

POSITIVISM AND HUMANISM

BY EDWIN H. WILSON

THE process of integrating the new world view of science to the religious needs of man is going on continually. One sees it taking place in the ranks of modernism. Men like Harry Emerson Fosdick,¹ Reinhold Neibuhr,² and Russell Henry Stafford³ have made notable concession to the position of the new humanists although eager to retain old symbols. In the Unitarian denomination the issue is more clear cut, with friendly controversy openly engaged in between theists and humanists. In this controversy the terms *Positivism* and *Humanism* are continually confused. The effort has been seemingly to try to heap all the old sins, real or alleged, of Positivism upon the New Humanism and to push the latter scapegoat fashion over the cliff into oblivion. By Positivism I understand these critics to mean the philosophy and cult of Auguste Comte, the French social theorist of the nineteenth century. The repeated confusion of the two terms led me, while I was studying abroad, to supplement the thesis I had already written upon *The Religion of Humanity According to Auguste Comte and Alfred Loisy* with an investigation at first hand of what is left of the movement. This investigation brought me into immediate contact with the present leaders, both in England and France and access to information upon the movement in South America.

My conclusion is that the two movements are so unlike that the effort to use Positivism as a shibboleth for Humanism is not justified on the grounds either of content or of form. To be sure both movements might be said to be religions of life, based upon the things of this life. But their respective ideas of what true

¹ See Harpers for March and April.

² *Does Civilization Need Religion?*

³ *Christian Humanism.*

religion is, what life values are most worthwhile, what constitutes evidence, and how the religion of humanity is best to be stated and propagated, are so unlike that the movements are altogether different plants producing different fruits. The history of the Comtian cult, with its few scattered handfuls of adherents, each group claiming to represent the true Positivism, gives in miniature form a review of the errors of a static church policy and doctrine based upon centralized authority. A comparison of the two movements however, is interesting because it shows rather effectively what humanism is and what it is not.

I shall begin with what I found out about Positivism as it exists today. Within the limits of a milieu itself not large enough to furnish the interstimulation necessary to life, schism and isolation have set up further barriers to increase the inherent sterility of the movement. A few persons drawn by Positivism as a method and stimulated by Comte's social theories have escaped the boundaries of the letter of his cult. The rigid outline of Comte's thought however, has clamped itself onto the mentality of most of his disciples and has served to set up harmful barriers to the free advance of their thought.

Auguste Comte, we must remember, attempted to found a cult without theology or metaphysics but in imitation of the Roman system, with a central ecclesiastical authority, a systematic and relatively static body of doctrine and a uniform method of worship. At one time he even negotiated with the Jesuits in the hope of a rapprochement. Judging Positivism by its results upon those under its influence it seems to serve in just about the same way as does Catholicism, producing minds subservient to authority and the past.

There are a number of Positivist groups surviving. Of these the Liverpool and Rio de Janeiro groups have followed most closely the minute instructions of the founder.* They are the conservatives of the sect. Comte took himself very seriously. He expected to be the high priest of a movement which was about to sweep the world. A few disciples accept his "mastership" in the full sense of the word, taking him as seriously as he took himself. One of the positivists in South America even tried in the manner of Saint Francis to imitate his master Comte, to think His thoughts, perform His acts, submit to His will in every detail of his existence.

Temples, modelled scrupulously after the specifications outlined

by Comte have been erected in Liverpool and Rio de Janiero. Preaching near Liverpool brought me an opportunity to visit the temple there. One sees as he enters, a statue of Comte. At the opposing end of the temple in the middle of the chancel is a life-sized statue of the Sistine Madonna. Along each side are the niches with busts of the thirteen saints for whom are named the months in the Positivist calendar: Moses, Homer, Aristotle, Cæsar, Saint Paul, Charlemagne, Dante, Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Descartes, Frederick, and Bichat.

I introduced myself to the leaders as a humanist interested in the similarities, if any, between the two movements. I was invited to return to preach in the Liverpool Temple, even when I warned them that I should speak freely. But they told me I must not sit in the chancel nor mount to the pulpit until the mystical service had been conducted. The leader was, he said, "very canonical," as I gathered later from his meticulous gestures and intonations.

Certainly in regard to ritual he may be called a fundamentalist of the cult. One set service is used for regular worship week in and week out, and on the evening of my sermon I heard it conducted in canonical fashion.

There were an invocation, responses, a doxology. Then the leader stood at the right hand side of the altar and began:

. "Thus saith Humanity: "I am the source of all purity and the giver of all sanctity"

and other sentences. Then he turned around and kneeling before the altar said:

"I beheld and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues stood before the throne. These are they which came out of great tribulation. We adore the sacred company of the dead; and among them our own dear ones; through whose life has arisen the mighty life of Humanity, the Supreme Mother of men, now here among us."

Then followed some responsive chanting. Up to this point the service had been conducted, one must admit, with great dignity and beauty. Were one to go there as though he went to a pageant that beauty might have a proper chance to show itself. But one was from the very start of the service conscious of an unnaturalness about it all. I experienced a feeling of revulsion that I promptly held in check in order to enter into the service as sympathetically

as possible. The chanting was rather ineffectively done, not in Latin, but in the Spanish as used in the Positivist temple in Brazil.

"Donna se' tanto grande e tanto vale, Che qual vuol grazia, e a to non ricore, Sua disianza vuol volar senz ali'."

(Lady thou art so great, and so prevailing, that he who wishes grace, nor runs to thee his aspirations without wings would fly.)

This and more chanting was followed by a silent meditation, music, a reference to the festival of the day, and then, all kneeling chanted the words arranged from Comte:

"In the name of Humanity, may Love be our principle, may Order be our basis, may Progress be our aim, may we live for others. May we live openly."

Mounting to the pulpit I faced a "multitude" of some forty who listened attentively and as I was later told appreciatively, to a sermon on "The True Religion of Humanity." I told them of Humanism as a living movement of this century, of its vital differences from their movement, and urged them to meet the challenge of the new day by taking a constructive humanistic step forward. Only later did I learn that Mr. F. G. Gould of London had been doing the same thing for some time without effect.

The leaders of the Positivist movement in Liverpool are possessed of a delightful culture of the pre-Comtian era, but seem hardly to have been affected by the thought that has developed since Comte's death. They did show a decided tendency to convince themselves that whatever had since been written is included in Comte's all-wise pronouncements. This is not a hard task to minds predisposed to it since Comte's all too ready generalizations were at the least sweepingly inclusive. That has probably been his chief value to the world of thought. He has set up some very broad hypotheses which future generations, especially in sociology have often used as a starting point for purposes of verification and reference. But with the true Comtian these writings are authoritative and, in practice, fence in the minds of his followers to an astonishing degree.

The Bishop of Liverpool recently undertook to edit a series of little pamphlets on the subject "God in the Modern World." Mr. Otto Baier, the active leader of the Liverpool movement spoke on that subject in February, 1928, identifying the God concept with Humanity which he interpreted as follows:

1. "The Humanity of our individual nature, which we find as the incentive to every action for good. The GOD within."
2. "The Utopia of the future Humanity, the industrial world co-operation realising the highest social speculation of a scientific priesthood, the ever more clearly seen *Social Ideal*, that inspires and leads: *The GOD* above.
3. "The Humanity of the families, tribes and nations, the teeming millions, with their work and play, their dreams and aspirations, the earth prepared to bear an ever richer harvest, the atmosphere of confident expectation, gradually replacing the primeval fear of the unknown, the consciousness of the growth of this Humanity through many generations under terrible catastrophes and back-sliding in humanity and bestiality, the consciousness of this slow, laborious and yet so triumphant development of human worth, this power realized in part as civilization, yet still more potent in the conviction of a much higher self-realization, this protector and upholder of our lives, this living Humanity is: *GOD In The World*.
 "And this divine Humanity, so viewed in its three-fold aspects—within, above, around—is one. Humanity is the consensus of powers that converge. It is the only reality of which we are conscious. Humanity IS and nothing touches us but through Humanity."

This effort to read the positivist theories into the idea of God is an unusual procedure for a Positivist. Usually the sharp distinctions between the scientific and theological has made them turn their backs rather unsympathetically to the advancing content or psychological function of theology. Mr. Baier shows a broader sympathy in this statement, but one still finds evident that lack of the integration of humanity to the universe from which it has emerged for which Positivism has been criticized. Any religious philosophy, however, which fails to take into consideration the inner drives, the projection of social ideals and the growing stream of human values from out the past which form the substance of this three-fold interpretation will be an impoverished theory.

The leaders of the Chapel Street Temple in London and one group holding meetings at its own foyer in Paris believe that Positivism is to be propagated by a combination of poetry and music.

These groups are also fundamentalists, but according to their own interpretations. Comte in his general view of Positivism "revealed" to the world that the philosophic priesthood of the true Positivism would one day usurp the functions of artist, musician and poet. In the past there were two movements in London, driven apart by a modernish schism, but the bare necessities of survival have forced the scattered remnants to unite again.

In the Positivist worship, the theistic faith object is clearly to be replaced by the personification of Humanity in the madonna.

"Humanity the one Great Being under whose providence we live can neither be conceived nor worshiped except under the concrete image, the ideal form of the Virgin Mother."

These are the words of George Legarrigue, an apostle of Positivism in Chile. Some of his prayers have true poetic feeling in them. But the worship of Humanity as person in the virgin is by no means conducted symbolically. They conceive it realistically as an organic being whose substance is in the madonna.

"Oh holy and divine Humanity, I adore and bless in thee the immaculate Virgin, in whom no selfish stain of animality is found to soil thy sublime and incomparable purity."

Somehow these groups cannot get beyond Comte. Much of the unnaturalness of the movement is easily understood when we remember that it has not been evolved as was Christianity over a long period of time. Comte conditioned it in his own image and by the rigid organization he left behind doomed it to a living death. What exists today is but the ghost of his hopes. Comte talked of the relativity of his thought but his spirit was authoritative. He made his calendar a tentative one for his own century but there has not been dynamic enough in the movement to change even that. The leader at Liverpool for instance could not officially make a change if he so desired without the approval of the controlling council which meets twice a year at Paris, as required by Comte's testament.

A peep into a few of these council meetings as revealed by their printed records reveals a quibbling over minute points of interpretation of what Positivism is, or what Comte, or Laffite, his Peter, intended. It is quite comparable to the early gatherings of Roman prelates. Here is an instance: For three sessions the council debated the matter of seating one M. A. Nour-Eddine, a native

tutor of Medea, Algeria, formerly a Mohammedan. After a year of waiting he had finally submitted with the witnessing signatures of two members of the council, a statement of his conversion to Positivism. The statement asserts that he has read carefully all of Comte's important works, no mean task in itself, and continues:

"I declare that I entirely adhere to the synthesis of the Master, consider it the best that I have yet known, consider it not only as preferable to all other but also as sufficient to the orientation of my existence. Accordingly I avow all my efforts to the service of the Family, the Country and Humanity."

But this complete giving of self to the movement is not enough to satisfy one M. Felician as to his orthodoxy and M. Nour-Eddine was not seated. This event, about as significant to us as the debate at a Mennonite conference over whether buttons will or will not be worn, is cited merely to show the deadly nature of a church polity having centralized authority.

A visit to the apartment of Auguste Comte in Paris furnishes the crowning touch to the picture of Positivist orthodoxy. A little old man meets one by appointment and shows you through the sanctuary with the same awed and hushed voice which one encounters in a cathedral crypt where rest the alleged bones and relics of the church Fathers. Here is the book-case of Comte just as he left it and never opened since his death. One is shown the desk at which he wrote his works, his lamp, pictures of Clothilde de Vaux, of Sophie Thomas who took care of him, and others intimately connected with his life and cult. Then in tears the guide explains that the young men are not coming to them and that the beautiful heritage will be lost to Humanity.

In practice then the orthodoxy of Positivism has been even stronger on the side of ritual than of organization. The thought patterns left by "the Master" have also played their part in making the movement an obstruction to creative expression on the part of its adherents. Like the Bahaists and others who have proclaimed the ideal of world unity, the Positivists have merely set up further barriers to that unity by acting as if they had a new revelation and a new saviour.

Positivism has its modernists as well as its fundamentalists. In London there are still vestiges of the liberal wing which brought about the old schism. Mr. F. J. Gould who is well known for his

splendid stories for the moral instruction of children, also a member of Stanton Coit's Ethical Society, and of the Rationalist Press association, has become alienated from the Chapel Street Positivist temple because he does not believe it an effective expression of the religion of humanity. A Professor Hayward conducts some rather tedious memorial services to great men at various points in England. The same preoccupation with formalistic means of worship and the same inability to understand the practical psychology of people which vitiates the entire Positivist cult, made a bore of the memorial service to Robert Owen and William Blake which I attended at the Highbury public library.

In France we also find Positivists of more modern tendencies. M. George Deshermes is a prolific writer working more or less independently. M. Emile Corra, the head of the *Positivist Internationale*, an organization which dates from an old schism and competes with the Council as the true representative of Positivism, is not in touch with the Council, or with the Liverpool Positivists. He is in communication with liberal Positivists in England, Argentine, Brazil, Mexico, the United States and China. "I do not want it to become mummified, I want to see it live," he says of the movement. He recognizes none the less that Positivism today is a pathetic sprinkling of anemic little groups each claiming to be the true representative of the religion of humanity.

In a series of annual conferences conducted in Paris, M. Corra has read the more recent sociological knowledge into the framework of Comte's inclusive synthesis. Like the modernists he is busy with putting new wine into old skins. He retains the famous slogans: "Love for principle and order for base" and "Live for others, Live openly."

These conferences have been published separately or in the *Revue Positiviste Internationale*. Through the columns of this paper we learn that Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, each have groups of apparently substantial size. The Sao Paulo society was founded in 1924. In the original political organization of Brazil, Positivist thought played an important part. The principle of a spiritual power and a temporal power was accepted from Comte's writings by governmental leaders and put into the constitution. That Positivism should do its best among the Latins is natural, although we hear nothing of it from Italy. In Argentine, a Dr.

Alfred Ferrera has gathered together a group which seems to be very much alive. Its bulletin *El Positivismo* claims to have five hundred subscribers and to be "injecting virility into the Argentine mentality," by making known the word of Auguste Comte on the social and political issue of the day.

M. Augustin Aragon, an engineer, gave forty-five lectures in Mexico during the year 1926, some of them on social and political issues of the day, some in the field of comparative religions and some as direct propaganda for Positivism.

A few other scattered voices such as Dr. Zodin in Roumania and Prof. La Grange in the United States, both ardent Positivists with a small personal following, go to make up the dwindling ranks of what is left of the movement. In Pekin there is an *Ecole Auguste Comte* for the study of the social sciences.

One who looks more for points of agreement than for points of difference will find much in the values desired by the Positivists that is equally desired by the humanist or the christian with a social gospel.

"Everywhere," writes M. Aragon, "we see the doctrines of our founder direct the thought and action of societies. Women are more respected and loved. Children receive better care and education every day. The sentiment of human solidarity, aside from all theology, becomes each day more clear. The aversion to war is more powerful, and begins to manifest itself even in countries where war is an industry. Ethics has begun to enter politics. Science and the fine arts progress enormously from one generation to another. The most terrible maladies are being cured or soon will be. Public schools and libraries multiply. The occident is treating the orient better, and beginning to understand it as Comte and Plafitte understood it. A hundred other progressions could be enumerated as conquests of the positivist spirit."

Once, when I was a boy of high school age, a state Secretary of Agriculture pointed out to me that in the field in which I was working, a field which produced in that one year a thousand crates of strawberries from a variety of his own breeding, no two leaves were exactly alike. Verily I learned that day that one thing is different from another.

From my observation and study I find that Humanism and Positivism are two entirely different plants, grown in different climates,

different soil, and from different seed. They are not of the same species. Positivism is a hybrid developed in the stuffy hothouse climate of one man's study. It bears the limitations of that man's personal foibles, we might fairly say abnormalities. It bears, moreover, the limitations of his century. The time was not yet ripe for such a synthesis. If in outer form and symbolism it retained certain similarities to the Roman Catholic church, it was uprooted from the human content of the religion of this hemisphere. Hence it has failed to win the response necessary to its success as a religion.

Comte's mentality was dominated by his so-called "Law of the Three Stages," the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive or scientific. It is on the surface an intriguing theory. Space will not permit me to go into the critique which Renan and others have made of this doctrine. It led Comte and his followers into doctrinal errors as costly as was his imitation of the Roman church organization. Comte failed adequately to gauge the survival power of superstition. He did not see that we have all three stages with us at any time. He failed to get behind the theological formulas of Christianity and see the service they were performing for inner life. Humanism has a grasp of the problems of the inner life not within Comte's range of experience. This inadequacy on the part of Comte arose from a false philosophy, an inadequate historical knowledge, and the oddities of his own personality.

We must bear in mind that Humanism has tools which Comte did not have to help him in his work. The results of half a century's research in the social science are now available. It has an immense body of new facts and hence a sounder orientation. It has at its disposal a developed method of research which controls the subjective limitations which handicapped Comte's system of thought.

Comte's system grew, not from an understanding of the needs and life problems of many other people but from the intellectual demands of his own system. Although the one to suggest that psychology become a science, a suggestion which George Eliot pointed out in speaking of "the egotistical Frenchmen" was met with derision, Comte was himself constitutionally unpsychological. He lacked even the common sense knowledge of practical psychology which is gained in a full and healthy life of normal acquaintance-ship with many types of persons.

In his course introductory to the study of society at the University of London, Professor Hobhouse points out that Comte's thought is dominated throughout by the Cartesian philosophy. He tried to give to social relations the certainty of mathematical knowledge. Comte did on paper give a place to the feelings in his theory of knowledge. A thread of this influence has been traced from William James, through Renan to Comte. But it was Comte's arrogance and dogmatism which Renan most disliked. Whereas Comte's effort to found a cult of humanity was artificially and theoretically pragmatic, Humanism is experimentally pragmatic with human needs the measure.

Comte did not escape the mechanism and rationalism of his century. This, no less than his notoriously inadequate knowledge of history and his false "three stages," successfully dehumanized Comte's system of doctrine and left it a rigid formulation of abstractions.

In philosophy the New Humanism has arrived at a point far from that to which Descartes led Comte. The fact is that a number of modern philosophical schools emerge religiously at Humanism. The chief argument advanced against Positivism by its early critics was that Comte had isolated his Humanity from the universe. Certainly that cannot fairly be said of Humanism. Its world view is naturalistic, but also organic and emergent. Although he participated in the development which foreshadowed Darwin, Comte was tarred with the pre-Darwinian stick. We of today have seen the break-up of the atom restore an organic world view. We possess a developed evolutionary theory. Says the Humanist, "Man is an earth child, born of the same star dust and fired with the same life force that moveth every living thing." "Man is the measurer of all things," in constant interrelation with and sustained by the surrounding world.

Feuerbach has been called a Positivist, but that was because he adhered to the evidential method and not because he adhered to the Comtian cult. To the contrary Feuerbach believed all systematisation to be an arbitrary setting of limits to our perception. He wished neither to imprison life in a formula nor to violate reality by his own rigid definition. The New Humanism is similarly in a state of development, rather than in a static condition.

Alfred Loisy of the College de France has been called a neo-

Positivist. In answer to an inquiry concerning the relation of his religion of humanity to that of Comte, Loisy wrote:

“Although I have never studied Comte deeply I see everything in his system as fixed and rigid while I view all things as relative and in flux.”

Loisy is less individualistic than the American Humanists. His Catholic heritage seems to have led him also to make out of Humanity a substitute for his theistic faith object, but it is usually as an inner ideal rather than an objective being. His thought is like that of the New Humanism in that it is relative. “I never could find inspiration,” he says, “in an abstract absolute radiating with frigid clarity.”

Nor can the charge that Humanism has severed the current of Christian idealism be fairly made of the New Humanism. The transition is being made slowly and normally. The New Humanism is a hardy plant deeply rooted in the human needs of many people. It is not rationalism. It arises in surprising similarity from independent sources. It is a subtle, permeating influence rather than a cult. Where it has come to conscious unity, its unity is the unity of freemen. Using a similar method, and disciplined by the same loyalty to truth, they break through the complexities of a transition period to find enthusiastic fellowship and co-operation in the fulfillment of a shared ideal freely won by each and all. The humanist sees that ideal of the abundant life implicit not only in Christianity but in all religions. He stresses the planetary origin and the human values in all religions.

Feuerbach was of direct influence upon at least one American Humanist, Dr. F. C. Doan. Where Comte turned his back upon theology as entirely in error, it was Feuerbach who looked within the human heart for the explanation of things which man had projected into his gods and his heavens. Where Comte's unsympathetic break with theology meant a failure sufficiently to appreciate that our ideals have been raised to the heights through centuries of aspiration, the Humanist believes he sees those ideals in sufficient clarity to be able to go on without the theological scaffolding of the supernatural within which those ideals were erected.

If the Humanist does not find conclusive evidence of personality and conscious purpose elsewhere in the universe he finds them in man. They are to him the new and real differences emergent in man out of a continuity of process to make man human. Truth,

beauty, goodness are the world become interiorized and becoming person in man through his experience of the outer world progressively unified within.

The Humanist's protest is partly a demand for sincerity in the use of words that we may continue to make distinction between black and white, between guesswork and fact. If he emerges at an essentially different type of religious experience from that of the Roman church it is to restore the element of challenge and renewal for that of resigned dependence and escape. This is a Puritanism of words. It is a discipline which will not permit speculation to soar far from evidence, words to be divorced from content or faith to offer escape from duty. The Humanistic faith demands fulfillment in abundant living.

Positivism represents clearly a different conception of what religion is and what it should do for its members, from the aim of the Humanist to produce significant persons, to develop "individuality with standards." Comte was near enough to the French revolution to put such a price on order that he sacrificed individuality and creativeness to solidarity and unity. The Humanist doctrines of the catholicity of values and the uniqueness of each individual are quite foreign to Positivism. Equally foreign to Humanism is the Positivist conception of a hierarchy of intellectual snobs conditioning the masses by a religion which was justified chiefly by its ability to maintain docile order and subservience to the past.

Positivism could only have come from France. In that country the heralders of a new religion always must needs formulate their cult in such manner that should sudden success come to them they could pack up and move into Notre Dame at a moment's notice. Religion apart from its cathedrals with their particular form of worship is not thought of as religion in France. Comte hence assumed that the new religion would retain essentially the same experience as the old. The manufacture of a faith object by the personification of Humanity in the madonna, (or was it Clothilde de Vaux?), the provisions for his Calendar of saints, and for an apostolic succession arose from such assumptions. Comte failed to recognize that the religious experience of the emancipated mind is of an essentially different kind. He did not see that the institution which would successfully meet man's need for freedom must also be inherently different from the authoritative systems of the past.

The importance of ritual in the present controversy between Humanism and Theism should not, however, be overlooked. From the point of view of the lady in the theistic pews, religion is definitely associated with the hymns, responses, collects, and benedictions that she has been used to all her life. What she demands of the theistic apologist is that he continue to make valid intellectually the use of the Lord's prayer, the psalms, and other service elements which never fail to develop the feeling of complacent dependence and reassuring consolation she is used to. From the point of view of the man in the Humanistic pews these same elements which he once loved, no longer are valid. If he loves the hymn tunes he wants words that will not disgust his intellect. The highest function of the religious service is to organize and renew the inner life and direct the energies thus released. This is valid insofar as it has done that and not merely meant escape from reality and social duty. Hence a real need for Humanistic services is felt in many quarters.

If the ritual of Positivism was predestined to sterility by its own shallow soil, the New Humanist service can be expected freely and gradually to evolve from the needs of vigorous and living congregations. The whole Positivist experiment is a vindication of the congregational polity and its way of individual religious liberty. Unitarians welcome differences as a sign of life and yet are able to co-operate in unity. By free exchange of materials the Humanists may fairly expect to develop as the years pass a mellow and sound service which will not only effectively feed the inner life but which will continually be refreshed with new materials. Though it puts more trust in challenging sermons, Humanism thirsts for beauty in its services as a religious value necessary to renewal in a machine civilization. That a body of service material freely gained in this way should have in it more vitality, should ring more truly to human needs than the Comtian ritual is seemingly inherent in its source.

The heritage of religious liberty which the Unitarian Humanists claims and the Humanists in the universities likewise possess is a guarantee that the Humanistic thinkers will not yield their critical faculties to any particular leader. They may go to the past for inspiration, weigh its values and glean its experience, but they will apply their own reason to the task of meeting the emerging needs of the present. The past is so full of error and so inadequate with

its answer to the spiritual needs of an industrial society that the Humanist, if he does not entirely disown it, will by no means worship or submit to it. The Humanist moreover has no messiah complex.

Let us recognize also that modern Humanism has a framework in society upon which to survive which Positivism did not have. The world is more nearly ready for a constructive answer to its religious needs. The new world view has had more time to develop and to make itself felt! Important concessions have been made by the theists. Seeking to justify their faith by the type of person it has produced, the more recent apologists have admitted the good life to be the most important thing. They thus subordinate theology to the supreme ideal of Humanism and admit its contention that religion is a way of living and not of believing. Where Positivism was ably met by a deluge of apologetics which by sheer mass it could not answer, Humanism has shown a considerable ability to defend itself when it wants to and to go on about its own tasks when it doesn't. The weapon of indifference is two-edged. Moreover the growing literature of Humanism makes the use of Positivism as a shibboleth increasingly ineffective.

One real issue between Humanism and Theism is found in the opposing claims of metaphysical speculation and the authority of verifiable evidence. To the Humanist the price of superstition is too great to make possible anything other than a reverent agnosticism which is unwilling to place speculative answers at the center of the scene and suspend the moral life therefrom. However interesting as matters of speculation metaphysical questions may be they are relatively remote from the immediate fulfillment of life. He believes that the road to world unity is through ideals so rooted in human experience that they are not controversial.

There is a possibility that if the more liberal Positivists could take an unbiased look at history before and after Comte and see him in his proper perspective they might yet be able to take an active part in the Humanistic movement of today. Their exaggerated view of Comte's importance prevents this. They simply fail to give due credit to such men as Saint Simon and Condorcet whose thought helped tremendously to shape up that of Comte. They do not face Comte's personal peculiarities. To try to heap onto this one man glory borrowed from great scholars before and after

bespeaks a distorted power of observation. But there are so few younger men in the movement that it seems consigned to the museum of unfulfilled dreams. Comte's works may be read as we'd read Plato's *Republic* or More's *Utopia* with great profit. By the very comprehensiveness of his system Comte has demanded attention. His works are undoubtedly a mine of stimulating ideas. But the New Humanism is a product of another soil, another century, another epistemology and another spirit.

For the impulse he gave to the development of the social sciences Comte deserves the statue which is placed to his honor before the Sorbonne. Let us give him his due, he was a great savant. His thought has been of greatest influence outside of his cult. But let us have an end of this absurd effort to attach the Positivist label to Humanism. The confusion comes from the dual use of the word. Positivism as a cult with an exact system of thought and the positive method are different things. In a discussion of Positivism we must distinguish not only between the philosophical system of Comte and his cult, but must remember that the word is frequently applied in a limited way to various thinkers such as Feuerbach, J. M. Guyau, and Alfred Loisy who are like Comte only or chiefly in their desire to be scientific. As used on the continent and sometimes here the phrase *positive method* means remaining close to the facts and refers neither to the Comtian religious cult nor the Comtian philosophical system.

The Unitarian doctrine of the freedom of the truth has been taught as the duty to follow the truth whatever its test. If they adhere to that their churches will continue to make Humanists because what they are teaching is essentially the positive method. That method is less ambiguously called the scientific method. We should adhere to the word *scientific* for the sake of clarity although its demands are severe. The word *Positivism* includes too much else which cannot be found in the Humanist movement to make it a usable term. To say that the New Humanism is the old straw of Positivism long since well thrashed and hence unworthy of consideration on its own merits is a worn out argument, unjustified by the facts.