

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF AUGUSTE COMTE.

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I. LIFE AND WORKS.

IT was one hundred years in May of this year since Auguste Comte published the famous prospectus of his comprehensive social philosophy under the title of *Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société*.¹ In the century which has passed many one-sided philosophies of society have been proposed and many incomplete schemes of social reform propounded. Many writers in recent years have, however, tended to revert to the position of Comte that we must have a philosophy of society which includes a consideration of biological, psychological and historical factors, and a program of social reform which will provide for an increase both in technical efficiency and in social morale.² Further, there has also developed a wide-spread distrust of the "pure" democracy of the last century and a growing feeling that we must endeavor more and more to install in positions of political and social power that intellectual aristocracy in which Comte placed his faith as the desirable leaders in the reconstruction of European society.³ In the light of the above facts a brief analysis of the political and social philosophy of Comte may have practical as well as historical interest to students of philosophy and social science.

Auguste Comte was born in Montpellier in 1798, and received his higher education at the *École Polytechnique*. During six years

¹ See the brief article on this matter in the *American Journal of Sociology*, January, 1922, pp. 510-13.

² See *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, 1920, pp. 174-202; and G. S. Hall, *Morale: the Supreme Standard of Life and Conduct*.

³ For an extreme statement of this point of view see E. Faguet, *The Cult of Incompetence*.

of his young manhood he was a close friend and ardent disciple of the progressive French thinker, Henri de Saint Simon.⁴ In 1824 there came a sharp break which led Comte into a somewhat ungracious depreciation of his former master. They differed chiefly in the degree to which they placed confidence in the revolutionary philosophy and tendencies of the times, Comte being inclined to take a more conservative position than his teacher. Comte's earliest work of importance was the prospectus of his social philosophy which was mentioned above.⁵ In 1826 he worked out in lectures the first formal exposition of the principles of the Positivist philosophy in his own home, where he was honored by the attendance of such distinguished men as the scientist Alexander von Humboldt.

Comte's first great work—the *Cours de philosophie positive*—appeared between the years 1830 and 1842. From 1836 until 1846 he was an examiner for the *Ecole Polytechnique*. After his dismissal from this position he was supported chiefly by contributions from his disciples and admirers. His friendship with Clotilde de Vaux (1845-6) doubtless contributed strongly to Comte's eulogy of women which appeared particularly in his *Polity*. He founded the *Positivist Society* in 1848. Comte's last and most important work—the *Système de politique positive*—appeared between 1851 and 1854. He died in 1857.⁶

In the first of his chief works—the *Philosophy*—Comte worked out in more detail than in his earlier sketches and essays his main theoretical positions. These include the hierarchy of the sciences; the necessity for, and the nature of, sociology, with its two main divisions of social statics and social dynamics; and the law of the three stages of universal progress, with ample historical illustrations and confirmation. The *Polity* was a detailed expansion of his theoretical doctrines, and their practical application to the construction of a "Positive" or scientifically designed commonwealth. While many are inclined to maintain that the *Philosophy* contains all of Comte's important contributions to sociology, such

⁴ See W. H. Schoff, "A Neglected Chapter in the Life of Comte," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 8, 1896, pp. 491-508.

⁵ For a list of Comte's works see M. Defourny, *La Sociologie positiviste*, pp. 19-22.

⁶ An excellent brief survey of Comte's life is to be found in John Morley's article on "Comte" in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

is far from the case.⁷ Though the *Polity* is verbose, prolix, involved and repetitious, nearly all of Comte's chief postulates are developed in it with far greater maturity and richness of detail than in the *Philosophy*.⁸

II .COMTE'S GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY.

It is generally conceded by the foremost students of Comte's social philosophy that his chief contribution lay in his remarkable capacity for synthesis and organization, rather than in the development of new and original social doctrines. He derived much from writers on social philosophy from Aristotle to Saint-Simon. From Aristotle he derived his fundamental notion as to the basis of social organization, namely, the distribution of functions and the combination of efforts. From Hume, Kant and Gall he received his conceptions of positivism in method and his physical psychology. From Hume, Kant and Turgot he obtained his views of historical determinism, and from Bossuet, Vico and DeMaistre his somewhat divergent doctrine of the providential element in history. From Turgot, Condorcet, Burdin and Saint-Simon he derived his famous law of the three stages in the intellectual development of mankind. From Montesquieu, Condorcet and Saint-Simon he secured his conception of sociology as the basic and directive science which must form the foundation of the art of politics. Each had made special contributions to this subject. Montesquieu had introduced the conception of law in the social process, stressing particularly the influence of the physical environment; Condorcet had emphasized the concept of progress; while Saint-Simon had insisted upon the necessity of providing a science of society sufficiently comprehensive to guide this process of social and industrial reorganization. It was the significant achievement of Comte to work out an elaborate synthesis of these progressive contributions of the thought of the previous century and to indi-

⁷ Cf. L. Chiappini, *Les Idées politiques d'Auguste Comte*, Introduction.

⁸ This point has been especially stressed by Comte himself, and by G. H. Lewes and Frederic Harrison. For a vigorous attack on the value of the *Polity* see *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 8, 1896, p. 506.

cate the bearing of this new social science upon the problems of European society in the nineteenth century.⁹

The outstanding doctrines of Comte, namely, the classification of the hierarchy of the sciences with sociology at the head; the division of this subject into statics and dynamics; the law of the three stages of universal progress; and the conception of the organic nature of society, with its corollary of society as a developing organism, have been so often repeated in resumés of sociological theory that they have become common-places. Even a cursory reading of Comte's major works, however, is bound to impress the reader with the fact that he had much more to offer than can be intelligently summarized under the above headings. There are few problems in social theory or history that he did not touch upon.¹⁰

Comte's fundamental methodological position is that if human knowledge is to be extended in the future this must be accomplished through the application of the positive or scientific method of observation, experimentation, and comparison. Sociological investigation must follow this general procedure, with the addition that when the comparative method has been applied to the study of consecutive stages of human society, a fourth method, the historical, will have been constructed, from which may be expected the most notable results.¹¹ Nothing fruitful can be hoped for from the metaphysicians. Comte's strictures upon their methods and results are particularly vigorous and to some equally convincing.¹²

Comte constructed a hierarchy of the sciences, beginning with mathematics and passing through astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology to the new science of sociology, which was to complete the series. The fundamental theoretical foundations of this classi-

⁹ F. Alengry, *La Sociologie chez Auguste Comte*, pp. 389 ff., 435-76; Defourny, *op. cit.*, pp. 350-54; H. Michel, *L'Idée de l'état*, pp. 451-58. For studies of Comte's thought see E. Littré, *Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive*; Depuy, *Le Positivisme d'Auguste Comte*; L. Lévy-Bruhl, *The Philosophy of Auguste Comte*; G. H. Lewes, *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences*; and E. Caird, *The Social Philosophy and Religion of Comte*.

¹⁰ An excellent attempt to estimate Comte's contribution to social science has been made in French by Defourny, *op. cit.*; and Alengry, *op. cit.* A more special treatment of his political theories is attempted by Fezensoc, *Le Système politique d'Auguste Comte*; and by Chiappini, *Les Idées politiques d'Auguste Comte*. In German we have H. Waentig, *Auguste Comte und seine Bedeutung für Socialwissenschaft*.

¹¹ Martineau, *The Positive Philosophy of Comte*, Vol. II, pp. 241-257.

¹² *Polity*, Vol. I, pp. 58-60, III, p. 446, IV, pp. 564, 646.

fication were: First, that each science depends upon those below it in the series; second, that as one advances along the series the subjects become more specific, complex, and less amenable to scientific measurement and prediction; and, finally, that the difficulties of sociology are due to the greater complexity of the phenomena with which it deals and the contemporary lack of proper investigation and measurement of these phenomena, rather than to any generic difference in desirable or possible methodology or procedure.¹³

While Comte did not elaborate to any great extent the organic conception of society, still he may be said to have offered the suggestions for the later school of so-called "Organicists" and is notable for holding that the organic doctrine was no mere analogy but a reality. It is the individual who is an abstraction rather than the social organism. Coker has summed up in the following manner his organic doctrines to be found in the *Philosophie positive*: Society is a collective organism, as contrasted to the individual organism or plant, and possesses the primary organic attribute of the *consensus universel*. There is to be seen in the organism and in society a harmony of structure and function working towards a common end through action and reaction among its parts and upon the environment. This harmonious development reaches its highest stage in human society, which is the final step in organic evolution. Social progress is characterized by an increasing specialization of functions and a corresponding tendency towards an adaptation and perfection of organs. Finally, social disturbances are maladies of the social organism and the proper subject-matter of social pathology.¹⁴ In the *Polity* he elaborated the similarity between the individual and the social organism. In the family may be found the social cell; in the social forces may be discerned the social tissues; in the state (city) may be discovered the social organs; in the various nations are to be detected the social analogues of the systems in biology.¹⁵ The great difference between the individual organism and the social organism lies in the fact that the former is essentially immutable,

¹³ Martineau, Volume I, Chapters I-II, particularly, pp. 8, 29. Cf. G. H. Lewes, *Comte's Philosophy of Science*. See the discussions of this classification by H. Spencer, *Classification of the Sciences*; F. H. Giddings, *Principles of Sociology*, pp. 45ff; L. F. Ward, *Pure Sociology*, pp. 65ff.

¹⁴ F. W. Coker, *Organismic Theories of the State*, pp. 123-4; Cf. L. T. Hobhouse, *Social Evolution and Political Theory*, p. 204.

¹⁵ *Polity*, II, pp. 240-242.

while the latter is capable of immense improvement, if guided according to scientific principles. Another distinction is that the social organism allows a far greater distribution of functions combined with a higher degree of coördination of organs.¹⁶

Sociology, Comte defined specifically as the science of social order and progress, and, in a more general way, as the science of social phenomena.¹⁷ It is closely related to biology, the subject-matter of the latter being organization and life; that of sociology order and progress.¹⁸

Comte divides sociology into two major departments, social statics, or *théorie générale de l'ordre spontané des sociétés humaines*, and social dynamics, or *théorie générale du progrès naturel de l'humanité*.¹⁹ He finds that the underlying basis of social order is the principle which he assigns to Aristotle, though it probably belongs more rightfully to Plato, namely, the distribution of functions and the combination of efforts, the former takes shape in the specialization and division of labor in society, and the latter is realized through the institution of government.²⁰

The government principle in social progress is to be found in the law of the three stages of intellectual advance.²¹ Through each of these stages—the theological, metaphysical, and scientific—there must pass the proper development and education of the individual, the various realms of human knowledge, and the general process of social evolution. None of these stages can be eliminated, though intelligent direction may hasten the process and lack of wisdom retard it.²² Each stage is the necessary antecedent of the following one, and any period is as perfect as the condition of the time will allow. All institutions are, thus, relative in their degree of excellence and none can hope to attain to absolute per-

¹⁶ Martineau, II, pp. 258-62, 299-301; *Philosophie positive*, fifth edition, 1893, Vol. IV, pp. 469-81.

¹⁷ Martineau, pp. 140-141, 218, 258; III, pp. 383-5.

¹⁸ Martineau, II, pp. 140-141.

¹⁹ *Philosophie positive*, IV, pp. 430, 498.

²⁰ *Polity*, II, pp. 242-4.

²¹ Martineau, Vol. I, pp. 1-3, and Vol. III passim; see also L. T. Hobhouse in *Sociological Review*, Vol. I, pp. 262-79. Comte possessed almost as great a love for triads as did Vico. Thus, he finds three stages of intellectual progress, three divisions of cerebral functions, three types of social forces, three grades of society, three social classes, three stages of religion, and three classes of regulating power in society.

²² *Polity*, IV, translated by Congreve, General Index, 1822, pp. 558-60.

fection.²³ Objectively considered progress may be regarded as consisting in man's increasing control over the environment.²⁴ Again, progress may be broken up into three constituent parts, intellectual, material, and moral. Intellectual progress is to be found in the law of the three stages; material progress in "an analogous progression in human activity which in its first stage is Conquest, then Defense; and lastly Industry"; and moral progress "shows that man's social nature follows the same course; that it finds satisfaction, first in the Family, then in the State, and lastly in the Race."²⁵ In securing progress the desires and emotions are the driving forces and the intellectual factors are the guiding and restraining agencies.²⁶

While Comte's philosophy of history has been criticized by many for being too one-sided and merely stressing the intellectual factors²⁷ most of his critics have overlooked those passages in which he foreshadows Spencer and Giddings by describing the three great stages of human progress as the Military-Theological; the Critical-Metaphysical; and the Industrial-Scientific.²⁸

Comte laid great stress upon the family as a fundamental social institution and upon religion as one of the most important regulating agencies in society. While somewhat utilitarian in his attitude towards the social applications of religion, his exposition of the principles of the Positivist creed is developed in great detail in the *Polity*. His doctrines regarding the basic importance of the family and religion, appreciated by Ward, have been recently revived with a more scientific analysis and application by Professor Ellwood.²⁹

²³ Cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, p. 432; Martineau, II, pp. 232-4. This doctrine of the relativity of the excellence of institutions was not, however, an original conception, as Dr. L. M. Bristol would seem to indicate, *Social Adaptation*, pp. 20-1, for it was perhaps the central feature of Montesquieu's philosophy.

²⁴ *Polity*, II, pp. 235-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 157.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 55ff. Cf. L. F. Ward, *Pure Sociology*, Chaps. VI, XVI.

²⁷ Cf. Giddings, *Principles of Sociology*, pp. 303-4.

²⁸ *Philosophie positive*, IV, pp. 17ff, 578-87; *Polity*, III, pp. 44-45 and *passim*. Cf. W. A. Dunning, *Political Theories from Rausseau to Spencer*, pp. 393-4. "Whatever addition it may receive, and whatever corrections it may require, this analysis of social evolution will continue to be regarded as one of the greatest achievements of the human intellect." Morley, *loc. cit.* Benn with undue enthusiasm declares it the best sketch of universal history ever written—*Modern Philosophy*, p. 156.

²⁹ *Sociology and Modern Social Problems*, pp. 74ff; *Sociology in its Psychological Aspects*, pp. 186-7, 356-8; *The Social Problem*, pp. 189ff; *The Reconstruction of Religion*.

Finally, as Lester F. Ward so clearly pointed out, Comte holds that the great practical value of sociology is to be looked for in its application to scientific social reform, and in his most elaborate work he develops at great length what he believes will be the ultimate type of social organization, if society is wise enough to study and apply the science which investigates the laws of its organization and progress.³⁰

II. SPECIFIC POLITICAL DOCTRINES.

1. *Sociology and Political Science.*

Comte makes no clear distinction between political science and sociology. Indeed, he seems to regard sociology as the perfected political science of the future. At the same time, he clearly differentiates sociology from the older political philosophy, as dominated by metaphysical methods and concepts. Sociology has nothing in common with the old *à priori* method that characterized the earlier political philosophy. It must be based on the assured scientific procedure of observation, experimentation and comparison.³¹ It is doubtful if Comte conceived it as possible that there could be a science of the state distinct from the general science of society.³² At any rate, his political theory is inextricably connected with his psychology, theology, ethics, and economics, which are included within his sociology. In general, Comte denied that the special social sciences were true sciences. He held that society must be studied as a whole by a unitary science—sociology.³³ Political science, to Comte, was that part of his sociology which was concerned with the history of the state and the theory and practice of its organization, but he rarely, if ever, treated these subjects in isolation, but dealt with each as a part of social evolution and organization as a whole.³⁴

2. *The Nature of the State.*

Comte's ideas concerning the nature of the state and its distinction from society, nation, and government are vague and un-

³⁰ *Polity*, passim, particularly Vols. II, IV.

³¹ Martineau, II, pp. 241-57.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 225-6.

³³ Cf. Giddings, *Principles of Sociology*, p. 28.

³⁴ Martineau, II, pp. 210-22, 235. *Polity*, IV, pp. 558-60, General Appendix, 3rd part, "Plan of the Scientific Operation necessary for the Scientific Reorganization of Society."

certain. Comte was too much interested in the ultimate Positivist society of the future to devote much attention to an elaboration of the theoretical foundations of the contemporary national *bourgeois state*. This was, at best, merely a transitory form of social organization. "Between the city, uniting man and his dwelling place, and the full development of the Great Being around a fitting centre, a number of intermediate forms of association may be found, under the general name of *states*. But all of these forms, differing only in extent and permanence, may be neglected as undefined."³⁵ Comte's whole position would have made it hard for him to conceive clearly such an entity as society politically organized, as distinct in practice, at least, from its material and spiritual aspects. His own theory of society was so all-inclusive, with its mixture of family ethics, theological dogmas and economic arrangements with politics, that it was not favorable to clearly differentiated concepts in the political realm. The only point on which he may be said to be unmistakably clear is his dogma that there can be no fixed social relations of any permanence without a political organization, that is, a government. The first principle of positive political theory, he says, is that "society without a government is no less impossible than a government without society. In the smallest as well as in the largest associations, the Positive theory of a polity never loses sight of these two correlative ideas, without which theories would lead us astray, and society would end in anarchy."³⁶ When, however, Comte begins to discuss the governmental arrangements in his state or society he immediately introduces conceptions quite foreign to orthodox notions of governmental organization by his advocacy of increasing governmental rectitude through the influence of family morality, and by entrusting its encouragement and surveillance to the priests of the religion of Humanity. In short, it seems that Comte regarded the state as the organ for the direction of the general material activities of society. While this is the most frequent connotation of the term state, as employed by Comte, he often uses it in sense identical with the nation and with society in general.³⁷

Upon the question as to what constitutes the fundamental attributes of the state, Comte is a little more clear. In fact, he quite agrees with what are now considered the indispensable at-

³⁵ *Polity*, II, p. 241.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 224; Cf. *Philosophie positive*, Vol. IV, pp. 485-95.

³⁷ Cf. Chiappini, *op. cit.*, pp. 97ff.

tributes of any state or political society, namely, population, territory, a sovereign power, and a governmental organization. He is particularly insistent upon the territorial prerequisite for the state.³⁸ His belief in the indispensability of government has just been pointed out above. Finally, in his unequivocal statement of the necessity of adequate social control in any stable society and the recognition that political organization ultimately rests upon force, Comte makes it plain that he discerned the necessity of a sovereign power for the creation and maintenance of a permanent political society.³⁹ Comte also anticipated the modern trends in political science by stressing the importance of the psychological and economic factors in the state. He sums up his position on these points very briefly in the following passage: "When Property, Family, and Language, have found a suitable Territory, and have reached the point at which they combine any given population under the same, at least the same spiritual, government, there a possible nucleus of the Great Being has been formed. Such a community, or city, be it ultimately large or small, is a true *organ* of Humanity."⁴⁰ More than the mere statement of Comte's doctrines regarding the fundamental elements of any state, this passage is an admirable example of how he was wont to introduce into political thought highly visionary and figurative ethical and theological concepts.

3. *The Genesis of Political Institutions.*

A. Philosophical Analysis of Principles.

Comte treated the subject of the origin of society, state, and government in both an analytical and in an historical manner. In his analytical treatment he based his procedure on the Aristotelian dogma of the inherent sociability of mankind and declared the notion of a state of nature mere metaphysical nonsense, and the allied contract theory of political origins untenable.⁴¹ Man, he held, prevailed over the other animals because of his superior sociability, and in developing this important element of a social

³⁸ *Polity*, II, pp. 237, 241. For his excessive emphasis on this point he is criticized by Defourny, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-6, 301-2.

³⁹ *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 247-9. See below, however, for an account of his failure to develop a theory of sovereignty.

⁴⁰ *Polity*, II, p. 241.

⁴¹ *Philosophie positive*, pp. 431-47; Martineau, II, pp. 157-8.

nature the prolongation of human infancy was perhaps the most important factor.⁴²

The unit of society, according to Comte, is not the individual but the family. The great function of the family in history has been to generate the basic elements which would ultimately produce the state. The growth and perfection of language was the main factor making it possible for the state to develop from the family.⁴³

A *society*, therefore, can no more be decomposed into *individuals* than a geometric surface can be resolved into lines, or a line into points. The simplest association, that is, the family, sometimes reduced to its original couple, constitutes the true unit of society. From it flow the more complex groups, such as classes and cities.⁴⁴

During the whole continuance of the education of the race, the principal end of the Domestic Order is gradually to form the Political Order. It is from this latter, finally, that the critical influence originates, whereby the family affections are raised up to their high social office, and prevented from degenerating into collective selfishness.⁴⁵

While society, in a psychological sense, is ultimately based upon the social instinct, grounded in sympathy and expressed mainly in the family, the wider and more highly developed forms of social organization, as exemplified by the state and society, are based upon the Aristotelian principle of the distribution of functions and the combination of efforts.⁴⁶ It is this coöperative distribution of functions which marks off the political society from the domestic association, which is based upon sympathy.⁴⁷ The great point of superiority of the social organism over the individual organism is that it allows of a higher degree of distribution of functions, coördinated with a more perfect adaptation of organs. The perfect distribution of functions and coördination of organs in society is the ultimate goal of social evolution, and it is in a study of the relation between these two principles that one is to look for the relation between society and government.⁴⁸ The

⁴² *Polity*, I, pp. 511-13. Cf. Giddings, *Principles of Sociology*, Bk. III, Chaps. i-ii; J. Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 340-44, 360-69.

⁴³ *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 153, 183; *Philosophie positive*, Vol. IV, pp. 447-469.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 153.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 183.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 234, 242; *Philosophie positive*, IV, pp. 469-81.

⁴⁷ *Polity*, II, p. 242.

⁴⁸ *Philosophie positive*, Vol. IV, pp. 469-81; *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 243-4.

reason for this is that too much specialization, while it leads to the development of a great skill and a high degree of interest in narrow fields, is liable to result in the disintegration of society through a loss of the conception of the unity of the whole and of the mutual relations between the individual and society. It is the function of government to coördinate human activities, and to guard against the dangerous elements in specialization, while, at the same time, conserving its beneficial effects.⁴⁹

In proportion as a distribution of functions is realized in society there results a natural and spontaneous process of subordination, the principle being that those in any occupation come under the direction of the class which has control over their general type of functions, i. e., the next class above them in the hierarchy of industrial differentiation. Government tends naturally to arise out of the controlling and directing forces which are at first centered in the smaller and functional groups of society. In the past, war has been the chief factor in unifying in one central unit this divided governmental power. Industry, however, is coming more and more to be the source of social discipline and governmental control.⁵⁰ "The habits of command and of obedience already formed in Industry have only to extend to public spheres, to found a power in the State capable of controlling the divergencies, and regulating the convergencies, of the individuals within it."⁵¹

This material basis of government in the principles of the division of labor, combination of efforts, and superiority and subordination⁵² harmonizes with the psychic characteristics of humanity, which leads some to command and others to obey. While it is necessary to recognize the almost universal desire to

⁴⁹ *Philosophie positive*, Vol. IV, pp. 481-7; *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 243-4.

"Cette conception constitue, à mes yeux, la première base positive et rationnelle de la théorie élémentaire et abstraite du gouvernement, proprement dit, envisagée dans sa plus noble et plus entière extension scientifique, c'est-à-dire, comme caractérisée en général par l'universelle réaction nécessaire d'abord spontanée et en suite régulière, de l'ensemble sur les parties."

Philosophie Positive, Vol. IV, p. 485.

"Fidèle à la pensée de Comte, nous pouvons définir le gouvernement dans son sens général et propre, la force de cohésion sociale qui agit, ou mieux encore le principe de coopération mis en oeuvre." Chiappini, op. cit., pp. 102-3.

⁵⁰ *Philosophie positive*, Vol. IV, pp. 487-93; *Polity*, Vol. II, 245-6. Cf. Spencer's doctrine of the military and industrial orders in society.

⁵¹ *Polity*, Vol. II, p. 246.

⁵² Cf. the doctrine of von Haller and Simmel.

command, it is no less essential to observe that people find it very agreeable to throw the burden of expert guidance upon others.⁵³

But one must go beyond this fundamental analytical basis of the state, in the distribution of functions and the combination of efforts to construct a complete system of political philosophy. With this Aristotelian axiom must be combined the Hobbesian notion of force as the ultimate foundation upon which governmental organization rests. "Social science would remain forever in the cloud-land of metaphysics, if we hesitated to adopt the principle of Forces as the basis of Government. Combining this doctrine with that of Aristotle, that society consists in the Combination of efforts and the Distribution of functions, we get the axioms of a sound political philosophy."⁵⁴

To the doctrines of Aristotle and Hobbes, however, must be added the more specific notions of Comte himself. He finds that, in addition to the requirements just named, there is demanded an efficient general regulating power or system of social control. "Close study, therefore, shows us that there are three things necessary for all political power, besides the basis of material Force: an Intellectual guidance, a Moral sanction, and lastly a Social control."⁵⁵ This regulating power is to be found in the religion of humanity and is to be administered by the priests of that cult.⁵⁶ There are, thus, in the perfect state three grades of society: the family based on feeling or affection; the state or city based on action; and the church based primarily on intelligence, but, in reality, synthesizing all three.⁵⁷ These grades of society correspond to, and have their basis in, the three fundamental powers or functions of man's cerebral system, which Comte took from Gall's phrenology and made the basis of his psychology and much of his social science.⁵⁸

This final element, the church, with its universal surveillance and guidance of all social activities, will make possible the dissolution of the great tyrannical states and the completion of the

⁵³ "Ainse la spontanéité fondamentale des diverses dispositions individuelles se montre essentiellement en harmonie avec le cours nécessaire de l'ensemble des relations sociales pour établir que la subordination politique est, en général, aussi inevitable qu'indispensable. *Philosophie positive*, Vol. IV, pp. 493-5. Cf. *Polity*, Vol. II, p. 244. Cf. Giddings' theory of "Protocracy" in his *Responsible State*, pp. 17ff.

⁵⁴ *Polity*, Vol. II, p. 247.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 249.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 249-50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 250-1.

⁵⁸ Cf. Martineau, Vol. II, Chapter VI; *Polity*, Vol. I, pp. 540-93.

social organism without any danger from anarchy or license.⁵⁹ In the place of the conventional political state, as it now exists, there is to be a group of cities united by the common religious tutelege provided by the worship of humanity as administered by its priests. Such political entities are, after all, as large as any which could be constituted without the entry of tyranny. Comte, thus, tended partially to revive the localism and municipal character of the Utopias of Plato and Aristotle, and, to a certain degree, anticipated Le Play and modern regionalism:

The foundation of a universal Church will enable the gradual reduction of these huge and temporary agglomerations of men to that natural limit, where the State can exist without tyranny . . . No combination of men can be durable, if this is not really voluntary; and in considering the normal form of the State we must get rid of all artificial and violent bonds of union, and retain only those which are spontaneous and free. Long experience has proved that the City, in its full completeness and extent of surrounding country, is the largest body politic which can exist without becoming oppressive. . . . But besides this, the Positive Faith, with its calm grasp over human life as a whole, will be sufficient to unite the various Cities in the moral communion of the Church, without requiring the help of the State to supplement the task with its mere material unity.

Thus the final creation of a religious society whereby the great organism is completed, fulfils all the three wants of the political society. The intellectual guidance, the moral sanction, and the social regulation which government requires to modify its material nature, are all supplied by a Church, when it has gained a distinct existence of its own.⁶⁰

B. The Historical Evolution or Political Institutions.

In his treatment of the origin of the state from a historical point of view Comte reminds one of Hegel's narration of the successive migrations of the Weltgeist until it finally settled among the German people.⁶¹ Comte ranges over the history of humanity and traces the stages through which the race has passed in its preparation for the final goal of its evolution—the Positivist State. One considerable difference between Hegel and Comte is that Comte presented a much more accurate interpretation of the facts

⁵⁹ *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 251-3, 304.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 251. This independence of the Church is possible only when its realm of domination is more extensive than that of the political group. *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 252-3.

⁶¹ Cf. Dittman, "Die Geschichtsphilosophie Comtes und Hegels, ein Vergleich," in *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie*, Vol. 38, pp. 281-312; Vol. 39, pp. 38-81.

of history than Hegel and, when viewed in the light of his times, he is by no means so devoid of historical information as some modern historical critics might seem to indicate.⁶² He seems to have been acquainted with Gibbon and Hallam, for instance, and grasped the significance of many fundamental movements in history, particularly in the field of economic development, which escaped many later and more erudite "political historians." A comprehensive grasp of the vital factors at work in history is as essential to a true conception and interpretation of history as a detailed knowledge of the objective facts of history. Judged by this criterion Comte was no less of a real historian than many of the extremely careful and critical "political historians" of the nineteenth century.

It is beyond the purpose of the recent work to present in detail Comte's philosophy of history. All that will be attempted is a brief statement of his fundamental principles and a summary of the portions dealing with the evolution of political institutions. Comte's philosophy of history is based on as ingenious a system of triads as distinguished the work of Vico.⁶³ In the first place, social evolution, like social organization, is based on the tripartite functions of man's cerebral system—feeling, action and intellect. Feeling or emotion, which is the basis of morality, passes through three stages in which man's social nature finds satisfaction first in the family, then in the state, and finally in the race. Or, as he puts it in other words, altruism in antiquity is domestic and civic, in the Middle Ages collective, and in the Positive period it is universal.⁶⁴ Still another way of describing this type of evolution is to say that the sympathetic instincts of humanity advance through the stages of attachment, veneration, and benevolence. There is a close relationship between these different views of moral evolution, as fetichism, which founded the family, also developed the feeling of attachment; polytheism, which founded the state, fostered veneration; while monotheism, with its universality, favored the sentiment of benevolence.⁶⁵ Man's activational evolution proceeds

⁶² E. g. G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 585.

⁶³ One should look for Comte's philosophy of history, not exclusively in the last volumes of his philosophy, but in the third volume of his *Polity*, for he himself tells the reader (*Polity*, Vol. III, p. 5) that his complete theory is to be found only in that volume. For Comte's most compact summary of his philosophy of history see the *Polity*, Vol. III, pp. 421-2.

⁶⁴ *Polity*, Vol. III, pp. 154-60.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 156-7.

through the stages of conquest, defence and industry.⁶⁶ Finally, the evolution of the intellect follows the famous three stages—the theological, metaphysical, and positive or scientific.⁶⁷ In this process emotion is the dynamic power, action the agent of progress, and intellect the guiding force.⁶⁸

Comte did not, therefore, as many writers would seem to indicate, base his philosophy of history exclusively on the single element of intellectual evolution. Even the law of the three stages of intellectual progress aimed at a larger synthesis, which would include material and spiritual factors, though probably the religious element played a predominant part in his scheme. His periods of intellectual development, in broad outline, were the theological, divided into fetichism, polytheism, and monotheism; the period of the western revolution from 1300 to 1800; and the beginnings of the positive period from 1800 onward. Each of these periods was further subdivided.

(To be Continued)

⁶⁶ Ibid, I, p. 507.

⁶⁷ Ibid, IV, p. 157.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ward, *Pure Sociology*, Chaps VI, XVI. Social evolution, as a whole, is a combination of all three of these special types of evolution. Defourny well summarizes this point: "L'évolution totale de l'espèce humaine peut donc, en somme, se résumer sous cette forme: La civilisation a été successivement d'abord théologique, militaire, et civique; ensuite métaphysique, féodal, et chrétienne; elle sera enfin positive, industrielle, et universellement altruiste. Elle se caractérise à chaque époque à un triple point de vue, parce que l'homme est doué d'un triple activité cérébrale." Op. cit. p. 151. Cf. W. A. Dunning, *Political Theories from Rousseau to Spencer*, pp. 393-4.