

Auguste Comte: The First Technocrat

Hierarchy

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between science and society has been a continuing focus for social theorists from the early writings of Auguste Comte up through the work of Max Weber (Chapter 5) and, more recently, of Jürgen Habermas (Chapter 15) and Michel Foucault (Chapter 16). Whereas Weber, Habermas, and Foucault view the emergence of a scientific civilization with critical skepticism, Auguste Comte's writings, dating back to the early part of the nineteenth century, are filled with enthusiasm at the promise of the new age of science and particularly of the positive science of society.

Comte was born in 1798 in Montpellier and lived much of his life during a period of tremendous political and social instability. The French Revolution had overthrown the aristocracy but it had failed to establish a stable and lasting governing order. Napoleonic rule was displaced by a restored monarchy only to be replaced again by Napoleon, who in turn gave way to the Restoration, the regimes of Louis XVIII and Charles X. Counter-revolutions and *coups* marked French history through the middle of the nineteenth century, and against this

backdrop, Comte sought a rational and scientific alternative to the chaotic politics of his time.

The *École Polytechnique*, which Comte attended, was considered the leading school for scientific study in France, if not in all of Europe. It was at the *École* that Comte developed his ideas about social reform and the ways in which scientific study could assist in shaping a rational social order. In 1817 he was introduced to Henri de Saint-Simon, whose views on science and society were greatly to influence Comte. St-Simon employed Comte as his personal secretary, and there ensued an intense intellectual relationship. In 1824 a heated dispute over the authorship of an article brought to a head some simmering tensions and the two men severed their ties with one another. Authorship of their ideas continues to be contested since their collaboration was so close that accurate attribution is difficult to determine.

Comte had a distinguished reputation among some intellectuals and scholars, and his work was widely read and his lectures well attended. However, Comte became increasingly isolated from the intellectual community after

his breakup with St.-Simon. He desperately wanted an academic appointment but was never able to secure one, and his relationship with academic intellectuals grew bitter and resentful. Comte began lecturing in order to secure an audience for his ideas, and for a while some very prominent French scientists attended his lectures and supported his ideas. But eventually his scholarly admirers began to drift away and Comte was reduced to seeking the approval of fawning and uncritical followers, among them ordinary workers, whom he praised lavishly. In 1826, during a series of lectures on the positive philosophy, Comte collapsed and had to spend several months in a mental hospital. By 1830 he had published the first volume of the *Cours de Philosophie*, and over the next twelve years he completed the remaining five volumes of his masterpiece. But Comte could not recover his intellectual standing, and he was beset by professional and personal troubles. In 1844 he lost his job as an examiner at the *École Polytechnique*. He separated from his wife, and shortly thereafter he fell deeply in love with Clothilde de Vaux, who took ill and died about a year later, leaving Comte isolated and friendless once again. He lived the rest of his life on the fringes of poverty and madness and died of cancer in 1857.

Comte was born into the strong tradition of French thinkers of the Enlightenment. It was the rational and scientific thrust of the Enlightenment that attracted Comte. However, the counter-Enlightenment, with its fear of revolutionary change and its concern for social order and stability also was of vital concern to him. His writings reflect this tension between stability and change as Comte tried to account for change but also keep it under rational control.

The Law of Three Stages was a critically important concept in Comte's theory of society and human progress. He sought to understand how mankind had evolved from its earliest stages to the civilized societies of Europe in the nineteenth century. He argued that human

evolution is recaptured in the evolution of the individual, and just as the individual moves from childhood to adolescence and then to maturity, so the human race has evolved from a theological through a metaphysical to a scientific stage. The Law of the Three Stages then attempts to capture the evolution of the human mind as a key to understanding the evolution of human society. One stage of development inexorably leads to the next as the human mind becomes progressively more capable of developing methods for a more accurate understanding of reality. During the theological stage, the human mind quests after first and final causes and attributes to supernatural beings the ultimate cause of all that happens in life. At this stage priests and the military rule society. The metaphysical stage is one in which the human mind creates abstract forces to account for the phenomena of the real world; this stage is dominated by clergymen and lawyers. Finally, the human mind is emancipated from these abstractions, and in the positive stage, the stage ruled by industrialists and scientists, the mind seeks laws of social development using the methods of positive science, i.e., observation of facts, historical comparisons, and, wherever possible, controlled experimentation. Comte was an idealist who described social change as predominantly intellectual, following a logical progression.

As well as the social dynamics of progress, Comte also analyzed social statics, or the conditions that contribute to a stable social order. Most important among these elements was a common language, which provides a means of communication connecting a people with one another and with their history. It is interesting that Comte also thought that some form of religious belief was essential to a society's cohesiveness. Religion is the basis for a social order since it provides society with common beliefs about the purpose of human life and encourages altruism over the demands of a selfish ego for the achievement of common objectives. Fi-

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nally, the division of labor is a source of solidarity because it establishes a sense of interdependence and purpose among individuals in a community. In this way, Comte turned his scientific precision upon the unifying structures of a stable society.

Comte developed a theory of human knowledge that paralleled his Law of Three Stages. According to him, there is a hierarchy of knowledge ranging from the least to the most complex sciences. He judged mathematics and astronomy, because of their relative simplicity, to rank below physics, chemistry, and biology. Each discipline was seen to build on those that rank below it. At the top of this hierarchy Comte placed sociology, since it was the last discipline to develop at the positivistic stage and the most complex and comprehensive because it drew from all of the other disciplines and analyzed their evolution and social context. Comte was the first to define the term "sociology"; he sought to place analyses of society under scientific discipline. Just as the natural sciences had been so successful in unearthing laws which explained the behavior of the universe, Comte reasoned, so would the social sciences describe the laws of human behavior. Particularly in this respect is Comte a foundational sociological thinker. He established the positivist approach which later sociologists such as Émile Durkheim and Herbert Spencer would apply with remarkable precision.

In the reading that follows, Comte presents his theory of social change and argues against the chaos of democratic politics on the grounds that the parties involved in the political struggle are blinded by their own selfish interests. Intellectuals, "savants" such as himself, are indispensable in the process of social change and government, for they are equipped with the intellectual tools to understand impartially the

complexities of historical evolution. Because of their knowledge of history and the laws of social development, they have prevision and can therefore legislate policies in the present that will assure the smooth transition to the society of the future. Indeed, the stated purpose of Comte's *Positive Polity* is to set in motion the forces capable of bringing society into the track of the new positive system. Comte describes such intellectual work not as mere academic discourse, but as the fundamental groundwork for the society that is coming into being.

Comte believed that the France of the post-revolutionary period was in transition from the metaphysical stage to the positive stage and that his work would enhance the process of change. The parties in conflict, what he called the Party of the People and the Party of the Kings, refer, of course, to the democratic and monarchical forces vying for power. Comte argues that the turmoil could be avoided if each side were to recognize its role in the historical process. Thus the monarchists would realize that they are part of the past order of the metaphysical stage and can never return to power. Similarly, the democratic forces should recognize that they are necessary for bringing about the collapse of the monarchy but that they have no role to play in the future. Rather, the future belongs to the sociologists, who with their prevision are able to understand the social forces in conflict as well as the outcomes of historical change. Comte's sociologist-kings would act as the knowledge elite of the new positive social order and guide it in the proper direction of progress without further revolution. Today this type of theory is called technocratic because it seeks to replace politics with science, the unwieldy processes of democracy with the ordered visions of elites who have technical knowledge and expertise.

Auguste Comte: Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for Reorganizing Society

A social system in its decline, a new system arrived at maturity and approaching its completion—such is the fundamental character which the general progress of civilisation has assigned to the present epoch. In conformity with this state of things, two movements, differing in their nature, agitate society; one a movement of disorganisation, the other of reorganisation. By the former, considered apart, society is hurried towards a profound moral and political anarchy which appears to menace it with a near and inevitable dissolution. By the latter it is guided to the definitive social condition of the human race, that best suited to its nature, and in which all progressive movements should receive their completest development and most direct application. In the co-existence of these two opposed tendencies consists the grand crisis now experienced by the most civilised nations; and this can only be understood when viewed under both aspects.

From the moment when this crisis began to show itself to the present time the tendency of the ancient system to disorganisation has predominated, or rather it alone is still plainly manifested. It was in the nature of things that the crisis should begin thus, so that the old system might be sufficiently modified to permit the direct formation of the new social system.

But now that this condition has been fully satisfied and the Catholico-Feudal system has lost its power, as far as is possible, until the new system has been inaugurated, the preponderance still maintained by the negative tendency constitutes the greatest obstacle to the progress

of civilization and even to the abolition of the ancient system. Its persistence forms the first cause of those terrible and continually renewed shocks by which the crisis is accompanied.

The only way of ending this stormy situation, of staying the anarchy which day by day invades society, in a word of reducing the crisis to a simple moral movement, consists in inducing the civilised nations to abandon the negative and to adopt an organic attitude; turning all their efforts towards the formation of the New Social System as the definitive object of the crisis and that for the attainment of which everything hitherto accomplished is only a preparation.

Such is the prime necessity of the present epoch. Such also is the general scope of my labours and the special aim of this essay, the object of which is to set in motion the forces capable of bringing society into the track of the new system.

A brief examination of the causes which have hitherto hindered and still do hinder society from frankly assuming an organic attitude, should naturally precede an exposition of the measures necessary for effecting this object.

The numerous and repeated attempts made by the People and Kings to reorganise society prove that the need of such a reorganisation is generally felt. But on both sides it is only felt in a vague and imperfect manner. These two kinds of attempts are, though for different reasons, equally vicious. To the present time they have not, nor could they have produced any real organic result. Far from tending to terminate the crisis these efforts only contribute to prolong it. Such is the true cause which, in spite of so many efforts, by keeping society in the negative track, leaves it a prey to revolutions.

To establish this fundamental proposition, it is sufficient to take a general view of the attempts at reorganisation undertaken by Kings and the People.

The error committed by Kings is easier to understand. For them the reorganisation of so-

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society means the re-establishment pure and simple of the feudal and theological system in all its integrity. In their eyes no other means exist of terminating the anarchy which results from the decline of this system.

It would be unphilosophical to regard this view as if it were mainly dictated by the special interests of the governing classes. Chimerical though it be, this idea naturally presented itself to minds seeking, in good faith, a remedy for the existing crisis. They feel in its entire extent the need for a reorganisation; but they have not considered the general progress of civilisation, and, viewing the present state of affairs under one aspect only, they do not perceive the tendency of society to establish a new system more perfect, and not less harmonious, than the ancient one. In a word it is natural that this view should be taken by rulers, since from their position they must of necessity perceive more clearly the anarchical state of society and consequently experience more forcibly the necessity for applying a remedy.

This is not the place to insist on the manifest absurdity of such an opinion; which is now universally recognised by the majority of enlightened men. Doubtless Kings, while seeking to reconstruct the ancient system, do not comprehend the nature of the present crisis and are far from having measured the magnitude of their enterprise.

The downfall of the feudal and theological system does not spring, as they believe, from recent, solitary, and in some sort accidental causes. Their downfall in place of being the effect of the crisis is, on the contrary, its source. The decline of this system has come to pass continuously during the preceding centuries, by reason of a series of modifications, independent of the human will, to which all classes of society contributed, and of which Kings themselves have often been the first agents and most eager promoters. In a word it was the necessary consequence of the progress of civilisation.

In order then to re-establish the ancient system it would not be sufficient to push society back to the epoch when the existing crisis began to reveal itself. For, even supposing this could be done, which it could not, we should have merely replaced the body politic in the situation which necessitated the crisis. Retracing past ages, it would be requisite to repair, one by one, all the losses suffered by the ancient system during six centuries in comparison with which all that it has lost for the last thirty years is of no importance.

No other mode of effecting this would be possible but to annihilate all the results of civilisation which have caused this decline. . . .

The manner in which the People have hitherto understood the reorganisation of society, is no less erroneous than that adopted by kings, though in a different way. Their error however is more excusable since it lies in a misconception of the new system towards which the progress of civilisation transports them, though its nature has not, as yet, been clearly determined; while kings pursue an enterprise the entire absurdity of which is plainly demonstrable, even by a superficial study of the past. In a word Kings are at variance with facts, the People with principles, the last being always more difficult to grasp. But it is much more important to eradicate the misconception of the people than that of kings, because the former constitutes an essential obstacle to the progress of civilisation, and alone gives some show of reason to the latter. . . .

If we attentively examine the doctrines now accredited among the people as exhibited in the speeches of their ablest adherents and as expounded in the most systematic writings; considered in themselves and in their successive growth, we shall find that they are conceived in a purely critical spirit, incapable of affording any basis for reorganisation. . . .

Government is, thus, no longer regarded as the head of society destined to bind together

the component units and to direct their activity to a common end. It is represented as a natural enemy encamped in the midst of our social system against which society needs to fortify itself by the guarantees already obtained while maintaining a permanent attitude of mistrust and defensive hostility ready to break forth at the first symptom of attack. . . .

Proclaiming the sovereignty of each individual reason, this doctrine in fact essentially tends to hinder the uniform establishment of any system of general ideas, without which nevertheless society cannot exist. For let the mass of men become as highly instructed as is possible, it is evident that the greater part of the general conceptions currently received can only be accepted by them on trust and not as the result of demonstration. Thus such a dogma is, by its very nature, only applicable to ideas destined to vanish and therefore regarded with indifference; and in point of fact it has only been applied to such at the moment of their decline and in order to hasten their fall. . . .

Next, comparing the two distinct modes,—hitherto considered separately—in which the People and Kings conceive this reorganisation, it will be seen that each of them, owing to its peculiar vices, is equally powerless to launch society on an organic course, and so to secure the future against the return of the convulsions that have continually accompanied the great crisis which characterises the present epoch. Both are alike anarchical, the one by its own nature, the other by its necessary consequences.

In this respect the only difference between them is that, in the opinion of kings the government purposely places itself in direct and continuous opposition to society; while according to the popular view society takes up a permanent attitude of hostility to government.

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The preceding considerations demonstrate that the way of final escape from this deplorably vicious circle, this inexhaustible source of

revolutions, lies neither in the doctrine of kings nor in that of the people. The formation and general adoption by both people and kings of Organic Conceptions can alone suffice to withdraw the latter from their retrograde, the former from their negative direction.

Such a doctrine can alone terminate the crisis by forcing society into the track of the new system, which the growth of civilisation has prepared and now offers as a substitute for the feudo-theological system.

By the unanimous adoption of this doctrine satisfaction will be afforded to all that is reasonable in the existing opinions both of the people and of kings, their discordant and vicious elements being discarded. The just apprehensions of kings as to the subversion of society being dissipated, no legitimate motive can any longer urge them to oppose the growth of the human intellect. While the people, turning all their aspirations to the formation of the new system, will no longer feel irritated against the feudo-theological system, but will await its peaceable extinction in the natural course of events.

Having thus established the necessity for adopting a new and truly organic doctrine, we shall next examine its opportunity. It will sufficiently appear from the following considerations that the moment for commencing this great operation has at last arrived. . . .

To resume then; not only are the popular and monarchical doctrines equally incapable of satisfying that fundamental need of reorganisation which characterises the present epoch—whence results the necessity for a new general doctrine—but the triumph of either in our day is alike impossible. Neither in truth can exercise any decided influence; and hence we may infer that men's minds are sufficiently prepared to receive the organic doctrine.

The destination of society now come to maturity is neither to inhabit for ever the old and miserable hut which its infancy erected, as kings suppose; nor to live eternally without

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quired experience, it should with all the accu-
mulated materials construct an edifice fitted for
its needs and enjoyments. Such is the great and
noble enterprise reserved for the present gener-
ation.

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The defects in the modes of conceiving the
Organisation of Society by the People and by
Kings having been shown, we are forced to
conclude that both have pursued wrong meth-
ods in framing the plan of reorganisation. Such
a state of things admits of but one explanation;
but it is important to establish this assertion di-
rectly and accurately. . . .

The nature of the works to be executed, of it-
self sufficiently indicates the class on which
their execution must devolve. Since these
works are theoretical, it is clear that those
whose professed aim it is to form theoretical
combinations, in other words Savants occupied
with the study of the sciences of observation,
are the only men whose capacity and intellec-
tual culture fulfil the necessary conditions. It
would be evidently abnormal when the most
urgent social needs call for a general work of
the highest order of importance and difficulty,
to entrust this work to any but the greatest in-
tellectual forces we can command and to men
who pursue a method of which the superiority
is universally recognised. Doubtless in other
branches of society men may be found equal
and even superior in theoretical capacity to
that of the majority of savants, for the effective
classification of individuals is far from con-
forming universally to the natural or physio-
logical classification. But in a work so essential
we must consider classes and not individuals.
Besides even as regards such exceptional in-
stances, education, that is to say, the system of
intellectual habits which results from the study
of the sciences of observation, can alone devel-
op their natural theoretical capacity. . . .

In the system to be constituted the spiritual

power will be confided to the hands of savants,
while the temporal power will belong to the
heads of industrial works. These two powers
then should naturally proceed to the formation
of this system; just as they will when it is estab-
lished undertake its daily application; due al-
lowance being made for the superior impor-
tance of the work now to be executed. This work
embraces a spiritual portion which ought to be
treated first and a temporal portion which will
follow. Accordingly on the savants devolves the
task of undertaking the first series of works and
on the leaders of industry that of organising,
on the bases thus established, the administra-
tive system. Such is the simple course indicated
by the nature of things, which teaches us that
the very classes which form the elements of the
powers of a new system and must one day be
placed at its head, can alone create it because
they alone are capable of truly apprehending
its spirit, and impelled in this direction by the
combined force of their habits and their interests.

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The *ensemble* of these views may be regard-
ed as intended to lead reflecting minds to that
elevated point of view whence both the vices of
the course hitherto followed for the reorganisa-
tion of society and the character of that which
should, in our day, be adopted may be em-
braced at a single glance. In the last resort all
resolves itself into establishing, through the
combined efforts of European savants, a posi-
tive theory in politics distinct from practice,
and one which shall bring our social system
into harmony with the present state of knowl-
edge. Pursuing this course of reflection we
shall perceive that the above conclusions may
be resumed in a single conception: *scientific
men ought in our day to elevate politics to the rank
of a science of observation.*

Such is the culminating and definitive point
of view at which we should place ourselves.
From this point of view it is easy to condense
into a series of very simple considerations the
substance of all that has been said in the pre-

sent essay. It remains to effect this important generalisation, which can alone supply the means of advancing further by rendering the march of thought more rapid.

From the nature of the human intellect each branch of knowledge in its development is necessarily obliged to pass through three different theoretical states: the Theological or fictitious state; the Metaphysical or abstract state; lastly the Scientific or positive state.

In the first state supernatural ideas serve to bind the small number of isolated observations which then constitute science. In other words the facts observed are explained, that is to say, conceived *à priori*, by means of invented facts. Such is the necessary state of all knowledge in its infancy. With all its imperfections this forms the only mode of connecting facts possible at that epoch. It furnishes, therefore, the only instrument by means of which we can reason on facts, thus sustaining our intellectual activity which above all requires a rallying point. In a word this state is indispensable as a condition of further progress.

The second state is simply destined to serve as a means of transition from the first to the third. It has a mongrel nature, connecting facts by ideas which are no longer entirely supernatural and have not yet become completely natural. In a word these ideas are personified abstractions, which the mind can at will regard as the mystic name for a supernatural cause, or the abstract statement of a mere series of phenomena, according as it approximates more nearly to the theological or the scientific state. This metaphysical state presupposes that facts, multiplied in number, have at the same time become more closely connected by more extended comparisons.

The third is the definitive state of all knowledge whatsoever; the two first having been destined to prepare it gradually. Then facts become connected by general ideas or laws of a completely positive kind, suggested or confirmed by the very facts, which are themselves frequently only simple facts sufficiently gener-

al to be elevated to the rank of principles. We constantly endeavour to reduce these to the smallest possible number, yet without proposing any hypothesis incapable of being sooner or later verified, and always regarding these principles simply as a general mode of stating the phenomena.

Men familiar with the progress of the sciences can easily verify the truth of this general historical *résumé* in reference to the four fundamental sciences already rendered positive, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry and Physiology, as well as their dependent sciences. Those even who have only considered the sciences in their present state can make this verification as to physiology which, although it has at last become as positive as the other sciences, still subsists under the three states in different classes of intelligence. This fact is particularly evident in reference to the phenomena specially called *moral*: for these are conceived by some as the result of a continuous supernatural action; by others as incomprehensible results of the action of an abstract entity; and lastly by others as connected with organic conditions susceptible of demonstration and beyond which it is impossible to go.

Considering Politics as a science and applying to it the preceding remarks, we find that it has already passed through the two first states and is now on the point of reaching the third.

The doctrine of Kings represents the theological state of politics. In the last result, this is in truth based on theological ideas. It exhibits social relations as resting on the supernatural idea of Divine Right. It explains the successive political changes of the human race by an immediate supernatural guidance, exercised continuously from the first man to the present day. In this way alone was political science conceived, until the ancient system began to decline.

The doctrine of the People expresses the metaphysical condition of politics. It is wholly founded on the abstract and metaphysical hypothesis of a primitive Social Contract antecedent to all development of the human

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faculties by civilisation. The instruments of reasoning which it habitually employs are 'rights,' regarded as natural and common to all men in the same degree and guaranteed by this contract. Such is the primitive negative doctrine, originally drawn from theology as a means of warfare against the ancient system and which has been subsequently erected into an organic idea. Rousseau was its chief systematiser, in a work which served and still serves as the basis of the ordinary reflections upon social organisation.

Lastly the Scientific Doctrine of politics considers the social state in which the human race has always been found by observers as the necessary effect of its organisation. It conceives the scope of this social state as determined by the rank which man holds in the natural scale, the result of facts which are not themselves susceptible of explanation. It perceives in truth that from this fundamental relation results the constant tendency of man to act upon nature in order to modify it for his own advantage. It then considers the social order as aiming at a collective development of this natural tendency, so as to give the highest possible efficiency to this useful action. This being settled, it endeavours, by direct observations on the collective development of the race, to deduce from the fundamental laws of the human organisation the evolution it has undergone and the intermediate states to which it has been subjected before reaching its definitive state. Guided by this series of observations this doctrine regards the improvements reserved for each epoch as necessitated, without resorting to any hypothesis, by the stage of development which the human race has reached. Thus, in reference to each degree of civilisation, it views political combinations as merely intended to facilitate natural tendencies when these have been sufficiently ascertained. . . .

To resume,—no moral revolution ever existed at once more inevitable, more ripe, and more urgent than that required to elevate politics to

the rank of the natural sciences, through the combined efforts of European savants. This revolution can alone introduce into the great crisis of our day a really preponderating force, capable of preserving society from the terrible explosions of anarchy which threaten it, by putting it on the track of that improved social system which the state of our knowledge demands.

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Theological and metaphysical polity, aiming at the best possible government, lead to interminable discussions, since such a problem cannot be reduced to certainty. The political *régime* should be, and of necessity is, in harmony with the state of civilisation. The best for each epoch is that which suits it best. Therefore there is not and cannot be any political *régime* absolutely preferable to all others; there are merely some states of civilisation more perfect than others. Institutions good at one period may be and most frequently are bad at another and *vice versa*. Thus, for example, Slavery which is now a monstrosity, was certainly at its origin an admirable institution, designed to prevent the strong from destroying the weak, constituting an unavoidable transition in the general development of civilisation. In like manner, conversely, Liberty which, to a reasonable extent, becomes so useful to individuals and nations that have reached a certain stage of knowledge, and contracted some habits of foresight, by permitting the development of their faculties, is very mischievous to those who have not yet fulfilled these two conditions; and who require for the sake of themselves, as well as of others, to be kept in tutelage. It is therefore evident that there can be no common understanding as to what forms the absolutely best possible government. To reestablish harmony no other expedient is admissible but that of entirely proscribing any discussion of the plan laid down. This is the course which the theological polity has adopted; more consistent in this respect than metaphysical polity, since its actual persistence proves that it fulfilled the conditions of

existence. We know that metaphysics by giving unrestrained scope to the imagination has induced a doubt and even a formal denial of the utility of the social state for the happiness of man, a conclusion which strikingly illustrates the impossibility of agreement upon such questions.

The practical aim of scientific politics being, on the contrary, to ascertain the system which the march of civilisation, indicated by the past, now tends to bring about, the problem is altogether positive and can be decided by observation. The freest investigation can and should be accorded, without any fear of its leading to disorder. After the lapse of a certain time competent minds, and finally all men, must agree as to the natural laws which govern the progress of civilisation, and the resultant system, whatever may originally have been their speculative opinions; just as men have ended in a common understanding about the laws of the solar system, those of the humans organisation, &c.

Finally positive politics furnish the only road by which the human race can find an issue from arbitrary courses, under the dominion of which it must remain so long as the theological and metaphysical polity predominate.

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In order to establish a new Social System, just conceptions will not suffice. It is necessary that the mass of society should feel attracted by it. This condition is not merely indispensable to overcome the obstacles, more or less serious, which this system must encounter among the classes who are losing their ascendancy. It is needed above all for the satisfaction of the moral craving for enthusiasm inherent in man when he enters upon a new career. Without such enthusiasm he could neither overcome his natural inertness nor shake off the powerful yoke of ancient habits; without which it is impossible to secure the free and full development of all his faculties in their new occupation. Since this necessity always manifests itself even in the least complicated cases, its absence

would involve a contradiction in the most complete and important changes, in those which must most deeply modify human existence. Accordingly all history testifies in favor of this truth.

It is therefore clear that the right mode of conceiving and presenting the new system under a scientific polity is not at all fitted to fulfil this indispensable condition.

The mass of mankind will never be inspired with a passion for any system, by proving to them that it is one which the progress of civilisation has prepared and now demands for the guidance of society. A truth of this nature is accessible to a very limited circle and for them even demands too long a series of mental operations, to allow of its inspiring an attachment. It can only produce among savants that profound and tenacious conviction, the necessary result of positive demonstrations, which offers a stronger resistance, but, for that very reason, is less active than the lively and captivating persuasion of ideas that excite the passions.

The only way of obtaining this result consists in presenting a vivid picture of the ameliorations which the new system should bring about in the condition of mankind, regarded under all points of view, and apart from its necessity and opportunity. Such a perspective alone, can induce men to effect the moral revolution within themselves, essential for establishing the new system. This alone can repress that egotism, now rendered predominant by the dissolution of the ancient system, and which, after our ideas have been enlightened by scientific labors, will remain as the only serious obstacle to the triumph of the new social organisation. This alone can draw society from its apathy, and impress on it that active devotedness which is demanded by a social state destined to maintain all the human faculties in constant action.

Here then we find a sort of work in which the Imagination should perform the principal part. Its activity can produce no bad effect,

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since this will be exerted in the direction pointed out by scientific labors; and it will aim, not at inventing a new system, but at spreading one which has been determined by positive polity. Thus set in motion the imagination ought to be entirely left to itself. The more open and free its attitude, the more complete and salutary will be its indispensable activity.

Such is the part specially reserved for the Fine Arts in the general work of social reorganisation. Thus this vast enterprise will obtain the cooperation of all the positive forces; that of the savants to determine the plan of the new system; that of the artists to cause its universal adoption, that of the industrial chiefs to put it into immediate execution by establishing the needful practical institutions. These three great forces will lend each other a mutual support in founding the new system, as they will do to ensure its daily application, when established.

In determining, then, the social system suitable to the present epoch the positive polity invests observation with the supremacy now accorded to imagination. At the same time it confides to the imagination a new and more perfect office than that which the theologico-metaphysical polity assigned to it; for since the human race has advanced near the positive state the imaginative faculty, though supreme, has revolved in a circle of obsolete ideas and monotonous pictures.

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In the preceding chapter I have submitted, though under the spiritual aspect only, a general view which, as it seems to me, fulfils the conditions above stated for effecting the primary coordination of the past. It constitutes the first result of a philosophic study of the *ensemble* of the history of civilisation.

I believe that this history may be divided into three grand epochs, or states of civilisation, each possessing a distinct character, spiritual and temporal. They embrace civilisation at once in its elements and its *ensemble*; which, as

above pointed out, evidently constitutes an indispensable condition of success.

Of these the first is the Theological and Military epoch.

In this state of society, all theoretical conceptions, whether general or special, bear a supernatural impress. The imagination completely predominates over the observing faculty to which all right of inquiry is denied.

In like manner, all the social relations, whether special or general, are avowedly and exclusively military. Society makes conquest its one permanent aim. Industrial pursuits are carried on only so far as is necessary for the support of the human race. Slavery, pure and simple, of the producers is the principal institution.

Such is the first great social system produced by the material progress of civilisation. It existed in an elementary shape from the very commencement of regular and permanent societies. In its entirety it becomes completely established only after a long series of generations.

The second epoch is Metaphysical and Juridical. Its general character is that of possessing no well-defined characteristics. It forms a link and is mongrel and transitional.

Under spiritual aspects it has been already characterised in the preceding chapter. Observation is still kept subordinate to imagination, but the former is, within certain limits, allowed to modify the latter. These limits are gradually enlarged, until, in the end, observation conquers the right of examining in every direction. At first it obtains this right in reference to all special theoretical conceptions, and gradually, by force of exercise, as to general theoretic ideas, which constitutes the natural termination of the transition. This period is one of criticism and argument.

Under temporal aspects industry in this second epoch becomes more extended, without as yet acquiring the upper hand. Consequently society is no longer frankly military and yet has not become frankly industrial, either in its

elements or in its *ensemble*. The special social relations are modified. Industrial slavery is no longer direct; the producer, still a slave, begins to obtain some rights in his relations with the military. Industry makes fresh advances which finally issue in the total abolition of individual slavery. After this enfranchisement, the producers still remain subject to a collective arbitrary authority. Nevertheless, the general social relations soon undergo a modification. The two aims of activity, conquest and production, advance *pari passu*. Industry is at first favoured and protected as a military resource. Later its importance augments; and finally war is regarded and systematically pursued as a means of favouring industry: which is the last term of the intermediate *régime*.

Lastly, the third epoch is that of Science and Industry. All special theoretic conceptions have become positive and the general conceptions tend to become so. As regard the former observation predominates over imagination; while in reference to the latter observation has dethroned the imagination, without having as yet taken its place.

Under temporal aspects industry has become predominant. All the special relations have gradually established themselves upon industrial bases. Society, taken collectively, tends to organise itself in the same manner, by making production its only and constant aim.

To resume, the last epoch has ended as regards the elements and is commencing as regards the *ensemble*. Its direct point of departure dates from the introduction of the Positive Sciences into Europe by the Arabs, and the enfranchisement of the Commons, that is to say, from about the eleventh century.

In order to prevent all confusion in applying this general view, we should never lose sight of the fact that civilisation necessarily progressed in reference to the spiritual and temporal *elements* of the social state, before advancing in regard to their *ensemble*. Consequently the

three great and successive phases were inevitably inaugurated as to their elements before they commenced as to the *ensemble*, a circumstance which might occasion some confusion if we did not make a large allowance for this unavoidable difference.

Such then are the principal characteristics of the three epochs into which we can divide the entire history of civilisation, from the period when the social state began to acquire real solidity until the present time. I venture to submit to savants this primary division of the past; which appears to me to fulfil the essential conditions of a good classification of the *ensemble* of political facts.

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All sciences aim at prevision. For the laws established by the observation of phenomena are generally employed to foretell their succession. In truth all men, however little advanced, make predictions, based on the same principle, the forecast of the future from the past. All men, for example, predict the general effects of terrestrial gravity, and a multitude of other phenomena sufficiently simple and usual to reveal their order of succession to the least capable and attentive spectator. The power of prevision is measured in each person by the extent of his knowledge. The prevision of the astronomer who predicts, with complete accuracy, the condition of the solar system many years in advance, is absolutely the same in kind as that of the savage who predicts the next sunrise. The only difference lies in the extent of their knowledge.

Manifestly then, it is quite in accordance with the nature of the human mind that observation of the past should reveal the future in politics as it has done in astronomy, physics, chemistry, and physiology.

Such a determination of the future should even be regarded as the direct object of political science, as of the other positive sciences. It is clear, in truth, that the ascertainment of the

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Social System in which the *élite* of the human race are in our day called on to take part, constitutes the true practical object of positive politics, and is nothing but a general determination of the future of society regarded as the result of the past.

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The considerations submitted in this chapter on the spirit of Positive Polity prove that this attempt, like the one last noticed, was, of necessity, misconceived. But we must accurately point out its error.

This consists in a disregard of that direct observation of the social past which should supply the fundamental basis of positive politics.

The superiority of man as compared with the other animals has, and in truth can have, no other cause than the relative perfection of his organisation. Therefore everything that the human race has effected, and can effect, must manifestly be regarded as being in the last resort a necessary consequence of organisation modified in its results by external circumstances. In one sense Social Physics, that is to say the study of the collective development of the human race, is really a branch of physiology, or the study of man conceived in its entire extension. In other words the History of Civilisation is nothing but the indispensable result and complement of the Natural History of man.

But if it be important to understand thoroughly and never to lose sight of this incontestable filiation, on the other hand it is a complete mistake to draw the conclusion that it is unnecessary to institute any clear demarcation between Social Physiology and Physiology properly so called. . . .

If, as I venture to hope, the considerations submitted in this chapter convince savants of

the importance and possibility of founding positive political science in the sense above indicated, I shall offer in greater detail my opinion on the mode of executing this first series of operations. But I deem it advisable to repeat the necessity for dividing it into two kinds, the first embracing general conceptions, the second special investigations.

The first kind of investigations should aim at establishing the general progress of mankind, putting aside the various causes that may modify the rate at which civilisation advances and consequently all the differences between nations, however great these may be. The second kind of investigations should aim at estimating the influence of their modifying elements, thus drawing the final picture in which each nation shall fill the special position appropriate to its own development.

Both classes of investigations, but especially the latter, admit of various degrees of generality, the necessity for which will probably make itself apparent to savants.

The propriety of treating the first order of investigations before the second is based on this evident principle,—as applicable to the physiology of the race as to that of the individual,—that peculiarities should only be studied after establishing general laws. If this rule were disregarded, we should be obliged to forego the acquisition of any clear conception.

The possibility of proceeding in this way results from the fact that an adequate number of special points have in our day been sufficiently investigated to allow of our attempting their general coordination. Physiologists did not postpone the task of framing a conception of the *ensemble* of our organisation until all the special functions were known. It ought to be the same in Social Physics.

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