already-come-to-be seems to leave us without access to a truly appropriate way of responding to the manner in which we and what is disclosed to us are actually "there" together. A technoscientific culture offers too little; a theologico-metaphysical alternative is already known to be worse. To some extent, and on some occasions, current experience—for some more than others but for all of us some of the time—ultimately leaves us unwilling to say what our inheritance would have us say, namely, "Yes, ever more of the same under ever improving conditions will do just fine."

In short, for every paean to technoscientific life as "we" live through it and prosper from it, it remains true that even for the privileged and even on our best days, it is surely just as true that our modern societies

> are fraught with meaninglessness, manipulation, and rationalized violence. Dystopia and apocalypse beckon as surveillance and nuclear technologies advance. Climate change melts the poles while nations dither. The long-run survival of modern society is very much in doubt. Could it be that our technology, or at least the specific way in which we are technological, threatens us with early self-destruction? [27]

But how should one interpret such statements? Most of the time, broadsides like this are read either metaphysically or sociologically—that is, as either telling us what must inevitably be the case with "our technology," or as simply reporting the factual technoscientific situation in terms of its agents or actants, their movements and interactions, and the antecedent conditions that have led to this pretty pass.

However, the statements by Feenberg just quoted might also be read existentially—that is, as a description informed by the experience of the burdensomeness of our "specific way of being technological," offered (as it is for Feenberg himself) to clear the ground for a call for the "democratization" of this way of being that would be responsive to all the possibilities latent in technoscientific life that we experience as currently occluded, suppressed or otherwise badly served in the predominant order of things.

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27 Feenberg (2010, 186). Feenberg reads Heidegger as having himself taken up precisely the standpoint of this "specific way of being technological" in order to condemn it—thus leaving himself without the means to speak for those who experience the technoscientific order as oppressively controlling rather than strategically facilitating their lives. I do not. See Veak (2006, 192–96).

Comte's characterization of a coming technoscientific culture—experienced as being held back by a still predominantly theologico-metaphysical atmosphere of thought and practice—is offered in precisely this same spirit. If we read Feenberg's description in this way—that is, as a parallel double description, but one responsive to twenty-first instead of nineteenth-century experience—then the positivism that still structures our technoscientific existence finally stays in focus for immanent critique *and* transformation. We can then ask: What account of our situation would best articulate our sense of the possible, if it is not held back by the continued dominance of "the specific way in which we are technological" as "the *sole criterion* of our journey through the world"? Would it be an account that envisions a Comtean fourth stage that gives voice to an expanded sense of humanity's most fundamental desires? Or a Heideggerian-inspired preparation for working out a "free relation" to technoscience that displaces the restrictive and enframing character of "the specific way in which we are currently technological" in today's developed world? Or a program like Feenberg's that "democratically rationalizes" our way of being technoscientific?

Accounts that start from questions like these would all have in common a clear understanding that the "technological-scientific-industrial character" of our own "developed" times is neither reducible to a sentiment, nor something to be merely studied and theorized under a principle of symmetry, nor—least of all—something to be "overcome" by the voluntary installation of a new worldview, epistemic standpoint, or set of practices. For all of them would be animated, not by prior epistemic or substantive commitments, but by life experiences that do not fit and often deeply challenge the currently enframed and undemocratically set up technoscientific sense of what is real and what matters. The point is not to debate endlessly whether we should be more or less distressed about this. Rather, it is to recognize, as I think Comte does, that philosophical inquiry should begin in critical reflection precisely *about the inherited basic sense of being-in-the-midst-of-things that is already set up for us in current life*, and to stop obsessing about being more concrete, pragmatic, empirical or post-traditional—on the mistaken (and itself at bottom traditionalist) grounds that doing so is necessary in order to avoid dwelling too much on the pre-scientific past, the negative or the abstract. Technoscientific life in the developed parts of our world is Janus-faced all the way down.

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Appendix A

CALENDRIER POSITIVISTE, OU TABLEAU CONCRET DE LA PREPARATION HUMAINE; AND CULTE ABSTRAIT DE L'HUMANITÉ OU CÉLEBRATION SYSTÉMATIQUE DE LA SOCIABILITÉ FINALE

Comte's Positivist Calendar, a core component of the Religion of Humanity, was first elaborated in the *Catéchisme positiviste* of 1852. It provided for two cycles of festivals. In the "concrete cult" of Humanity the 13-month calendar, with its daily celebration of past great benefactors, moved historically from antiquity (first five months) to the middle ages (months six and seven) to "the modern preparation" (months eight to thirteen). Parallel with this, the "abstract cult" of Humanity would celebrate, month by month, Humanity's fundamental social relations, preparatory forms of religion, and core social functions and classes. Both series culminated in a general festival of the dead.

CALENDRIER POSITIVISTE

POUR UNE ANNÉE QUELCONQUE

OU

TABLEAU CONCRET DE LA PRÉPARATION HUMAINE, dessiné surtout à la transition finale de la république occidentale formée, depuis Charlemagne, par le libre concité des cinq populations avancées, française, italienne, espagnole, britannique et germanique.

	PREMIER MOIS. MOÏSE. LA THÉOCRATIE INITIALE.	DEUXIÈME MOIS. HOMÈRE. LA POÉSIE ANCIENNE.	TROISIÈME MOIS. ARISTOTE. LA PHILOSOPHIE ANCIENNE.	QUATRIÈME MOIS. ARCHIMÈDE. LA SCIENCE ANCIENNE.	CINQUIÈME MOIS. CÉSAR. LA CIVILISATION MILITAIRE.	SIXIÈME MOIS. SAINT-PAUL. LE CATHOLICISME.	SEPTIÈME MOIS. CHARLEMAGNE. LA CIVILISATION FÉODALE.
Lundi 1	Prométhée *(Cadmus, Thélde.)*	Hésiode.	Anaximandre.	Théophraste.	Miltiade.	Saint-Luc *(Saint-Jacques.)*	Théodoric-le-Grand.
Mardi 2	Hercule *(Thésée, Tirésias.)*	Tyrtée *(Sapho.)*	Anaximène.	Hérophile.	Léonidas.	Saint-Cyprien.	Pélage.
Mercredi 3	Orphée.	Anacréon.	Héraclite.	Érasistrate.	Aristide.	Saint-Athanase.	Othon-le-Grand *(Henri-l'Oiseleur.)*
Jeudi 4	Ulysse.	Pindare.	Anaxagore.	Celse.	Cimon.	Saint-Jérôm.	Saint-Henri.
Vendredi 5	Lycurgue.	Sophocle *(Euripide.)*	Démocrite *(Leucippe.)*	Galien.	Xénophon.	Saint-Ambroise.	Villers *(La Valette.)*
Samedi 6	Romulus.	Théocrite *(Longus.)*	Hérodote.	Avicenne *(Averroès.)*	Phocion *(Épaminondas.)*	Sainte-Monique.	Don Juan de Lépante. *Jean Sobieski.*
Dimanche 7	NUMA.	ESCHYLE.	THALÈS.	HIPPOCRATE.	THÉMISTOCLE.	SAINT-AUGUSTIN.	ALFRED.
8	Bélus *(Sémiramis.)*	Scopas.	Solon.	Euclide.	Périclès.	Constantin.	Charles-Martel.
9	Sésostris.	Zeuxis.	Xénophane.	Aristée.	Philippe.	Théodose.	Le Cid *(Lenoride.)*
10	Manou.	Ictinus.	Empédocle.	Théodose-de-Bythinie.	Démosthènes.	Saint-Chrysostôme *(Saint-Basile.)*	Richard *(Saladin.)*
11	Cyrus.	Praxitèle.	Thucydide.	Héron *(Ctésibius.)*	Ptolémée Lagus.	Sainte-Pulchérie *(Marcien.)*	Jeanne-d'Arc.
12	Zoroastre.	Lysippe.	Archytas.	Pappus.	Philopœmen.	Sainte-Geneviève-de-Paris.	Albuquerque *(Walter Raleigh.)*
13	Les Druides *(Ossian.)*	Apelle.	Apollonius de Tyane. *(Philolaüs.)*	Diophante.	Polybe.	Saint-Grégoire-le-Grand.	Bayard.
14	BOUDDHA.	PHIDIAS.	PYTHAGORE.	APOLLONIUS.	ALEXANDRE.	HILDEBRAND.	GODEFROI.
15	Fo-Hi.	Ésope.	Aristippe.	Eudoxe *(Aratus.)*	Junius-Brutus.	Saint-Benoît *(Saint-Antoine.) (Saint-Austin.)*	Saint-Léon-le-Grand *(Léon IV.)*
16	Lao-Tseu.	Plaute.	Antisthènes.	Pythéas *(Néarque.)*	Camille *(Cincinnatus.)*	Saint-Boniface.	Gerbert *(Pierre Damien.)*
17	Meng-Tseu.	Térence *(Ménandre.)*	Zénon.	Aristarque *(Bérose.)*	Fabricius *(Régulus.)*	Saint-Isidore-de-Séville. *(St-Bruno.) (Régula.)*	Pierre-l'Ermite.
18	Les théocrates de Thibet.	Phèdre.	Cicéron *(Pline-le-Jeune.)*	Eratosthène *(Sosigène.)*	Annibal.	Lanfrano.	Suger *(Saint-Éloi.)*
19	Les théocrates du Japon.	Juvénal.	Épictète *(Arrien.)*	Ptolémée.	Paul-Émile.	Héloïse *(Saint-Anselme.) (Béatrice.)*	Alexandre III *(Thomas Becket.)*
20	Manco-Capac *(Taméhameha.)*	Lucien.	Tacite.	Albategnius *(Nassir-Eddin.)*	Marius *(Les Gracques.)*	Les archit. du moyen âge. *(S.-Benoit.) (St-François-d'Ass.) (St-Dominique.)*	—
21	CONFUCIUS.	ARISTOPHANE.	SOCRATE.	HIPPARQUE.	SCIPION.	SAINT-BERNARD.	INNOCENT III.
22	Abraham *(Joseph.)*	Ennius.	Xénocrate.	Varron.	Auguste *(Mécène.)*	St-François-Xav. *(Ignace de Loyola.)*	Sainte-Clotilde.
23	Samuel.	Lucrèce.	Philon d'Alexandrie.	Columelle.	Vespasien *(Titus.)*	St-Charles-Borrom. *(Fréd. Borrom.)*	Ste-Bathilde *(Ste-Math.-de-Toscane.)*
24	Salomon *(David.)*	Horace.	Saint-Jean-l'Évangéliste.	Vitruve.	Adrien *(Nerva.)*	Ste-Thérèse *(Ste-Cather.-de-Sienne.)*	St-Étienne-de-Hong. *(Mat. Corvin.)*
25	Isaïe.	Tibulle.	Saint-Justin *(Saint-Irénée.)*	Strabon.	Antonin *(Marc-Aurèle.)*	St-Vinc.-de-Paule *(l'abbé de l'Épée.)*	Sainte-Élisabeth de Hongrie.
26	Saint-Jean-Baptiste.	Ovide.	Saint-Clément-d'Alexandrie.	Frontin.	Papinien *(Ulpien.)*	Bourdaloue *(Claude Fleury.)*	Blanche de Castille.
27	Haroun-al-Raschid. *Abderame III.*	Lucain.	Origène *(Tertullien.)*	Plutarque.	Alexandre-Sévère.	W. Penn *(G. Fox.)*	Saint-Ferdinand III. *Alphonse X.*
28	MAHOMET.	VIRGILE.	PLATON.	PLINE-l'Ancien.	TRAJAN.	BOSSUET.	SAINT-LOUIS.

CALENDRIER POSITIVISTE
POUR UNE ANNÉE QUELCONQUE
OU

TABLEAU CONCRET DE LA PRÉPARATION HUMAINE, destiné surtout à la transition finale de la république occidentale formée, depuis Charlemagne, par la libre connexité des cinq populations avancées, française, italienne, espagnole, britannique et germanique.

Jour complémentaire ·········· Fête universelle des MORTS.
Jour bissextile ·········· Fête générale des SAINTES FEMMES.

Jour	HUITIÈME MOIS — DANTE (L'ÉPOPÉE MODERNE)	NEUVIÈME MOIS — GUTTEMBERG (L'INDUSTRIE MODERNE)	DIXIÈME MOIS — SHAKESPEARE (LE DRAME MODERNE)	ONZIÈME MOIS — DESCARTES (LA PHILOSOPHIE MODERNE)	DOUZIÈME MOIS — FREDERIC (LA POLITIQUE MODERNE)	TREIZIÈME MOIS — BICHAT (LA SCIENCE MODERNE)
Lundi 1	Les Troubadours.	Marco Polo ... Chardin.	Lope de Vega ... Montalvan.	Albert-le-Grand ... Jean de Salisbury.	Marie de Molina.	Copernic ... Tycho-Brahé.
Mardi 2	Bocace ... Chaucer.	Jacques Cœur ... Graham.	Moreto ... Guillen de Castro.	Roger Bacon ... Raimond Lulle.	Côme de Médicis l'Ancien.	Kepler ... Halley.
Mercredi 3	Rabelais.	Gama ... Magellan.	Rojas ... Gueron.	Saint-Bonaventure ... Joachim.	Philippe de Comines ... Guicciardini.	Huyghens ... Varignon.
Jeudi 4	Cervantes.	Neper ... Briggs.	Otway.	Ramus ... Le cardinal de Cuse.	Isabelle de Castille.	Jacques Bernouilli ... Jean Bernouilli.
Vendredi 5	La Fontaine ... Robert Burns.	Lacaille ... Delambre.	Lessing.	Montaigne ... Erasme.	Charles-Quint ... Sixte-Quint.	Bradley ... Rœmer.
Samedi 6	De Foë ... Goldsmith.	Cook ... Tasman.	Goethe.	Campanella ... Morus.	Henri IV.	Volta ... Sauveur.
Dimanche 7	**ARIOSTE.**	**COLOMB.**	**CALDERON.**	**SAINT-THOMAS-D'AQUIN.**	**LOUIS XI.**	**GALILEE.**
8	Léonard de Vinci ... Le Titien.	Benvenuto Cellini.	Tirso.	Hobbes ... Spinoza.	Coligny ... L'Hôpital.	Viète ... Harriott.
9	Michel-Ange ... Paul Véronèse.	Amontons ... Wheatstone.	Vondel.	Pascal ... Giordano Bruno.	Barnevelt.	Wallis ... Fermat.
10	Holbein ... Rembrandt.	Harrison ... Pierre Leroy.	Racine.	Locke ... Malebranche.	Gustave-Adolphe.	Clairaut ... Poinsot.
11	Poussin ... Lesueur.	Dollond ... Graham.	Voltaire ... Alfieri.	Vauvenargues ... Mme de Lambert.	De Witt.	Euler ... Monge.
12	Velasquez ... Murillo.	Arkwright ... Jacquard.	Métastase.	Diderot ... Duclos.	Ruyter.	D'Alembert ... Daniel Bernouilli.
13	Teniers ... Rubens.	Conté.	Schiller.	Cabanis ... Georges Leroy.	Guillaume III.	Lagrange ... Joseph Fourier.
14	**RAPHAEL.**	**VAUCANSON.**	**CORNEILLE.**	**Le Chancelier BACON.**	**GUILLAUME-le-Taciturne.**	**NEWTON.**
15	Froissart ... Joinville.	Stévin ... Torricelli.	Alarcon.	Grotius ... Cujas.	Ximenès.	Bergmann ... Scheele.
16	Camoens ... Spenser.	Mariotte ... Boyle.	Mme de Motteville ... Mme Roland.	Fontenelle ... Maupertuis.	Sully ... Oxenstiern.	Priestley ... Davy.
17	Les Romancistes espagnols.	Papin ... Worcester.	Mme de Sévigné ... Lady Montague.	Vico ... Herder.	Colbert ... Louis XIV.	Cavendish.
18	Chateaubriand.	Black.	Lesage ... Sterne.	Fréret ... Winckelmann.	Walpole ... Mazarin.	Guyton-Morveau ... Geoffroy.
19	Walter Scott ... Cooper.	Jouffroy ... Fulton.	Mme de Staël ... Miss Edgeworth.	Montesquieu ... d'Aguesseau.	D'Aranda ... Pombal.	Berthollet.
20	Manzoni.	Dalton ... Thilorier.	Fielding ... Richardson.	Buffon ... Oken.	Turgot ... Campomanes.	Berzélius ... Ritter.
21	**TASSE.**	**WATT.**	**MOLIERE.**	**LEIBNITZ.**	**RICHELIEU.**	**LAVOISIER.**
22	Pétrarque.	Bernard de Palissy.	Pergolèse ... Palestrina.	Robertson ... Gibbon.	Sidney ... Lambert.	Harvey ... Ch. Bell.
23	Thomas A'Kempis ... Louis de Grenade et Bunyan.	Guglielmini ... Riquet.	Sacchini ... Grétry.	Adam Smith ... Dunoyer.	Franklin ... Hampden.	Boerhaave ... Stahl.
24	Mme de Lafayette ... Mme de Staël.	Duhamel (du Monceau) ... Bourgelat.	Gluck ... Lully.	Kant ... Fichte.	Washington ... Kosciusko.	Linné ... Bernard de Jussieu.
25	Fénelon ... Saint-François-de-Sales.	Saussure ... Bouguer.	Beethoven ... Handel.	Condorcet ... Ferguson.	Jefferson ... Madison.	Haller ... Vicq-d'Azyr.
26	Klopstock ... Gessner.	Coulomb ... Borda.	Rossini ... Weber.	Joseph de Maistre ... Bonald.	Bolivar ... Toussaint-Louverture.	Lamarck ... Blainville.
27	Byron ... Elisa Mercœur.	Carnot ... Vauban.	Bellini ... Donizetti.	Hegel ... Sophie Germain.	Francia.	Broussais ... Morgagni.
28	**MILTON.**	**MONTGOLFIER.**	**MOZART.**	**HUME.**	**CROMWELL.**	**GALL.**

CULTE ABSTRAIT DE L'HUMANITÉ

ou

IDÉALISATION SYSTÉMATIQUE DE LA SOCIABILITÉ FINALE

(figurant dans le *Catéchisme positiviste*)

LIENS FONDAMENTAUX.

1er mois. L'HUMANITÉ .... { Fêtes hebdomadaires de l'Union .... } religieuse. historique. politique. communale.

2e mois. LE MARIAGE .... { complet. chaste. inégal. subjectif.

3e mois. LA PATERNITÉ .. { complète .... { naturelle. artificielle. incomplète .. { spirituelle. temporelle.

4e mois. LA FILIATION ... *Mêmes subdivisions.*

5e mois. LA FRATERNITÉ.. *Idem.*

6e mois. LA DOMESTICITÉ. { permanente .. { complète. incomplète. passagère ... *Mêmes subdivisions.*

ÉTATS PRÉPARATOIRES.

7e mois. LE FÉTICHISME ... { spontané .... { nomade. sédentaire. systématique . { sacerdotal. militaire.

8e mois. LE POLYTHÉISME . { conservateur . progressif ... { intellectuel. { esthétique. scientifique. militaire.

9e mois. LE MONOTHÉISME { théocratique. catholique. islamique. métaphysique.

FONCTIONS NORMALES.

10e mois. LA FEMME, ou la Providence morale ... { mère. sœur. épouse. fille.

11e mois. LE SACERDOCE, ou la Providence intellectuelle .... { incomplet. complet ..... { préparatoire. direct. { secondaire. principal.

12e mois. LE PATRICIAT, ou la Providence matérielle { banquier. commerçant. fabricant. agriculteur.

13e et dernier mois. LE PROLÉTARIAT, ou la Providence générale .... { actif. affectif. contemplatif. passif.

JOURS EXCEPTIONNELS. { Jour complémentaire .... Fête universelle DES MORTS. { Jour additionnel des années bissextiles ..Fête générale DES SAINTES FEMMES.

Paris, le 5 Guttemberg 64 (lundi 6 août 1852).

Auguste COMTE,
(10, rue Monsieur-le-Prince).

Appendix B

CLASSIFICATION POSITIVE DES DIX-HUIT FONCTIONS DU CERVEAU, OU TABLEAU SYSTÉMATIQUE DE L'ÂME

HUMANITÉ

VIVRE POUR AUTRUI

CLASSIFICATION POSITIVE
DES DIX-HUIT FONCTIONS INTÉRIEURES DU CERVEAU
OU TABLEAU SYSTÉMATIQUE DE L'AME
PAR L'AUTEUR DU *SYSTÈME DE PHILOSOPHIE POSITIVE*

AIMER, PENSER, AGIR
AGIR PAR AFFECTION, ET PENSER POUR AGIR

PRINCIPE

10 MOTEURS AFFECTIFS. (Penchants, dans l'état actif; et sentiments, dans l'état passif.)

7 PERSONNELS

3 SOCIAUX

Général Spécial

INTÉRÊT . . .
Instincts de la conservation. { de l'individu, ou *instinct nutritif* . . . (1).
{ de l'espèce. { *instinct sexuel* . . . (2)
{ *instinct maternel* . . . (3).
Instincts du perfectionnement { par destruction, ou *instinct militaire* . . (4).
{ par construction, ou *instinct industriel* . (5).

AMBITION . . . Temporelle, ou Orgueil, besoin de domination . . . . (6).
Spirituelle, ou Vanité, besoin d'approbation . . . . (7).

ATTACHEMENT. . . . . (8).

VÉNÉRATION . . . . (9).

BONTÉ, ou amour universel (sympathie), *humanité* . . . . (10).

Égoïsme

Altruisme

Déroulement d'énergie, et accroissement de dignité, d'arrière en haut, et des bords au milieu.

IMPULSION
(LE CŒUR)

MOYEN

5 FONCTIONS INTELLECTUELLES

CONCEPTION.
{ Passive, ou Contemplation, d'où matériaux objectifs. { Concrète, ou relative aux êtres, essentiellement *synthétique* (11).
{ Abstraite, ou relative aux événements, essentiellement *analytique* . . . . (12).
{ Active, ou Méditation, d'où constructions subjectives. { Inductive, ou par comparaison, d'où *Généralisation* (13).
{ Déductive, ou par coordination, d'où *Systématisation* (14).

EXPRESSION. . Mimique, orale, écrite; d'où *Communication* . . . . (15).

Savoir pour prévoir afin de pouvoir

CONSEIL
(L'ESPRIT)

RÉSULTAT

8 QUALITÉS PRATIQUES

ACTIVITÉ. { Courage. . . . . (16) }
{ Prudence . . . . (17) }

FERMETÉ, d'où *Persévérance* . . . . . . (18)

EXÉCUTION
(LE CARACTÈRE)

RÉSUMÉ DE LA THÉORIE CÉRÉBRALE

L'ensemble de ces dix-huit organes cérébraux constitue l'appareil nerveux central, qui, d'une part, stimule la vie de nutrition, et, d'une autre part, coordonne la vie de relation en liant ses deux sortes de fonctions extérieures. Sa région spéculative communique directement avec les nerfs sensitifs, et sa région active avec les nerfs moteurs. Mais sa région affective n'a de connexités nerveuses qu'avec les viscères végétatifs, sans aucune correspondance immédiate avec le monde extérieur, qui ne s'y lie qu'à l'aide des deux autres régions. Ce centre essentiel de toute l'existence humaine fonctionne continuellement, d'après le repos alternatif des deux moitiés symétriques de chacun de ses organes. Envers le reste du cerveau, l'intermittence périodique est aussi complète que celle des sens et des muscles. Ainsi, l'harmonie vitale dépend de la principale région cérébrale, sous l'impulsion de laquelle les deux autres dirigent les relations, passives et actives, de l'animal avec le milieu.

AUGUSTE COMTE
(10, rue Monsieur-le-Prince.)

Comte's schema of the "eighteen functions internal to the brain" that governed, respectively, human feeling, thought and activity, was first systematically presented in volume one of the *Système de politique positive*. A speculative derivative of early nineteenth century "cerebral physiology," Comte's "systematic tableau of the soul" provided a positive basis for Comte's understanding of individual subjectivity, and underpins much of his later work.

Appendix C

HIÉRARCHIE THÉORIQUE DES CONCEPTIONS HUMAINES, OU TABLEAU SYNTHÉTIQUES DE L'ORDRE UNIVERSEL

(B) HIÉRARCHIE THÉORIQUE DES CONCEPTIONS HUMAINES,
OU TABLEAU SYNTHÉTIQUE DE L'ORDRE UNIVERSEL,
D'APRÈS UNE ÉCHELLE ENCYCLOPÉDIQUE A CINQ OU SEPT DEGRÉS.

PHILOSOPHIE POSITIVE, ou Connaissance systématique de l'HUMANITE.

ÉTUDE DE LA TERRE, ou COSMOLOGIE

- Abstraite, ou Étude fondamentale de l'existence universelle. . . . . (d'abord numérique, puis géométrique, et enfin mécanique). — 1º MATHÉMATIQUE. . . . .
- Concrète, ou Étude directe de l'ordre matériel. — 2º PHYSIQUE { céleste, ou ASTRONOMIE. . . . . terrestre { générale, ou Physique (proprement dite). spéciale, ou CHIMIE. . . .

ÉTUDE DE L'HOMME, ou SOCIOLOGIE

- Préliminaire, ou Étude générale de l'ordre vital. . — 3º BIOLOGIE. . . . .
- Finale, ou Étude directe de l'ordre humain. . . . { collectif. . — 4º SOCIOLOGIE. . . . . (proprement dite.) { individuel. — 5º MORALE. . . . .

DIVISION DOGMATIQUE.

(Ordre extérieur.) (Ordre humain.)

PHILOSOPHIE NATURELLE, ou SCIENCE PRÉLIMINAIRE, PHILOSOPHIE MORALE, ou SCIENCE FINALE.

DIVISION HISTORIQUE.

Paris, le 10 Dante 64 (samedi 24 juillet 1852).

AUGUSTE COMTE,
Auteur du *Système de philosophie positive* et du *Système de politique positive*.
(10, rue Monsieur-le-Prince.)

(*Catéchisme positiviste*, 2ᵉ édition, page 168.)

First produced in 1852, Comte's final, modified, version of his "encyclopedic scale" of the sciences incorporates the original six-fold schema (mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology) on the right of the diagram, but shows astronomy, physics – in the usual sense – and chemistry as branches of physics (as general knowledge of the concrete), and adds *morale* to sociology as the science of the human individual. The relation is also shown between these five, six or seven fundamental branches of knowledge and two overall modes of classification, "historical" and "dogmatic."

Appendix D

TABLEAU DES QUINZE GRANDES LOIS DE PHILOSOPHIE PREMIÈRE, OU PRINCIPES UNIVERSELS SUR LESQUELS REPOSE LE DOGME POSITIF

(E)   TABLEAU DES QUINZE GRANDES LOIS DE PHILOSOPHIE PREMIÈRE
OU
PRINCIPES UNIVERSELS SUR LESQUELS REPOSE LE DOGME POSITIF.

Premier groupe, *autant objectif que subjectif.*

1º Former l'hypothèse la plus simple et la plus sympathique que comporte l'ensemble des renseignements à représenter; (1)
2º Concevoir comme immuables les lois quelconques qui régissent les êtres d'après les événements; (2)
3º Les modifications quelconques de l'ordre universel sont bornées à l'intensité des phénomènes dont l'arrangement demeure inaltérable. (3)

Deuxième groupe, *essentiellement subjectif et surtout relatif à l'entendement.*

Premier sous-groupe, *relatif à l'état statique de l'entendement.*

1º Subordonner les constructions subjectives aux matériaux objectifs; (4)
2º Les images intérieures sont toujours moins vives et moins nettes que les impressions extérieures; (5)
3º Toute image normale doit être prépondérante sur celles que l'agitation cérébrale fait simultanément surgir. (6)

Deuxième sous-groupe, *relatif à l'essor dynamique de l'entendement.*

1º Chaque entendement présente la succession de trois états : fictif, abstrait, et positif, envers les conceptions quelconques, avec une vitesse proportionnée à la généralité des phénomènes correspondants ; (7)
2º L'activité est d'abord conquérante, puis défensive, et enfin industrielle; (8)
3º La sociabilité est d'abord domestique, puis civique, et enfin universelle, suivant la nature propre à chacun des trois instincts sympathiques. (9)

Troisième groupe, *essentiellement objectif.*

Premier sous-groupe.

1º Tout état statique ou dynamique tend à persister spontanément sans aucune altération, en résistant aux perturbations extérieures (KÉPLER); (10)
2º Un système quelconque maintient sa constitution active ou passive, quand ses éléments éprouvent des mutations simultanées, pourvu qu'elles soient exactement communes (GALILÉE); (11)
3º Il y a toujours équivalence entre la réaction et l'action, si leur intensité est mesurée conformément à la nature de chaque conflit (HUYGHENS, NEWTON). (12)

Deuxième sous-groupe.

1º Subordonner toujours la théorie du mouvement à celle de l'existence, en concevant tout progrès comme le développement de l'ordre correspondant, dont les conditions quelconques régissent les mutations, qui constituent l'évolution ; (13)
2º Tout classement positif doit procéder d'après la généralité croissante ou décroissante, tant subjective qu'objective ; (14)
3º Tout intermédiaire doit être normalement subordonné aux deux extrêmes, dont il opère la liaison. (15)

(Catéchisme positiviste, 2ᵉ édition, Appendice, p. 388.)   (AUGUSTE COMTE, *Politique positive,* tome IV.)

The fifteen universal principles underlying positivist doctrine, explicated in volume four of the *Système de politique positive*, were presented as the final, scientifically corrected, form of "first philosophy" that Francis Bacon had sought for as a replacement for the "first philosophy" expounded in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and which had been dominant in medieval scholasticism. Comte's principles combine methodological axioms (rules of positivist subjectivity) with axioms concerning the natural order, as well as axioms for an "objective" understanding – historical, sociological and moral/cerebral – of human knowledge itself.

Appendix E

POSITIVIST LIBRARY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Comte's select list of readings "to guide the more thoughtful minds among the people for constant use" first appeared in the *Catéchisme positiviste* of 1852. It was originally called *Bibliothèque au prolétaire du dix-neuvième siècle* and later renamed *Bibliothèque positiviste du dix-neuvième siècle*. Frederic Harrison's translation shown here was published in 1886 under the auspices of the Newton Hall (London) branch of the Positivist church.

POSITIVIST LIBRARY

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

PART I.—POETRY AND FICTION.

HOMER.	The *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*.
ÆSCHYLUS.	The Seven *Tragedies*.
SOPHOCLES.	The *King Œdipus*.
ARISTOPHANES.	The *Comedies*.
PINDAR.	The *Triumphal Odes*.
THEOCRITUS.	The *Idylls*.
LONGUS.	The *Daphnis and Chloe*.
PLAUTUS.	The *Comedies*.
TERENCE.	The *Comedies*.
VIRGIL.	The *Poems* complete.
HORACE.	Selections—(The *Odes*).
LUCAN.	*Pharsalia*.
OVID.	(*Metamorphoses*, and *Fasti*.)
TIBULLUS.	The *Elegies*.
JUVENAL.	The *Satires*.
TALES OF THE MIDDLE AGES.	*Fubliaux du Moyen Age*, by Legrand d'Aussy.
DANTE.	(*Divina Commedia*.)
ARIOSTO.	(*Orlando Furioso*.)
TASSO.	(*Gerusalemme Liberata*.)
PETRARCH.	Selections—(The *Sonnets*).
METASTASIO.	A Selection from the *Dramas*.

ALFIERI.	A Selection from the *Dramas*.
MANZONI.	The *Betrothed* (*Promessi Sposi*).
CERVANTES.	*Don Quixote.*
	The Exemplary Novels.
SPANISH DRAMAS.	(A Collection of Twenty Dramas by Calderon, Lope de Vega, and others. *Coleccion Selecta del Antiquo Teatro Español*, by José Segundo Florez. Paris, 1854.)
THE CID.	(The national Epic of old Spain.)
SPANISH NATIONAL BALLADS.	(A Selection.)
CORNEILLE.	A Selection from the *Dramas*.
MOLIÈRE.	The *Comedies* complete.
RACINE.	A Selection from the *Dramas*.
VOLTAIRE.	A Selection from the *Dramas*.
LA FONTAINE.	*Fables in Verse.*
LA MOTTE.	Some selected *Fables*.
FLORIAN.	Some selected *Fables*.
LE SAGE.	*Gil Blas.*
MADAME DE LA FAYETTE.	*The Princess of Cleves.*
BERNARDIN DE SAINT PIERRE.	*Paul and Virginia.*
CHATEAUBRIAND.	*The Martyrs, The Last of the Abencerages.*
SHAKESPEARE.	A Selection from the *Dramas*.
MILTON.	*Paradise Lost*, the *Lyrical Poems*.
DE FOE.	*Robinson Crusoe.*
GOLDSMITH.	*The Vicar of Wakefield.*
FIELDING.	*Tom Jones.*
WALTER SCOTT.	*Ivanhoe, Quentin Durward, Fair Maid of Perth, Legend of Montrose, Old Mortality, Heart of Mid-Lothian, The Antiquary.*
BYRON.	Selected *Poems*, excluding *Don Juan*.
GOETHE.	Selected *Poems*.
THE ARABIAN NIGHTS.	

PART II.—SCIENCE.

CONDORCET.	*The Art of Calculating (Arithmetic).*
CLAIRAUT.	*Algebra,* and *Geometry.*
LACROIX, or LEGENDRE.	*Trigonometry.*
DESCARTES.	*Geometry.*
A. COMTE.	*Analytic Geometry.*
POINSOT.	*Statics,* and *Memoirs on Mechanics.*
CARNOT.	*Infinitesimal Calculus.*
NAVIER.	*Transcendental Analysis* (Polytechnic School).
	Course of Mechanics (Polytechnic School).
CARNOT.	*Principles of Equilibrium and of Motion.*
LAGRANGE.	*Theory of Analytic Functions.*
A. COMTE.	*Popular Astronomy.*
FONTENELLE.	*The Plurality of Worlds.*
FISCHER.	*Physics,* translated and annotated by BIOT.
J. CARR.	*Synopsis of Practical Philosophy.*
LAVOISIER.	*Elements of Chemistry.*
BERTHOLLET.	*Statical Chemistry.*
T. GRAHAM.	*Elements of Chemistry.*
MECKEL.	*Manual of Anatomy.*
BICHAT.	*On Life and Death.*
	General Anatomy.
BLAINVILLE.	*On the Organization of Animals.* Vol. I.
RICHERAND.	*Physiology,* annotated by BERARD.
CL. BERNARD.	*Physiological Researches.*
SEGOND.	*Systematization of Biology.*
	General Anatomy.
BARTHEZ.	*New Elements of the Science of Man.* (Second edition, 1806.)
LAMARCK.	*The Philosophy of Zoology.*

DUMÉRIL.	*Elements of Natural Science.*
BUFFON.	*Natural History of Animals.*
HIPPOCRATES.	*On Airs, Waters, and Places.*
HUFELAND.	*Art of Prolonging Human Life.*
CORNARO.	*On a Sober Life.*
BROUSSAIS.	*Notes on Questions of Pathology.*
	History of Chronic Inflammations.
FONTENELLE and CONDORCET.	*Estimates of Men of Science.*

PART III.—HISTORY.

MALTE-BRUN.	*Universal Geography.*
RIENZI.	*Geographical Dictionary.*
COOK.	*Three Voyages round the World.*
CHARDIN.	*Travels in the East.*
BARTHELEMY.	*Travels of Anacharsis.*
HEEREN.	*Manual of Ancient History.*
HERODOTUS.	*History.*
THUCYDIDES.	*History of the Peloponnesian War.*
ARRIAN.	*Life of Alexander.*
CÆSAR.	*Commentaries.*
TACITUS.	*Complete Works.*
PLUTARCH.	*Lives.*
WINCKELMANN.	*History of the Art of Antiquity.*
GIBBON.	*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*
FLEURY.	*Ecclesiastical History.*
HALLAM.	*Middle Ages in Europe.*
HEEREN.	*Political System of Europe.*
HUME.	*History of England.*
ROBERTSON.	*History of Charles V.*
ASCARGORTA.	*Short History of Spain.*
DENINA.	*The Revolutions of Italy.*
BOSSUET.	*History of France.*
P. DE COMINES.	*Memoirs.*
BENVENUTO CELLINI.	*Memoirs of his Life.*

L. DA VINCI.	*Treatise on Painting.*
CROMWELL.	*The Life of.*
RICHELIEU.	*Political Testament.*
MADAME DE MOTTE-VILLE.	*Memoirs (from 1615-1666).*
VOLTAIRE.	*Age of Louis XIV.*
GRÉTRY.	*Memoirs on Music.*
MIGNET.	*History of the French Revolution.*

PART IV.—PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION.

ARISTOTLE.	The *Politics* and the *Ethics.*
THE BIBLE.	Complete.
THE KORAN.	Complete.
ST. AUGUSTIN.	*The City of God.*
	The Confessions.
	Treatise on the Sermon on the Mount.
ST. BERNARD.	*On the Love of God (De Diligendo Deo).*
THOMAS À KEMPIS.	*The Imitation of Christ.*
CORNEILLE.	*Paraphrase in Verse of the Imitation of Christ.*
BOSSUET.	*The Doctrine of the Catholic Church.*
	History of Protestant Divergencies.
POUGET.	*The Montpellier Catechism.*
BACON.	*Novum Organum.*
DESCARTES.	*Discourse on Method.*
DIDEROT.	*Interpretation of Nature.*
PASCAL.	*The Thoughts.*
VAUVENARGUES.	*The Reflexions.*
MADAME DE LAMBERT.	*Advice of a Mother to her Son.*
	Advice of a Mother to her Daughter.
BOSSUET.	*Sketch of Universal History.*
CONDORCET.	*Progress of the Human Understanding.*
BOSSUET.	*Policy drawn from Scripture.*
DE MAISTRE.	*The Pope.*
DIDEROT.	*Letter on the Blind.*
	Letter on the Deaf and Dumb.

HUME.	*Essays.*
ADAM SMITH.	*Philosophical Reflexions on the History of Astronomy.*
DIDEROT.	*The Beautiful.* (Article *Le Beau* in the Encyclopædia.)
BARTHEZ.	*The Theory of the Beautiful.*
CABANIS.	*Relations of the Physical and the Moral in Man.*
LEROY.	*Letters on Animals.*
GALL.	*The Functions of the Brain.*
BROUSSAIS.	*Irritation and Madness.* (First edition.)
A. COMTE.	*Positive Philosophy.* (Translated and condensed by Miss Martineau.)
	Positive Polity.
	Positivist Catechism.

CONTRIBUTORS

Carolina Armenteros, trained at Stanford and Cambridge, has served as a teacher and researcher of European history in the American, British, Dutch and French academic systems. At present, she teaches the methodology of the social sciences in Dominican institutions of higher learning and is collaborating to found a socio-political journal. Carolina's main area of interest lies in nineteenth-century European thought, with an emphasis on the Counter-revolution. She is the author of *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794–1854* (2011); and the co-editor of *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of Enlightenment* (2011), *Joseph de Maistre and His European Readers: From Friedrich von Gentz to Isaiah Berlin* (2011) and *The New enfant du siècle: Joseph de Maistre as a Writer* (2010). Carolina's articles further focus on women's writing, social theory, political thought, religious sensibilities and the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Her work has appeared in five languages.

Mike Gane was educated at Leicester University 1965–68 (BA), and LSE 1968–71 (PhD). In 1972, he was a founding member of the Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, where he taught social theory for many years. His publications include: *On Durkheim's Rules of Sociological Method* (1988); *Harmless Lovers? Gender, Theory and Personal Relationships* (1991); *Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty* (2001); *French Social Theory* (2003); and *Auguste Comte* (2006).

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Thomas Kemple is professor of sociology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. His research and teaching focus on European and North American traditions of classical and contemporary social theory from the late nineteenth century to the present, with the aim of recovering lost ways of knowing the social world while pursuing the acquisition of new methods of interpretation and analysis in the social sciences. He is the author of *Reading Marx Writing: Melodrama, the Market, and the Grundrisse* (1995), and his articles have appeared in the *Journal of Classical Sociology*, *Telos*, *Rethinking Marxism*, and in two special issues on the work of Georg Simmel that he co-edited for *Theory, Culture & Society*. His latest book, *Intellectual Work and the Spirit of Capitalism: Weber's Calling* (2015) considers the literary, rhetorical and aesthetic structure of Max Weber's speeches and essays as an allegorical resource for thinking sociologically.

Mary Pickering is professor of modern European history at San Jose State University specializing in cultural/intellectual history, social history and women's history. She has written a three-volume work entitled *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (1993–2009). Her articles have appeared in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *French Historical Studies*, *Journal of Women's History*, *Historical Reflections*, *Revue philosophique*, *Revue internationale de philosophie* and *Revue interdisciplinaire d'études juridiques*.

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