

THE GODFATHER OF “OCCIDENTALITY”: AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE IDEA OF “THE WEST”

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Abstract

Recent theories concerning the origins of the idea of “the West” have missed the most important link in the story, the writings and tireless propagandizing efforts of Auguste Comte. It was Comte who first developed an explicit and elaborate idea of “the West” as a socio-political concept, basing it on a historical analysis of the development of the “vanguard” of humanity and proposing a detailed plan for the reorganisation of that portion of the world, before it could serve the rest of humanity to achieve the same “positive” state of development. Previous authors who had used “the West” did not go beyond employing it casually and interchangeably with “Europe.” Thus the modern political idea of “the West” was anything but an imperialistic project in its inception, despite widespread arguments in the literature that attribute its emergence to the needs of high imperialism. Comte’s West was meant to abolish empires and conquest and establish world peace.

“We of the West, the advanced guard of Humanity, are citizens of no mean city; not lowered by narrow and local aspirations; not isolated by national selfishness; ... We cease to be solely or primarily members of such or such a Western nation, England or France. We become primarily Western, with an immunity from all the evils which have clung around the exclusive prominence given to the more restricted associations; ... The ties and obligations of the new relation exert a healthy influence on all our thought and action, not extinguishing, nor even lessening our love of our separate countries or states, but correcting its excess, and by placing it in its due subordination, at once purifying and strengthening it.”¹

¹ Richard Congreve, “The West,” in Frederic Harrison, ed., *International Policy: Essays on the Foreign Relations of England* (London, 1866), 1-49, at 39-40. For advice, assistance or encouragement in relation to this article I thank the three anonymous readers and the members of the editorial board of *MIH*, as well as David Armitage, Richard Bourke, Stuart Jones, Alan Kahan, Avi Lifschitz, J.P. Parry, Michael Sutton, Bella Thomas and, for generously facilitating my research in Comte’s papers, Michel Bourdeau, David Labreure and the *Maison d’Auguste Comte*.

I seek to show that the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was the first political thinker to elaborate an explicit and thorough socio-political idea of “the West” – both as a supra-national identity and as a proposed political entity, based on civilizational commonality and shared historical antecedents (an idea that is usually taken for granted as if it had always existed). Yet in available histories of the “idea of the West” Comte is absent. The attribution of such a role to Comte leads me to argue, further, that the modern political idea of “the West” was anything but an imperialistic project in its inception, despite widespread arguments in the literature that attribute its emergence to the needs of high imperialism.

Comte made a conscious decision to substitute the term “the West” (“l’Occident”) for “Europe” in order to avoid the confusions to which he thought the latter term led. Comte’s proposed entity included most of the peoples of Western Europe plus the peoples “descended from” them in the Americas and Australia-New Zealand. By proposing the new name instead of “Europe” he attempted to safeguard the cohesiveness of his proposed socio-political entity for the immediate future, in the interests of the radical reorganisation that he was proposing. I am by no means claiming that Comte was the first person to use *the term* “the West”. The word was used from time to time (not least in expressions such as “in East and West” or “from East to West” and the like), interchangeably with “Europe.” But these casual uses were far from conscious definitions of a new entity or coherent political proposals. I will show in Section III that, although the term had been used by many people, especially in French, it was employed interchangeably with

“Europe” and the latter term always predominated in the very texts that sporadically featured “the West.” But “Europe” was a geographical expression and a system of states that included countries which Comte thought were not part of the “vanguard of Humanity” that he was keen to see reorganised. It was in order to avoid such confusions and to promote, instead, a distinct and precisely-defined new entity, as well as to prescribe a new supranational identity and allegiance for it, that Comte opted for the term “l’Occident.” He coined the term “*Occidentalité*” (Westernness) to describe the new identity and supranational allegiance in question.²

Through establishing the ignored origin of the first explicit and elaborate modern socio-political idea of the West, this article challenges a currently prevalent historiographical narrative regarding not only the timing, but also the intentions leading to the emergence of the idea of the West. In what he called “A Brief Genealogy of the West” Christopher GoGwilt argued that the idea of the West emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, and that the first context in which it arose was “that of the British imperial rhetoric during the 1890’s, at the height of jingoism, propaganda, and politics of the ‘new imperialism.’”³ That timing and association with imperialism have been widely accepted and reproduced in subsequent scholarship, as will be seen in Section II. And yet, the first elaborate articulation of a socio-political concept of “the West” emerged from the pen of Comte as part of a thorough reorganisation of the

² Cf. the quotation by his leading British disciple in 1866 that serves as an epigraph to this article.

³ Christopher GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford, California, 1995), 220.

existing world order. That new world order would, among other things, abolish empires of conquest and establish a “Western Republic” that would, first, organise the most advanced part of the world on a new basis internally. It would then radically alter the way the “vanguard of Humanity” dealt with the rest of the world. It would offer to those outside sympathy, example and assistance on a strictly voluntary basis. But all forceful interference in the affairs of other countries or civilisations, not to speak of imperial conquests, would be banished. And it would, in the long term, eventually admit them if and when they were both willing and ready to join it. I am therefore arguing that “the West” as a self-conscious and explicitly political proposal originated in a vociferously anti-imperialist project aimed at abolishing the European empires and replacing them with an altruistically inclined “Western Republic.” Meanwhile, there were other features of that Western Republic that would make it unattractive to most liberals (then or now). But the aim of this article is neither to resuscitate Comte’s overall political project nor to rehabilitate his reputation. It is rather to establish the real historical origins of the modern idea of the West and to challenge some prevalent perceptions as to its meaning or content. And it is an important (and ignored) part of those origins that, instead of being a product of imperialist plans and rhetoric around the turn of the twentieth century, as current scholarship would have one believe, “the West” as a deliberate political project was, on the contrary, fiercely anti-imperialist. That was certainly a road not taken in the sense that here was a self-assured, conscious and fully articulated proposal for the development of a “Western” identity and commonwealth, which, however, would deal with the rest of the world in a way completely different from the

imperialist attitudes and practices that actually prevailed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴

Comte's project was Western-Europe-centric and Latin-Europe-centric. This leads us to a further reminder of how partial current mainstream understandings of the idea of "the West" are. Establishing that the first, as well as the most thorough, modern articulation of the idea of "the West" as a socio-political concept was that contributed by Comte and propagated by his disciples is a healthy antidote against the all-too-frequent equation of "the West" with the so-called "Anglosphere." Comte's Latin-centric "West," explicitly relegating Britain and the United States to important but non-hegemonic roles, was certainly another road not taken. In all this, I am not proposing a "correct" definition of "the West." We have been warned long ago not to look for such definitions of concepts with a long history.⁵ But I do aim to contribute to our understanding of that history, which, thus far, has been surprisingly limited.

⁴ On the staunch anti-imperialism of Comte's British disciples see Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire 1850-1920* (Cambridge, UK, 2010), 47-123. Comte's global reach and readership were enormous for some decades after his death. For a recent account see: Mary Pickering, "Conclusion: The Legacy of Auguste Comte," in Michel Bourdeau, Mary Pickering and Warren Schmaus, eds., *Auguste Comte: Science, Philosophy, and Politics* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2018, forthcoming).

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 53.

In what follows, I will first (Section I) clarify the historiographical question I am addressing in relation to the idea of the West, including a short account of some of the different earlier meanings of the term. I will then (Section II) summarise the main arguments in existing recent literature on the history of the idea of the West and the periodization for the emergence of the modern socio-political concept of the West prevalent in that literature. I will proceed (Section III) to challenge the periodization proposed by recent scholarship and argue that the term began to be used, in French more than in English, in the eighteenth and increasingly in the early nineteenth century, but in imprecise and incoherent ways, and always interchangeably with the term “Europe,” until Comte decided that the confounding of the two terms had to stop. I then summarise (in Section IV) Comte’s complex political project. In Section V, I chart in some detail the gradual transition in Comte’s uses from “Europe” to “the West.” I also analyse the coining of the term “*occidentalité*” to describe the identity or supranational allegiance that Comte advocated as an alternative both to national patriotism and to a generalised “vague cosmopolitanism”. In order to elucidate the exact rationale for Comte’s substitution of “the West” for “Europe” (as well as for “Christendom”), I then move (Section VI) to some particularly telling explanations contributed by Comte’s leading disciples in Britain and France. Finally, I try to show in Section VII how bewildered most of Comte’s English-speaking reviewers, translators, and even disciples or correspondents were when first faced with his uses of “West,” “Western,” and “Westernness” and how often they responded by failing to use the same terms initially.

I. "THE WEST": "FROM PLATO TO NATO"?

The concept of "the West" was not used by Plato, Cicero, Hobbes, Tocqueville and other canonized figures of what we today call the "Western" tradition. While "west," pertaining to geographical location, is as old as any language, "the West" as a socio-political concept or as a political association based on cultural commonality is surprisingly modern. There were of course earlier uses of the word. "The West" first came to be employed as of 395 CE to describe the Western Roman Empire, once the Empire was divided. But the Western Empire soon collapsed. Later, the empire of Charlemagne was also known as the empire of the West. In the eleventh century, after the Schism between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, "West" came to refer to the Latin (Catholic) Church as opposed to the "Eastern" Greek-Orthodox Church. Similar uses can be found in French dictionaries on "L'Occident." (The differences between the very short entry on "L'Occident" in the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie*, written by d'Alembert, and the much longer entry in Larousse's dictionary of 1866-79 are telling as to when the concept came to acquire its socio-political meanings). But these earlier uses, though they may have provided the word and useful historical antecedents for later adoption through elective affinities, do not amount to the same concept as "the West" today. According to Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, "The East-West division is many centuries old, and has had at least three distinct referents." The first referent is said to be: "The original and persistent core of the West has always been Latin Christendom, derived ultimately from the Western Roman Empire – with (ancient) Greece included whenever the search for origins goes deeper." Thus "the most significant historical divide

across Europe was that separating the Latin church's *Europa Occidens* from the Orthodox lands of the Byzantine and Russian spheres." Then they continue to describe the second referent: "Following the European diaspora of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries...divisions within European Christendom began to recede in importance. In their stead, the idea of a supra-European West, encompassing European settler colonies across the Atlantic, increasingly took hold. This sense of an expanded West was greatly strengthened after World War II."⁶ Admittedly it is a sweeping leap from the mediaeval division between Western-Catholic and Eastern-Orthodox Christians to the "expanded West ... after World War II". It may be true that "the idea of a supra-European West, encompassing European settler colonies across the Atlantic, increasingly took hold." But when, why, how? It may look to us now evident that once the New World was discovered something like "the West" had to be invented, but did it? I wish to find out when and how this happened and what the alternatives were. Because, no matter how much sense it may make to us retrospectively, it did not occur to people in the newly-independent United States to talk of themselves as part of a "West" that included themselves and the West-Europeans, and it did not occur to West-Europeans to talk of themselves and their cousins in the New World as "the West," until well into the nineteenth century. This article traces the crucial missing link between the mediaeval Catholic "*Europa Occidens*" and "the idea of a supra-European West, encompassing European settler colonies across the Atlantic". To put it simply, wishing to propose a particular organization for the latter entity, Comte decided that the name of the former

⁶ Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, California, 1997), 49-51.

would suit his proposed new entity -- and the specific identity he wanted to cultivate for it -- much better than any of the available alternatives, "Europe" or "Christendom." Up to -- and during -- his time, when people wanted to talk about both sides of the Atlantic, they talked of "Christendom," or "the civilized world." And for Americans in particular "the West" meant something different on their shifting frontier.⁷ In Europe "the West" was available as an historical term to refer to the Western Roman Empire or later Charlemagne's empire, but -- casual uses here and there notwithstanding -- it had not been explicitly or consistently adopted to describe a clearly-defined socio-political entity until Comte chose to promote it.

Before we go into more detail on how all that changed, it should be noted that some of the most interesting definitions of, and debates about, "the West" are to be found among thinkers and writers in China, Korea, Japan, India, Turkey, or Russia. Germany is a particularly interesting case as Germans discussed "the West" more than others, but for much of their modern history were ambivalent about their own relation to it. Most German writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the West as being composed of France, Britain and America, not including Germany (that was to change gradually but decisively after the Second World War).⁸ However, my focus here is *the West's* West: when and why did thinkers and writers in the core of what others saw as "the West," France, Britain and the US start referring to such an entity and calling it "the West"? For most of their history

⁷ See Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Myth of the West: America as the Last Empire* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995).

⁸ Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber, eds., *Germany and 'The West': The History of a Modern Concept* (Oxford, 2015).

the peoples now retrospectively seen as the West referred to themselves by other terms – most recently “Christendom,” “Europe,” or “the civilized nations.” And yet, it is commonplace to find self-styled histories of “the idea of the West” anachronistically projecting what nineteenth- or twentieth-century thinkers and historians co-opted as their preferred collective past and referring to it as “the West,” no matter what the self-identifications of the earlier people concerned might have been (this is the “from Plato to NATO” narrative).

II. A RUSSIAN IMPORT OR A SUBSTITUTE FOR “WHITENESS”?

There are very few works that do not succumb to such anachronistic accounts and instead try to study the actual uses of the concept of the West historically. But these works still fail to trace the concept’s history accurately. Thus, it has been asserted that the first sustained elaboration in English of “the West” as a political-cultural entity was that found in books published by the British social Darwinist thinker Benjamin Kidd in 1894 and 1902. Moreover, some of the scholars in question attribute the emergence of the idea of the West to causes that may in fact have conduced to an increase in its uses but by no means account for its emergence, as they argue. One such claim was made, as already mentioned, by Christopher GoGwilt, who maintained that “[t]he idea of the West has a recent history, emerging around the turn of the [twentieth] century from the combined and related phenomena of European imperial expansion and the crisis of democratic politics.” In trying to explain “the shift from a European to a Western identity,” GoGwilt, besides attributing it to the

needs of imperialism, also maintained that it was the Russian debates between Slavophiles and Westernisers, most notably of the 1860s, that decisively influenced the self-descriptions of West-Europeans in the following decades, and led to their adoption of the term “the West” instead of “Europe.”⁹

Similar claims about the importation of the concept of “the West” from Russian debates have been made more recently by others.¹⁰ However, the very thinker taken in recent scholarship to have initiated the use of “the West” that was then to permeate the later fierce debates between Westernizers and Slavophiles, Chaadaev, was clearly deeply immersed in French philosophy and philosophy of history. In any case, moreover, the novelty of Chaadaev’s use of “the West” has been exaggerated. Although he did use the term in the “First Philosophical Letter” (written in 1829 and first published in Russia in 1836), it was employed interchangeably with “Europe” and the terms “Europe” and “European” were used incomparably more times than “the

⁹ GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West*, 1-2, 226-7.

¹⁰ Peggy Heller, “The Russian dawn: how Russia contributed to the emergence of ‘the West’ as a concept,” in Christopher S. Browning and Marko Lehti, eds., *The Struggle for the West: A divided and contested legacy* (London, 2010), 33-52; Kathleen Margaret (Peggy) Heller, “The Dawning of the West: On the Genesis of a Concept” (PhD thesis, Union Institute and University, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2007); Jasper M. Trautsch, “The Invention of the ‘West’,” *Bulletin of the GHI* [German Historical Institute Washington DC], 53 (2013), 89-102.

West” and “Western” in that text.¹¹ Others had done so long before him, in French in particular.

Another recent argument on the emergence of the idea of the West was contributed by Alastair Bonnett, who agrees with GoGwilt’s assertion that the first sustained elaboration in English of “the West” as a political-cultural entity was that found in Kidd and then attributes the emergence of the idea at that time to the impasses to which “narratives of racial whiteness” had fallen. Thus “the West, in the West, emerged in the context of the inadequacies and contradictions of a more racially explicit discourse” between 1890 and 1930.¹² Again, this may be an interesting contribution to explaining the intensification of uses, but by no means establishes the origin of the idea of the West in English, let alone in the West. As I will show below, sustained elaborations of “the West” in English had been contributed by Comte’s British disciples for some decades before Kidd (himself steeped in Comte¹³), wrote the works Bonnett focuses on.

The periodization proposed by GoGwilt and Bonnett and the claim that “[t]he category of ‘the West’ or ‘the Western world’ ...does not appear...before the 1890s” was also adopted recently by Jürgen Osterhammel,

¹¹ Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev, “Letters on the Philosophy of History: First Letter,” in Marc Raeff, ed., *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology* (New Jersey and Sussex, 1978), 159-73.

¹² Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Basingstoke, 2004), 11, 14-39.

¹³ See D.P. Crook, *Benjamin Kidd: Portrait of a Social Darwinist* (Cambridge, UK, 1984), 3, 277, 283, 295, 375, 397 n84.

who gave a reference to Bonnett for that argument.¹⁴ The claim that “the West” emerged in the 1890s was also defended by the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah in his 2016 BBC Reith Lectures. Appiah maintained that “the very idea of the ‘West,’ to name a heritage and object of study, doesn’t really emerge until the 1890s, during a heated era of imperialism”.¹⁵

III. FRENCH ORIGINS

I take issue with these assertions and will show that the idea of the “West” to name a heritage and an object of study, as well as an elaborate and detailed political project, had arisen much earlier in the nineteenth century in a very different historical and intellectual context. There had been various earlier uses of the West, and I am not asserting that there was *one* idea of the West that someone fully articulated at some point. Instead, I am trying to study different *uses* of “the West.”¹⁶ There have been related myths, such as the tradition of *translatio imperii* (the notion that human beings and their civilization are involved in the movement of the sun from East to West), or

¹⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ, 2014), 86.

¹⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah, Reith Lectures 2016: “Mistaken Identities: Creed, Country, Color, Culture”, Lecture 4: Culture; Lecture transcript (http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio4/transcripts/2016_reith4_Appiah_Mistaken_Identities_Culture.pdf -- downloaded 3 March 2017).

¹⁶ Cf. Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas,” in: Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. I (Cambridge, UK, 2002), 57-89.

heliotropic myth.¹⁷ But “the West” as a political entity based on civilizational commonality is a modern idea that arose in the first half of the nineteenth century. I am going to show here that the first elaborate articulation of such a concept was contributed by Comte.

Before the nineteenth century, when people made distinctions *within* Europe, it was a North-South division that prevailed.¹⁸ Various explanations have been proposed on the gradual shift, in the nineteenth century, from a North-South division of the mental maps of Europe and the world to the now more familiar East-West division.¹⁹ And there have been various versions of

¹⁷ See Loren Baritz, “The Idea of the West,” *The American Historical Review*, 66 (1961), 618-40.

¹⁸ Pace Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, California, 1994). See Hans Lemberg, “Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert Vom ‘Norden’ zum ‘Osten’ Europas,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 33 (1985), 48-91; Reto Speck, “The History and Politics of Civilisation: The Debate about Russia in French and German Historical Scholarship from Voltaire to Herder” (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2010); Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France (c. 1740-1880)* (Bern, 2006).

¹⁹ Lemberg, “Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs”; Riccardo Bavaj, “‘The West’: A Conceptual Exploration,” *Europäische Geschichte Online* (2011); Bernhard Struck, “In Search of the ‘West’: The Languages of Political, Social and Cultural Spaces in the *Sattelzeit*, from about 1770 to the 1830s,” in Bavaj and Steber, *Germany and ‘The West’*, 41-54; Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, “Mental

the from-East-to-West tradition. The best known is the formulation by Hegel, who wrote that “World history travels from east to west; for Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning.”²⁰ Yet, “west” was used in a geographical sense here, and was somehow interchangeable with Europe in the very same sentence in Hegel’s formulation. Moreover, as Bonnet correctly remarked, “despite elaborating at length on the Oriental world, Hegel had little to say about the West as a unity.” It is true that “Hegel had scant interest in developing an explicit or overarching sense of Western identity.”²¹ What has been said of Hegel can certainly not be said of Comte.

It cannot be stressed enough that the transitions (from Europe to West and from North-South to East-West distinctions) were not sudden, straightforward, coherent or unanimous. Ezequiel Adamovsky, who has traced the emergence of the concept of “Eastern Europe” in French debates during the nineteenth century, stresses that meanwhile references to Russia as part of “Northern Europe” continued to be very common well into the 1880s.²² Similar things can be said of British thinkers. When the former Saint-Simonist Gustave d’Eichthal sent his friend John Stuart Mill his book *Les Deux Mondes*, the two “worlds” alluded to in the title were “l’Orient” and “l’Occident.” And yet, so deeply ingrained was the North-South orientation in Mill’s mind, that

Maps: Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28 (2002), 493-514.

²⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, ed. Duncan Forbes (Cambridge, UK, 1975), 197.

²¹ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 24.

²² Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism*, 248-60.

he commented: “your views respecting the differences between the Oriental and the *European* character, seem to me perfectly just. I quite agree with you that an infusion of the Oriental character into that of the nations of *northern* Europe would form a combination very much better than either separately.”²³ Mill was typical. “The West” and “western” were used very rarely in English in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century. One can find the odd reference in T.B. Macaulay using “western” interchangeably with “European” in juxtaposition with “the East.” For a short time Foreign Secretary Palmerston spoke of the treaty of alliance that he forged between Britain, France, Spain and Portugal in 1834 as “a quadruple alliance among the constitutional states of the West, which will serve as a powerful counterpoise to the Holy Alliance of the East” (or as “a formal union between the four constitutional states of the West to drive absolutism out of the [Iberian] Peninsula”).²⁴ But then he alternated between calling the other side (Russia, Prussia and Austria) “the Eastern Powers” and “the three Northern Powers”²⁵ – typically displaying the inchoateness of these distinctions in the early nineteenth century. The historian Edward Augustus Freeman used the term “West” sometimes, but the use was always interchangeable with references to “Europe,” “European,” “Europeans,” and “European

²³ Emphasis (both times) added: Mill to d’Eichthal, March 3, 1837, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. F.E.L. Priestley and John M. Robson, 33 vols (Toronto and London, 1963-1991), XII, 329.

²⁴ Quoted in: Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston 1830-1841: Britain, the Liberal Movement and the Eastern Question*, 2 vols (London, 1951), I, 397.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 406.

civilization".²⁶ Such uses were far from sustained or explicit advocacies of the adoption of a new term; nor were they definitions of a new entity in any way. Where it might have been expected to feature *par excellence*, given the Crusading theme of the novel, in Disraeli's *Tancred* (1847), "the West" is absent. The terms used to denote the antithesis of the East are mainly "Christendom," and "the north" and "the northern tribes."²⁷

Things were different in France, where the words "*l'Occident*" and "*occidental/-e*" had been used much more often than the equivalent terms in English. France had been at the core of Charlemagne's "Empire d'Occident" and thus the word was more familiar in French (the more insular English, whose history did not overlap with Charlemagne's Empire, did not think in the same terms). Although the distinction North – South prevailed then, *l'Occident* and *occidental* had been sporadically employed already in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and not least by some of the authors who had most inspired Comte, such as Condorcet and Joseph de Maistre,²⁸ and later even more by the Saint-Simonians, to some of whom Comte had been close in the 1820s. Henry Laurens has argued that Condorcet was probably the first to use the term in its modern sense at the end of the

²⁶ Edward A. Freeman, *Historical Essays*, Third Series (New York, 1969), 214-15, 230; Second Series, v, 176, 188, 189, 216.

²⁷ See J.P. Parry, "Disraeli, the east and religion: *Tancred* in context," *English Historical Review* (forthcoming).

²⁸ Comte praised highly both Condorcet and de Maistre: *System of Positive Policy: Or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity* (London, 1875-1877) [hereafter: *System (Engl.)*], I, 589; II, 151, 369; III, 11, 527-28; IV, 2, 262, 570-577.

eighteenth century.²⁹ (Even before Condorcet, Montesquieu had used “Occident,” though rarely, already in 1721.³⁰) But these uses were interchangeable with “l’Europe,” which appeared overwhelmingly more often in Condorcet’s *Esquisse* than “l’Occident.”³¹ It is also revealing to pay close attention to how and where “the West” was used in Condorcet’s *Esquisse*. Almost all references appear in the parts of the essay dealing with “the sixth epoch” and “the seventh epoch.”³² These were the parts of the book dealing with the fall of “the West,” the Western part of the Roman Empire, to the “barbarians” and then with the Crusades, and more generally the term is used primarily in a geographical sense to distinguish between developments in the two parts of Europe at particular times in the past. Meanwhile, neither in the *Esquisse* nor in any of his writings directly dealing with America and its influence on Europe did Condorcet (though “perhaps the most brilliant of all the Americanists”³³) refer to “the West” in any sense including Europe and America together.³⁴ Similarly, in Volume III of Diderot’s *Œuvres* (on: *Politique*),

²⁹ Henry Laurens, *Orientales* (Paris, 2007), p. 16.

³⁰ Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes*, ed. Jacques Roger (Paris, 1992), 28, 52, 133, 163, 183, 241.

³¹ Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*, ed. Alain Pons (Paris, 1988).

³² Condorcet, *Political Writings*, ed. Steven Lukes and Nadia Urbinati (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 55, 57, 58, 60, 62, 63, 66.

³³ See Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), 152.

³⁴ See Condorcet, *Écrits sur les États Unis*, ed. Guillaume Ansart (Paris, 2012).

“Occident” appears once in the whole volume -- used in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* entry on the Crusades to distinguish the Western Christian Crusaders from their Eastern Christian “brethren”. “Europe,” on the other hand, appears 68 times and “Européen(s)” appears at least 14 times.³⁵

But there certainly occurred an intensification of uses of “l’Occident” in contradistinction with “l’Orient” during the early nineteenth century among French authors. Debates over the “Eastern question” (“la question d’Orient”), which accelerated after the Greek Revolution of the 1820s, made uses of “l’Orient” more and more frequent, and references to “l’Occident” increased accordingly. Lamartine provides good examples of such uses.³⁶ But there were incomparably more references to “l’Europe” in the same speeches and articles by Lamartine, and it was “la civilisation européenne” that he proposed to promote in the Ottoman Orient and a new “système politique européen” that he wanted to see created.³⁷ Similar things can be said of some of the Saint-Simonians, most notably Michel Chevalier, Gustave d’Eichthal, Émile Barrault and Ismaïl [Thomas] Urbain. In the early 1830s such Saint-Simonians were obsessing about bringing together opposites, such as matter and spirit, woman and man, Orient and Occident.³⁸

³⁵ Diderot, *Œuvres*, Vol. III, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris, 1995).

³⁶ Alphonse de Lamartine, *La Question d’Orient: Discours et articles politiques (1834-1861)*, ed. Sophie Basch and Henry Laurens (Paris, 2011), 102, 154, 157-158, 183, 189, 202, 228, 230, 234, 249, 373, 375, 376.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 102, 117, 186, 187, 188, 190, 192, 193, 194, 195, 197, 201, 202-205, 218-220, 229, 231, 234, 238, 240, 246-7, 250-251, 373, 378, 381.

³⁸ Michel Chevalier, *Politique Industrielle. Système de la Méditerranée: Articles Extraits du Globe* (Paris, 1832); Pierre Musso, ed., *Le Saint-Simonisme, L’Europe*

One of these Saint-Simonians who used “l’Occident” extensively from early on had a special relationship with Comte. Gustave d’Eichthal had been Comte’s first disciple. He later emancipated himself and joined the Saint-Simonian “sect.”³⁹ Despite their estrangement after that, d’Eichthal sent *Les Deux Mondes* to Comte, who replied that he was keen to read it.⁴⁰ D’Eichthal drew an extensive list of differences between “l’Orient” and “l’Occident.”⁴¹ He also offered his readers a map where he drew clear lines of demarcation. His median line dividing West and East almost coincided with the lines drawn by major rivers and separated “la race allemande” from the “races slave et hongroise”. It then left Europe, traversing Malta and going through Africa from the Cape of Tunis to the Cape of Good Hope. The details show that he

et la Méditerranée (Houilles, France, 2008); Michael Drolet, “A nineteenth-century Mediterranean union: Michel Chevalier’s *Système de la Méditerranée*,” *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 30, (2015), 147-68; Jean-François Figeac, “La géopolitique orientale des saint-simoniens,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 85 (2012), 251-68; Philippe Régnier, “Le mythe oriental des Saint-Simoniens,” in Magali Morsy, ed., *Les Saint-Simoniens et l’Orient: Vers la modernité* (Aix-en-Provence, 1989), 29-49; Michel Levallois and Sarga Moussa, eds., *L’Orientalisme des saint-simoniens* (Paris, 2006).

³⁹ *Correspondance Générale et Confessions* (8 vols, Paris/La Haye, 1973-1990) [hereafter: *Correspondance*], I, 78-85, 104-110, 133-38, 140-146, 160-161; Hervé Le Bret, *Les frères d’Eichthal: Le saint-simonien et le financier au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2012), 91-127; Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (3 vols, Cambridge, UK, 1993-2009), I, 258-61, 275-303.

⁴⁰ Comte to d’Eichthal, October 23, 1836, *Correspondance*, I, 275.

⁴¹ Gustave d’Eichthal, *Les Deux Mondes* (Paris, 1836), 23-31.

took the distinction too literally in geographical terms in a way Comte would never do.

The authors, however, who used “l’Occident” in the first decades of the nineteenth century by no means meant all the same thing by the term. That is not unrelated to the fact that “l’Orient” did not have a clear meaning. The prominence of the Eastern Question meant that the Ottoman lands were quite commonly called “l’Orient.” But then there was a deeper “Orient” stretching to India, China, Japan etc. Chevalier alluded to the confusion when he wrote, in 1836: “Les peuples que nous avons l’habitude d’appeler Orientaux, mais qui ne sont que du *Petit Orient*, ont cessé d’être pour l’Europe des adversaires redoutables. Ils lui ont rendu leurs épées sans retour à Héliopolis, à Navarin, à Adrinople.” He distinguished that “*Petit Orient*” from “le *Grand Orient*” that was further east.⁴² But things were even more complicated by the fact that more and more people in the nineteenth century began to draw a vague distinction *within* Europe between East and West. This means that, as the opposite of “l’Orient,” “l’Occident” could mean a number of things, from Western Europe as opposed to Eastern Europe, to Europe as a whole as opposed to “the East” or to the rest of the world. And then, an additional complication was beginning to be contributed by America. We can discern the inconsistency in the use of the terms even in the writings, within the same year, of authors related to each other and cross-referencing each other. In *Lettres sur l’Amérique du Nord* Chevalier refers approvingly to the first edition of d’Eichthal’s *Les Deux Mondes*. Chevalier speaks of the two “hémisphères” meaning what we would understand today, with America

⁴² Michel Chevalier, *Lettres sur l’Amérique du Nord* (2 vols, Paris, 1836), I, ix-x.

being on a different hemisphere from Europe.⁴³ But when d'Eichthal talked repeatedly of the two "hemispheres," he was using "hémisphères" to distinguish between Western and Eastern Europe, and included his map with detailed delimitations. And when d'Eichthal was criticized by one of his German relatives that *Les Deux Mondes* was typically French in that it was "looking too much towards the South," he replied that others had to write on other parts, conceding that an appreciation of Germany was entirely missing from his book, as was an appreciation of England, America, Spain etc. After which he added: "Vous connaissez peut-être l'ouvrage de mon ami Michel Chevalier sur l'Amérique, qu'il aurait mieux pu intituler *Sur l'Occident*."⁴⁴ Why would d'Eichthal think that Chevalier's book ought to have been entitled *Sur l'Occident*? Presumably America was now "l'Occident," or at least a major part of it. But he said nothing of the kind when talking of "l'Occident" in *Les Deux Mondes* a few months earlier.

That is one of the reasons why Comte was original and important to this story, because he made a conscious decision to abandon "Europe" and substitute "the West" to designate an entity that he described in meticulous detail. Others who employed the term before him or contemporaneously with him were neither precise nor consistent in their use. D'Eichthal is typical of the inconsistencies. Few people had used "l'Occident" as much and as early as he did. However, he went on in later years promoting "l'unité européenne" and a "confédération européenne" explicitly based on the kind of pan-Christian unity promoted by the Holy Alliance, on Russia's initiative and of

⁴³ Chevalier, *Lettres*, I, xiii.

⁴⁴ D'Eichthal to Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, January 25, 1837, quoted in: Le Bret, *Les frères d'Eichthal*, 239.

course including Orthodox Russia.⁴⁵ That membership list was anathema to Comte, who strongly preferred the more restricted membership, based around Charlemagne's Europe, or pre-Reformation Catholic Europe, the Europe envisaged by Maistre, Bonald, and Saint-Simon, plus the extra-European colonial offshoots of the peoples in question. In order to avoid the contradictions and confusions arising from the use of that much more vague term, "Europe," Comte decided to name his supranational entity "the West."

IV. COMTE'S POLITICAL PROJECT: THE "REPUBLIC OF THE WEST"

Comte is mainly seen as a philosopher who made important contributions to the history and philosophy of science and as the founder of Sociology. Yet Comte himself saw his life's work as primarily *political* and as a project for social and political reorganisation after the cataclysm of the French Revolution. He regarded his scientific and epistemological work as a parenthesis (admittedly longer than planned) that would corroborate his political project.⁴⁶ Many commentators have interpreted his work as divided into two phases. The first (scientific) phase culminated in the six-volume

⁴⁵ See Gustave d'Eichthal, *De l'Unité Européenne* (Paris, 1840); see also: Gustave d'Eichthal, *L'Italie, la Papauté et la Confédération Européenne: Six articles publiés dans le journal Le Credit les 12, 18, 25 Decembre 1848, et 1, 8, 22 et 23 Janvier 1849*, dossier 8-Z-4601, *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, Paris.

⁴⁶ Pierre Laffitte, "Conversations avec A. Comte: Notes manuscrites de P. Laffitte sur des conversations entre 1845 et 1850," p. 12 bis., *Maison Auguste Comte* manuscripts.

Cours de Philosophie Positive (1830-1842).⁴⁷ The second “phase” was preoccupied by the development of his political project accompanied by his elaboration of the “Religion of Humanity.” The major work of that period was the *Système de Politique Positive*, published in four volumes between 1851 and 1854.⁴⁸ Today most Comte scholars reject the thesis that his career went through an overwhelming change in his last decade or so.⁴⁹ Be that as it may, around the middle of the 1840s Comte’s mind took a religious turn and the “Religion of Humanity” was born. He attributed his religious turn to his meeting (in late 1844) with the much younger Clotilde de Vaux, and her untimely death in 1846. In any case his religious focus had started by 1845.⁵⁰

According to the founder of Positivism, “the fundamental problem” of the politics of advanced societies was that “of reconciling Order and Progress.” Comte had a radical solution. He advocated the introduction of a new “spiritual power” that would oversee “the spiritual reorganization of society” and the corresponding separation between the spiritual and the temporal powers. He was inspired by his understanding of the role of the separation of spiritual from temporal power in Western Europe’s Middle

⁴⁷ *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-1842), ed. Jean-Paul Enthoven, 2 vols (Paris, 1975) [hereafter: *Cours*].

⁴⁸ *Système de Politique Positive* (1851-1854), 5th edition, 4 vols (Paris, 1929) [hereafter: *Système*].

⁴⁹ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, I, 6, 691; II, 3; Annie Petit, *Le Système d’Auguste Comte* (Paris, 2016), 269.

⁵⁰ On 14 July 1845 Comte wrote to Mill that he had dedicated the previous two months to special studies on medieval Catholicism and mainly to reading, for the first time, Augustine’s *City of God*. *Correspondance*, III, 62.

Ages and influenced by Maistre's *Du Pape* (1819) in that respect. The Catholic Church and its Pontiff had played a beneficial role during the Middle Ages by exercising a spiritual power that both curbed the excesses of the secular rulers and kept the peoples of Western Europe together in a spiritual unity despite their fragmentation into separate political jurisdictions. During the Middle Ages the human mind was not ready for anything better than the dominance of the spiritual domain by the Catholic clergy. But in Comte's own time, things were different, and the "positive" age ought to lead to a different political arrangement.

This brings us to one of Comte's most cherished ideas, his "law of the three states."⁵¹ Comte was proud of what he saw as the originality of his "law" and often insisted that he had "discovered" it as early as 1822.⁵² He argued that humankind had gone through three stages of evolution, depending on the development of the human mind in particular. The first stage he called "theological," when people attributed everything that happened in the natural world to direct divine intervention. Then came the "metaphysical" state, when gods were replaced by abstract entities and substances as explanations for phenomena. The final state of the human mind was the "positive" state, which was characterised by scientific explanations and by a quest for *relative* knowledge and *laws of explanation* (as opposed to the quest for *absolutes* and for *ultimate causes* that had characterised the previous states). The first stage was one of offensive war or conquest; the second, transitional,

⁵¹ See Michel Bourdeau, *Les Trois États: Science, théologie et métaphysique chez Auguste Comte* (Paris: 2006).

⁵² Laffitte, "Conversations avec A. Comte," p. 12 bis., *Maison Auguste Comte* manuscripts.

stage was one of defensive war; the third, positive, stage was industrial and peaceful.⁵³ Thus, in the positive state, war and conquest would be seriously anachronistic.

The positive state would be the final and permanent state of the human mind and human society. Comte thought that what he saw as the most advanced part of the world, “the élite of humanity,” ought to be organised in a particular way that would overcome the anarchy that had resulted from the “metaphysical” politics of the previous centuries of critical upheaval. This much-needed reorganization was possible in his time, thanks to his systematisation of Positivism and elaboration of Sociology. He argued that the most advanced part of the world was ready for that new dispensation, that would recreate the salutary separation of spiritual from temporal power, but, crucially, without any need to believe in the existence of a supernatural God. He envisaged for the theoretical class (“*les savants*”), the scientists-thinkers-philosophers, to form themselves into an organized body and constitute “the Spiritual Power” for the whole of the advanced world (as of 1848 Comte decided to stop calling the power in question “spiritual” and to substitute instead “moderating power”⁵⁴). Meanwhile, temporal power would be in the hands of members of the capitalist class in each distinct temporal republic (headed by bankers).

Comte also introduced another very significant stipulation: The temporal states in question had to be small in size for them to be well

⁵³ *System (Engl.)*, III, 46-55; II, 32-324.

⁵⁴ On April 29, 1848 Comte told Laffitte that from then onwards he was to use an expression much preferable to that of “*pouvoir spirituel*,” that of “*pouvoir modérateur*.” *ibid.*, 20-21.

governed and for the spontaneous and “organic” feelings of patriotism to arise (given his firm belief that “what sociability gains in breadth, it loses in energy.”⁵⁵). For example, France would have to be decomposed into seventeen smaller republics;⁵⁶ Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales would be separated, and “England” would have to relinquish all its transmarine dependencies, France would relinquish Algeria, and so on. Each state would have to be roughly of the size of Belgium, Corsica or Tuscany. Comte went to great lengths to offer exact details on the size and population of each of the states, as well as on the ideal social and occupational composition of each of the populations. Given the small size of the proposed temporal states, and the restriction of their powers to the “temporal” functions that Comte had reserved for them, it is not an exaggeration to say that he was proposing “the withering away of the state.”⁵⁷

The most crucial part in Comte’s political scheme was that the scale over which the temporal power and the spiritual (or moderating) power would operate would not be identical.⁵⁸ The temporal governments would rule over the industrial organization of each of the small states of the size of Tuscany or Belgium. The spiritual power, however, would be *one* for the whole of the Western Republic (*République occidentale*), which would include the five great “national” – or, more accurately, linguistic/cultural --

⁵⁵ *Early Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Jones (Cambridge, UK, 1998), 211.

⁵⁶ *Système*, IV, 420-422; *System* (Engl.), IV, 403.

⁵⁷ Richard Vernon, “Comte and the Withering Away of the State,” in Richard Vernon, *Citizenship and Order: Studies in French Political Thought* (Toronto 1986), 125-45.

⁵⁸ *Système*, II, 310, 319-320; IV, 305.

groupings of Western Europe (French, Italian, Iberian, British, German) as well as their colonial transplantations in the Americas, Australia etc. Whereas the temporal power would look after solidarity among the members of each limited state, the spiritual power would ensure continuity between the dead, future generations, and those living in the present throughout the West.⁵⁹ The Spiritual Power would be charged with the education of the youth, but also with the continual education and moral guidance of people throughout life as well as keeping the temporal power in check. The capital of the new supranational entity united by the spiritual power, “the West,” was to be, “naturellement,” Paris. Comte went to meticulous (as well as ridiculous) lengths of detail to describe the composition of the “Western Republic,” the reasons for inclusion or exclusion, the primacy of France within it, and then the hierarchical precedence he accorded to the other two Southern, Catholic and Latin, nations (“Italy” and “Spain”) over the Northern and Protestant nations (“England” and “Germany”) and much else. Here is how he delineated what he meant by “the West” in the 1848 *Discours*: “Since the fall of the Roman empire, and more especially from the time of Charlemagne, France has always been the centre, socially as well as geographically, of this Western region which may be called the nucleus of Humanity.” Now, north and south of this “natural centre”, there were “two pairs of nations, between which France will always form an intermediate link, partly from her geographical position, and also from her language and manners.” The one pair was for the most part Protestant. It comprised, first, “the great Germanic body, with the numerous nations that may be regarded as its offshoots; especially Holland”. And secondly, “Great Britain, with which may be classed

⁵⁹ *Système*, II, 314-315.

the United States, notwithstanding their present attitude of rivalry." The other pair was "exclusively Catholic": "It consists of the great Italian nationality...; and of the population of the Spanish Peninsula (for Portugal, sociologically considered, is not to be separated from Spain), which has so largely increased the Western family by its colonies." Finally: "To complete the conception of this group of advanced nations, we must add two accessory members, Greece and Poland, countries which, though situated in Eastern Europe, are connected with the West, the one by ancient history, the other by modern."⁶⁰

Comte was to elaborate much more on the details of the membership of the Western Republic and, even more, on how exactly it was to be governed during the following few centuries of "transition" to the "normal" state of Humanity. For the Western Republic was not to be the final stage of his plan. It was just necessary in order to prepare and lead the transition of the whole of Humanity to the future that Comte thought the scientific laws of his Sociology had prescribed for it, the "positive" and permanent state. The West would then eventually disappear and be merged into the greater republic that would include the whole of Humanity. When that transition was completed (it would take around seven centuries, Comte calculated), the capital would move from Paris to Constantinople, which would become the permanent seat of the spiritual power and the centre of Humanity. Comte again developed in great detail the plans for the transition, including which groups could be admitted first and which later -- depending on their

⁶⁰ *A General View of Positivism* (trans. J.H. Bridges, London, 1865) [hereafter: *General View*], 92-93. For the French original see: *Discours sur l'Ensemble du Positivisme*, ed. Annie Petit (Paris, 1998) [hereafter: *Discours 1848*].

civilization, religion and consequent degree of susceptibility to the “positive” message. He was keen to point to shortcuts that would spare major parts of humanity the need to go through the turbulent evolution that the West had gone through and instead would allow them to pass straight from the state they found themselves in to the positive state.

Thus, Comte’s “West” was a complex “sociological” notion, and certainly not primarily a geographic entity. He set out to study the historical development of the part of humanity that was most advanced, the “avant-garde of Humanity”. Through that history he reached his “scientific” interpretation of the past and future of humanity – which he elaborated through his new science of “Sociology.” That avant-garde of Humanity was ready to receive Comte’s proposed “positive” reorganisation. However, for that reorganisation to succeed, the cohesion of the most advanced part of humanity had to be safeguarded. Because only that part of the world was ready, in his time, for the new, “positive,” dispensation. Hence Comte’s concern to exclude for the time being more backward parts of humanity from the proposed unit that had to be re-organized. Those “backward” parts included Russia and most of Eastern Europe. The use of the name “Europe” in reference to the countries that he included in the vanguard of humanity (by more or less everyone else until -- and during -- his time) led to inevitable confusion and indeed contradiction, Comte decided. “Europe” was seen -- at least since the time of Peter the Great – as including Russia, and consequently also the lands in-between Russia and Western Europe. Meanwhile, “Europe” did not include populations that Comte thought belonged to the vanguard of humanity, peoples descended mainly from the “five great nations” but living outside geographical Europe, in the Americas, Australia or New Zealand.

Now, these latter populations were often included (along with Europeans) in his time under the name "Christendom." But Christendom would not do either. First, it was still confusingly over-inclusive, as the populations of most of Eastern Europe and Russia were also Christian. And second, Christianity (and – crucially -- more precisely, Catholic Christianity with its spiritual unity under one Pope and one sacerdotal organization) had been only *one* of the elements or phases that had shaped the vanguard of humanity. The other formative influences had been the incorporation of the populations in question under the Roman Empire, mediaeval feudalism, the unity of – most of – those populations under Charlemagne, and the revolutionary "metaphysical" upheavals of the previous five centuries culminating in the French Revolution. It was the populations that had shared in -- at least most of -- those successive experiences that had become the vanguard of humanity according to Comte, and it was through an analysis of *their* history that he formed his "scientific" laws of Sociology.

The overall project of the political and social reorganisation of the vanguard of humanity was already conceived by Comte by the mid-1820s, and had been explained in his several youthful works, the *opuscules de jeunesse*. Though he was to add immense amounts of detailed stipulations in his later works (particularly in the *Système de Politique Positive*), the major building blocks and proposals were already there in the 1820s. What did change between the *opuscules* of the 1820s and the *Discours* of 1848 was the name of the entity in question. From "Europe" in the 1820s it was renamed into "the West" in the 1840s.

V. FROM "L'EUROPE" TO "L'OCCIDENT"

As early as 1816 Comte had displayed a sense of the unity of the five "nations" he was later to include in the West. "J'aimerais mieux vivre médiocrement en Amérique que de nager dans l'opulence dans l'Anglo-Germano-Latino-Hispano-Gaule," wrote the eighteen-year old Comte on 29 October 1816.⁶¹ This was written before Comte met Henri de Saint-Simon and became his secretary in 1817. The lumping together of the nations in question was shared by Comte's new master. Saint-Simon also referred to "Europe" or "Western Europe" as being composed of the peoples he often addressed as follows: "Français, Anglais, Belges, Hollandais, Danois, Suédois, Allemands, Italiens, Espagnols et Portugais ... c'est à vous collectivement que cet écrit s'adresse."⁶² He referred to these same peoples collectively as "l'Occident de l'Europe," "l'Europe occidentale," or "la grande nation des Européens occidentaux."⁶³ On one occasion in 1822 (at the time when Comte was still his secretary) Saint-Simon used both terms, addressing the peoples he had enumerated earlier as "Européens, Occidentaux, ..."⁶⁴ The comma makes a difference from his usual references to "les Européens occidentaux" and turns "Occidentaux" into a noun in this case, and thus into an alternative appellation

⁶¹ *Correspondance*, I, 17. At that time Comte was seriously contemplating to move to the United States. See René Rémond, *Les États Unis devant l'Opinion Française 1815-1852*, 2 vols (Paris, 1962), II, 495.

⁶² Henri Saint-Simon, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Juliette Grange, Pierre Musso, Philippe Régner and Frank Yonnet, 4 vols (Paris, 2012), IV, 2764, 2767.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV, 2764, 2767, 2762, 2763, 2768.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 2764, 2767, 2764.

of the nations he referred to. But the rest of the time he went on talking of “l’Europe” and “les européens.”⁶⁵ Saint-Simon’s “Europe” was quite close to the entity that Comte was later to start calling “l’Occident,” and Saint-Simon displayed the same kind of indecisiveness about whether to call it “l’Europe,” “l’Occident,” or “l’Europe occidentale.” But the first and the last of these alternatives prevailed by far in Saint-Simon’s writings. His Europe was based mainly on Charlemagne’s former empire, plus “England”.⁶⁶

Comte had displayed a similar indecisiveness and indeed explicit uneasiness at least once with the use of the term “Europe” to describe the supranational unit that he was talking about quite early on. In the 1826 “Considerations on the Spiritual Power,” while describing the supra-national authority of the “spiritual power,” to which he was allocating an overarching role transcending state jurisdictions, he wrote in a footnote:

Obliged to employ one or other of two expressions, *European* or *universal*, in order to designate that part of the functions of the spiritual power which is exerted over international relations [sur les relations de peuple à peuple], I prefer the former as being the most accurate and consecrated by past usage, *although probably it is at once too large and too narrow*.⁶⁷ But I employ it without prejudice to the territorial extension which the spiritual power shall some time or other attain.⁶⁸

That uneasiness seems to have come to a head by early 1842. Already in the last volume of the *Cours* Comte began to display indecision regarding how to

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 583; IV, 2826.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 582-4.

⁶⁷ Emphasis added.

⁶⁸ *System (Engl.)*, IV, 635-6n; *Système*, IV, Appendix, 202 n(1).

call the historic entity composed of the “five great nations.” Most of the time he used “Europe,” but “Western Europe” (“l’occident européen”) became more and more frequently used by the end.

There are some sophisticated analyses related to Comte’s ideas on the West or on Europe contributed by Comte scholars in French in the last two decades or so.⁶⁹ Tonatiuh Useche Sandoval has produced an excellent analysis of the meaning and role of “l’Occident” in Comte’s overall system. He notes that in the last lessons of the *Cours* Comte began treating Europe as a “republic” and that he hesitated between the adjectives “européen” and

⁶⁹ They mostly discuss Comte’s writings as contributions to thinking on the idea of “Europe.” See Annie Petit, “L’Europe positiviste: la ‘République occidentale,’” *Revue de la Société d’histoire des révolutions du XIXe siècle*, 7 (1991), 19-35; Juliette Grange, “La continuité de l’idée de l’Europe,” in Raphael Draï and Cao-Huy Thuan, eds., *Instabilités européennes: recomposition ou décomposition?* (Paris, 1992), 207-18; Jean-François Braunstein, “Auguste Comte, l’Europe et l’Occident,” in Françoise Chenet-Faugeras, ed., *Victor Hugo et l’Europe dans la pensée* (Paris, 1995), 193-206; Tonatiuh Useche Sandoval, “L’idée d’Europe dans la politique positive d’Auguste Comte,” *Philonsorbonne*, 3 (2008-09), 51-73. For a work that charts the transition from “l’Europe” to “l’Occident” in Comte’s vocabulary without attempting to situate Comte in the history of ideas of the West see: Tonatiuh Useche Sandoval, “L’idée d’Occident chez Auguste Comte” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013). In the Conclusion Useche Sandoval complains about the absence of Comte from works dedicated to “l’idée européenne” [my emphasis] and says that his thesis was undertaken to make up for that neglect.

“occidental,” but that the former predominated by far. Then he remarks that we have to wait till the publication of the *Système* (1851-1854) for “européen” to give way to “occidental.”⁷⁰ And this is roughly true as far as published works are concerned.⁷¹ But we can trace the victory of “l’Occident” and “occidental” more closely by following Comte’s correspondence (which Useche Sandoval does not use in this context with one exception of a relatively later letter of 1846). In his first letter to J.S. Mill, in 1841, Comte wrote that he was just then finishing, in his latest volume of the *Cours*, the elaboration of the proposal for the spontaneous institution of a “European committee” (“d’un comité européen”) aiming to coordinate the common movement of philosophical regeneration, once positivism would have planted its flag thanks to the publication of his work. That permanent committee, composed of thirty members, would represent the populations of Western Europe (“de l’Occident européen”), which, since Charlemagne, “have always advanced more or less in synergy”. All the rest of Europe and the rest of the world would have to remain for a long time “outside this association, which makes up the elements of the great European republic [la grande république européenne] of which we are both fellow-citizens.”⁷² Thus “European” prevailed in November 1841, though “Western Europe” was mentioned as

⁷⁰ Useche Sandoval, “L’idée d’Occident,” 112.

⁷¹ The first published work where “l’Occident” was formally proclaimed was the *Discours* of 1848. Not only was the word used innumerable times in the book, but the top of the front page read:

“RÉPUBLIQUE OCCIDENTALE
Ordre et Progrès”.

⁷² My translation: Comte to Mill, November 20, 1841, *Correspondance*, II, 22.

well. In the next letter, on January 17, 1842, ambivalence is obvious, with both “la grande république européenne” and “toute la communauté occidentale” coinciding in the same page. Similar ambivalence occurs within the same sentence on March 4, 1842 when Comte talks of “la nouvelle synergie européenne des cinq grandes populations occidentales.”⁷³ In May 1842 Comte wrote to Mill that “Plus notre siècle avance, plus on y doit sentir que tous les Européens occidentaux sont, au font, concitoyens”.⁷⁴ Comte’s see-saw between “Europe” and “Western Europe” continued for some months.⁷⁵ But he seems to have made up his mind by the end of 1842, when he wrote of the “phase actuellement atteinte par l’ensemble de la révolution européenne *ou plutôt occidentale*.”⁷⁶ In the remainder of his letters to Mill, from 1843 to 1846, it was “l’Occident,” “en Occident,” “dans l’ensemble de notre Occident,” “Occidentales,” “concert occidental,” “les mœurs occidentales” that would clearly prevail.⁷⁷ Similarly, it was “la grande famille occidentale” and “l’ensemble de l’Occident” that Comte was to write of to other British correspondents as well in the same years.⁷⁸

Comte had also begun using in the correspondence a term pointing towards his coinage of the noun “occidentalité” by 1848. At some point Mill took issue with Comte’s insistence that the English were the most prone to nationalistic prejudices among the five “advanced” populations and retorted

⁷³ *Correspondance*, II, 32, 37, 61.

⁷⁴ *Correspondance*, II, 48.

⁷⁵ *Correspondance*, II, 57, 91.

⁷⁶ Emphasis added: Comte to Mill, December 30, 1842, *Correspondance*, II, 125.

⁷⁷ *Correspondance*, II, 142, 158, 203, 210, 248, 330; III, 240, 244, 299; IV, 4, 8, 38.

⁷⁸ *Correspondance*, IV, 20-21, 38.

that the knowledgeable portion of the English were cosmopolitans (“cosmopolites”) beyond what Comte could imagine.⁷⁹ The Frenchman replied that such “vague” cosmopolitanism that led people (such as the English cosmopolitans) to place on the same level the French or the Germans, on the one hand, and the Turks or the Chinese, on the other, was not conducive to real political cooperation, which required habitual sentiments of more complete sympathy. He explained: “La situation fondamentale de l’élite de l’humanité réclame partout l’urgente prépondérance, non d’un insuffisant cosmopolitisme, mais d’un actif européenisme, ou plutôt d’un profond occidentalisme, relatif à la solidarité nécessaire des divers éléments de la grande république moderne” -- after which he repeated the historical antecedents that he regarded as binding together the five “elite” populations.⁸⁰ Comte explicitly considered and then abandoned “européanisme,” opting instead for “occidentalisme.” (In that he departed from his former master, who had used “européanisme,” more or less equating it with cosmopolitan Christian morality or philanthropy -- thus Saint-Simon was conflating and merging “European” and “universal,” between which Comte was clear that he had to choose in 1826).⁸¹ Comte insisted that an intermediate level of allegiance to the Western family of nations, the “Western Republic” would be necessary in order for the urgently needed social and political reorganisation of the vanguard of humanity to take place, before it could help others and gradually accept them one by one (eventually merging into “Humanity”). He named that allegiance “occidentalisme” and then “occidentalité”.

⁷⁹ Mill, *Collected Works*, XIII, 692.

⁸⁰ Emphasis added: Comte to Mill, January 21, 1846, *Correspondance*, III, 298-9.

⁸¹ Saint-Simon, *Œuvres complètes*, IV, 2875-3016, 2974.

The latter concept is explained further in the *Discours* of 1848 (and then in the *Système*) in a passage that makes clear both the mediaeval inspiration of the notion and the completely new character that it needed to assume in the “positive” era: “Entre la simple nationalité, que le génie social de l’antiquité ne dépassa jamais, et l’Humanité définitive, le moyen âge a institué *un intermédiaire trop méconnu aujourd’hui*, en fondant *une libre occidentalité*. Notre premier devoir politique consiste maintenant à la reconstruire sur des bases inébranlables, en réparant l’anarchie suscitée par l’extinction du régime catholique et féodal.”⁸² But it should be stressed that Comte did not insist on the need to cultivate “Westernness” by any desire for permanent exclusions. To the extent that the systematisation and reorganisation that he was proposing would be accomplished, Comte continued, it would show that “Westernness” (*l’occidentalité*) constituted just a last preparation to the real “Humanity” (*Humanité*). He added that the fundamental laws of human evolution, that were the philosophical basis of the final regime, “applied necessarily to all climates and to all races, except for simple inequalities of speed.”⁸³

In other words, the “Westernness” that had emerged in the Middle Ages needed to be reconstructed on new “positive” bases and until that reconstruction was complete it would be necessary for the West not to be adulterated by the inclusion of peoples that did not share the same degree of advancement and cohesion as the five “advanced” or “elite” populations. But once the reconstruction of the vanguard of Humanity, the West, would be complete, the positive laws established scientifically would be able to be

⁸² Emphasis added: *Système*, I, 389-90.

⁸³ My translation: *Système*, I, 389-90.

applied to the rest of Humanity to bring the more backward populations into the fold, at their own pace and on their own initiative. That process once achieved, Humanity would be complete in its “normal” and “permanent” state.

Once Comte adopted the term “l’Occident” to describe the entity he was envisaging he did make the most of it. From July 1848 that he published the *Discours sur l’Ensemble du Positivisme*, all books and circulars published by the rue Monsieur-le-Prince publishing industry were headed “RÉPUBLIQUE OCCIDENTALE.” The common Navy that would replace standing armies would be called “Western Navy.” Comte was very alert to the importance of symbols.⁸⁴ He therefore designed a common Western currency, a Western flag, and much more. On all these he went to astonishing degrees of detail, for, as Mill observed, “[h]e cannot bear that anything should be left unregulated”.⁸⁵

VI. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE EPIGONES: DEFINITIONS OF “THE WEST” BY SOME OF COMTE’S DISCIPLES

In 1866 a group of British Comtists published *International Policy: Essays on the Foreign Relations of England*. The first essay, signed by the leader of the British Comtists at the time, was entitled “The West.”⁸⁶ According to Congreve, the decline of the power of Catholicism, and the consequent disunion of mediaeval Europe, were “first evidenced by disorder in the international

⁸⁴ Cf. Wolf Lepenies, *Auguste Comte: Die Macht der Zeichen* (Munich, 2010).

⁸⁵ Mill, *Collected Works*, X, 366

⁸⁶ Congreve, “The West,” 1-49.

relations of its constituent states." By the same token, it was "in the same international relations that the restoration of order must begin". Congreve argued that ever-increasing contact among peoples had led to a growing sense of mutual interdependence. The latter led to the conception of a common interest, until all this begot the conception of the unity of the human race. Humanity had to be united, but on two conditions: first, that the power which attempted its unification should be duly subordinated to the whole (Humanity) on whose behalf it did it; and second, that the agent must be complex, like the larger body on which it was to act -- constituted by several nations differing from one another. Thus no mere national interest could get ascendancy and there would be ample provision for a larger range of sympathies with those outside, and a just mutual control with reference to those within. The familiar units of social organisation were

- the family
- the country
- Humanity

For the new dispensation that the Comtists envisaged, one more unit was necessary between the country and Humanity: this unit would be, on the one hand, wider than the country/state, and thus not as isolated or selfish as the state; while, on the other hand, it would be less extensive than Humanity, and thus not as powerless for action and practical purposes as Humanity at large. The intermediate unit needed was "the West." Thus, social existence would be organized along the lines:

- the family
- the country

- the West
- Humanity

According to Congreve, “the leadership of the human race is invested in the West”. But here we come to the crucial issue of the name of the unit in question: “The actual consciousness of the world accepts this term Europe as a whole.” However, “Europe” would not do and he would attempt “to get a clear conception of what the term the West means, how far it is synonymous with, how far different from, Europe.” In other words, Congreve continued, “let us seek an adequate answer to the question – What constitutes the West?”⁸⁷ The first step needed was one of exclusion: “The elimination of Russia from the system is the first great rectification. She is an Eastern, not a Western power, or more Eastern than Western.” The criterion for membership was “the participation directly or indirectly, completely or incompletely, in the progressive civilisation which, since the repulse of the theocracy of Western Asia by Greece, has characterized Europe” (including the intellectual cultivation of Greece; the social incorporation of Western Europe by Rome; the Catholic-Feudal organisation of mediaeval Europe; and the revolutionary upheavals of the previous five centuries).⁸⁸

Another interesting testing ground was Ottoman Turkey, which according to Congreve was “more Western than Russia.” It was “far more intimately bound up with the history of Europe than is Russia, whose admission to that history is barely a century old.” Besides this historical argument, there was also a far from unimportant political argument: “It is her

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

religion which would make me wish for her admission, were it legitimate on other grounds." Every recognition of Turkey, down to the latest at the time of the Crimean War, had been "valuable as a protest against the spirit of religious exclusiveness," and "distinctly set aside the claim of Christian nations, as such, to domineer over others in the name of an inherent superiority conferred on them by their religion." It would be ideal in this respect to have Turkey included simultaneously as Russia would be excluded. However, this could not be: "Whatever the advantages of such a view, they must be foregone rather than weakened by any immature concession the cohesion of the Western body, already far too weak."⁸⁹

Congreve stressed that for the Positivists, followers of Comte's precept of "altruism" and "living for others," the way forward was "sympathy". Thus, he defined as the "aim" of the West "the peaceful action on the rest of the [human] race, with the purpose of raising, or enabling its various constituents to rise, in due order to the level it has itself attained." Such a body would "stand forth as the model at once and director of the rest. Duly organised within, conscious of its functions and obligations, it would appreciate the wants and situation of those without it; and, without any pressure or unwarranted interference with their legitimate independence of action, it would be ready to help them in their onward course."⁹⁰

The article concluded with a six-page "Note on the United States of America." The whole tone shows a growing unease (obvious in British thought more generally by the 1860s) about the rise of the US and its increasing assertiveness following the Civil War. For, although the US

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-6.

deserved much more attention as part of the West than it had so far received, Congreve was adamant that one should not meanwhile admit “her claim to be the latest outcome of the mature political wisdom of the race, the type to which all others must eventually conform.” The problem was that “America claims no less, it would seem” he added. “America must weigh heavily in the scales of international policy; but she weighs by her mass, not by her ideas”.⁹¹ American reviewers – even if otherwise positive overall -- were not amused by the part that concerned themselves.⁹²

Similarly, Comte’s appointed successor in France, Pierre Laffitte, explained in 1881: “With the spread of Positivism, the use, as a political expression, of the purely geographical term ‘European’ must be dropped: for it was applied in an utterly irrational way to an assemblage of very distinct and dissimilar peoples.” As used, “the appellation errs at once by excess and by defect.” As he explained, “Democratic hallucinations notwithstanding, there is no United States of Europe; for this portion of the world comprises Oriental populations, such as Turkey and Russia, while it does not include the various colonial extensions of the West, especially the Americans, who manifestly form part of it.”⁹³

And “Europe” was not the only term that had to be superseded and replaced by “the West”. In 1861 Laffitte had stressed that “before the group formed by the advanced populations can adopt a proper policy towards the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 44-9.

⁹² “International Policy,” *The North American Review*, Vol. 103, No. 213 (October 1866), 608-9.

⁹³ Pierre Laffitte, *The Positive Science of Morals: Its Opportunities, its Outlines, and its Chief Applications*, trans. J. Carey Hall (London, 1908), 196-7.

rest of the world, *a change must be brought about in its way of looking at itself.*"⁹⁴ That change consisted "in dropping the notion of *Christendom*, and adopting in place of it, the notion of *Westerndom*⁹⁵ or *The West*." "*The West*" was preferable because it was more precise for the reason explained already (exclusion of Eastern Christians), as well as because it represented fully "the whole set of antecedents that have helped to mould this memorable group." But the substitution of *Westerndom* for *Christendom* would also have a salutary influence on its external policy: For the Christian point of view, "which so profoundly vitiates our appreciation of the other peoples of the world," would, if "*Westerndom*" were adopted in its stead, stop being a barrier to Westerners' capacity to understand other peoples accurately.⁹⁶

VII. THE NOVELTY OF "THE WEST" IN ENGLISH

Initially even some of Comte's disciples or translators were not sure how to handle the conceptual innovation that he had introduced. The novelty of the term in English is obvious both from the way Congreve introduced his definition in 1866 and from the way reviewers commented on it. "What is meant by the West is defined in the preliminary Essay by Mr. Congreve,"

⁹⁴ Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ In the original: "*occidentalité*".

⁹⁶ Pierre Laffitte, *A General View of Chinese Civilization and of the Relations of the West with China*, trans. John Carey Hall (Tōkyō, London, Yokohama, Shanghai & Hongkong, 1887), iii-vii, 104 n.1.

noted an American reviewer.⁹⁷ And British reviewers found Congreve's definition and membership list of "the West" idiosyncratic and some protested against his (and Comte's) exclusion of some Christian nations from membership of "the West."⁹⁸ Reviewers explicitly took exception to the replacement of "what once was Christianity till essayists found out a better name for it."⁹⁹ Others commented on "what he calls the West" referring to Congreve as "paradoxical".¹⁰⁰ A *Westminster Review* author referred to "'the West,' as Comtists affectedly choose to call Europe at large," and went on to observe that "[t]he West being a new general term, admits of a fresh definition better than could be easily supplied of that for which it stands", and then hastened to complain against "the arbitrary manner in which every European influence is discarded from the definition of 'the West' that cannot be traced back to the times of Imperial Rome".¹⁰¹

Earlier, Harriet Martineau, in her free translation of the *Cours*, was unable to follow Comte in his linguistic innovations, which, as we have seen,

⁹⁷ "International Policy," *The North American Review*, 103 (October 1866), 608-9.

⁹⁸ W. H. Freemantle, "M. Comte and his Disciples on International Policy," *The Contemporary Review*, 3 (1866), 477-98, at 488.

⁹⁹ *The Athenæum*, No. 2038 (17 November 1866), 642.

¹⁰⁰ *The Saturday Review* (11 August 1866), 176.

¹⁰¹ "Politics Sociology, Voyages and Travels," *Westminster Review*, 30/2 (October 1866), 484-5. Meanwhile, a sympathetic reviewer explained that "The idea of Humanity, which has become too familiar to need any exposition here, has given birth to an offshoot which may be called 'the West,' or 'Occidentality.'" "International Policy," *The Reader* (21 July 1866), 661.

were already incipient in the last lessons of the *Cours* (written in the end of 1841 and in early 1842). She translated “qu’aucune autre branche de la grande famille occidentale”¹⁰² as “than any other branch of the great family,”¹⁰³ thus avoiding to translate or acknowledge “occidentale.” And where Comte had written “tendant à isoler profondément le peuple anglais de toute le reste de la famille occidentale”¹⁰⁴ Martineau translated “which tend to separate the English people from the rest of the European family.”¹⁰⁵ Martineau again did not translate “dans le reste de notre Occident” at all.¹⁰⁶ Further on, where Comte had written “la république occidentale” Martineau translated “the great European commonwealth”.¹⁰⁷ The omission of the “Western” dimension becomes even more striking near the end of Lesson 57, where Comte had written on his projected *Comité positif occidental*.¹⁰⁸ Martineau completely ignored the emphasis on the supra-national, “occidental” character of the proposal outlined in the original text.¹⁰⁹

No less interestingly, throughout the correspondence that I discussed in Section V between Comte and Mill, the Englishman remained remarkably

¹⁰² *Cours*, II, 694 (57th lesson).

¹⁰³ *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, freely translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau, 2 vols (London, 1853) [hereafter: *Martineau*], II, 493.

¹⁰⁴ *Cours*, II, 695.

¹⁰⁵ *Martineau*, II, 494.

¹⁰⁶ *Cours*, II, 695. The rest is translated in *Martineau*, II, 494.

¹⁰⁷ *Cours*, II, 695-6; *Martineau*, II, 494.

¹⁰⁸ *Cours*, II, 696.

¹⁰⁹ *Martineau*, II, 495.

unconverted to Comte's new lexical preferences and kept replying by using "Europe" or "European" each time Comte had used "West" or "Western".¹¹⁰

The reluctance became bewilderment when it came to translating Comte's new coinage, "Occidentalité." J.A. Bridges clearly hesitated in his first translations of the *Discours* of 1848. For example, in a text already quoted, Comte's original read "le moyen âge a institué un intermédiaire trop méconnu aujourd'hui, en fondant une libre occidentalité."¹¹¹ In his translation in 1865 Bridges rendered the text: "the Middle Ages introduced the intermediate conception of Christendom, or Occidentality."¹¹² That translation was inconsistent with Comte's intention, which was to reject "Christendom" as a collective description and stress the "Occidentality" developed only among Catholic Western Christians. But the neologism seems to have been too much for Bridges, so he added "Christendom" which was at least more familiar. A later translator of texts by Laffitte preferred "Westerndom".¹¹³ Clearly, "the West" needed some getting used to. But the term did gradually become more and more employed in English in the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Mill, *Collected Works*, XIII, 538, 561, 703.

¹¹¹ *Discours 1848*, 412; *Système*, 390.

¹¹² Emphasis added: Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 416.

¹¹³ Laffitte, *A General View of Chinese Civilization*, iv-vii, 106.

¹¹⁴ It may or may not be accidental that the three British thinkers that Bonnett identifies as the first to develop the idea of the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 28-31) all had close connections of varying degrees with Comtean Positivism. For Ramsay Macdonald's links with the Comtists and references to their *International Policy*

VIII. CONCLUSION

I have argued, firstly, that various recent theories about the history of the modern idea of “the West” in English and in the West more generally have missed the most important link in the story. That link consists in the writings and tireless propagandizing efforts of Auguste Comte. In the modern era it was Comte who first developed an explicit idea of “the West” as a socio-political concept, basing it on a historical analysis of the development of what

in his writings see: James Ramsay Macdonald, *Imperialism: Its Meaning and Its Tendency* (London, 1900); and Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 199. On Benjamin Kidd’s debts to Comte see: Crook, *Benjamin Kidd*, 3, 277, 283, 295, 375, 397n84. And Francis Sidney Marvin (whose name appears in front of more titles than any other in Bonnett’s bibliography) was indeed one of the most prolific authors writing on Western Civilization in the early twentieth century. He was also a leading and highly active Comtist (see T.R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, UK, 1986), 122, 242-3, 246-8, 271). Already as a student in Oxford he co-founded with the classicist Gilbert Murray an Auguste Comte discussion society and later he contributed more than a hundred articles to the Comtist *Positivist Review* between 1893 and 1925. He also authored a book on Comte, where he discussed Comte’s projected “Western Republic” and assessed the chances of implementation of the Frenchman’s pacifist scheme in the real world and through the League of Nations: F.S. Marvin, *Comte: The Founder of Sociology* (London, 1936), 122-61, 187-212.

he saw as the “elite” of humanity and proposing an elaborate plan for the reconstruction of that part of the world, “the West,” before it could serve the rest of Humanity to achieve the same “positive” state of development. I have followed in some detail the gradual adoption of “l’Occident” to replace “l’Europe” and found the decisive turn to have happened as of the end of 1842. Establishing that timing means that “the West” was adopted and developed by Comte before his religious turn a few years later and therefore was independent of the latter. Once he invented his religion, the West and the Religion of Humanity became of course closely associated, but the timing that I have established here for his adoption of “the West” means that they were neither coeval nor inextricably linked.

Secondly, to the extent that the idea of “the West” tends to be associated with “democracy, individualism and liberalism”¹¹⁵ the attribution that I have argued here of a crucial role to Comte complicates the picture. The “West” envisaged by Comte was designed to be anything but democratic, individualistic or liberal. This does not change the meanings and associations acquired by the concept through its later uses, but it shows that such meanings and associations were neither inherent to it nor coeval with its emergence. There is clearly no single “idea of the West” but many different ideas or uses, which need to be studied historically in their own contexts. But it is significant to note that the first and most elaborate conceptualisation of a modern socio-political idea of the West was not democratic, individualist or liberal. Comte’s diagnosis of the problem of modernity was that, in its recent revolutionary and “metaphysical” phase, the “vanguard of Humanity” had been victim to individualist neglect of the past and of historical antecedents,

¹¹⁵ Trautsch, “The Invention of the West,” 89.

which he called the “Western disease” (*la maladie occidentale*).¹¹⁶ That is why his proposed Spiritual Power would be preoccupied with establishing continuity with the past and future generations, why his “Religion of Humanity” was to cultivate reverence for past benefactors of Humanity, and the Positivist motto “*vivre pour autrui*” would promote altruism (a term that Comte coined). In order to combat “metaphysical” revolutionary notions such as individual rights, Comte proposed a deeply illiberal programme of moral regeneration through religiously inculcated altruism and love of Humanity.

However, thirdly, far from its emergence being related to the needs of European imperialism as has often been argued, the modern idea of the West has clear anti-imperialist origins. Of course *prima facie* it could be plausible to say that Comte’s international vision was one more version of the “transnational projects of empire in France” that David Todd analysed in this journal recently.¹¹⁷ But seeing only the Franco-centrism of the project would be unfair and one-sided. For there was a strong anti-imperialist thrust in Comte’s political project. Though strikingly Eurocentric, his long-term utopian plan was meant to become universal and inclusive, aimed to encompass the whole of Humanity. And no matter how patronising it may appear to us today, if judged against any proposed alternatives in the nineteenth century, Comte’s scheme was a plea for the Western nations to associate with the rest of the world “on terms of mutual courtesy and fair reciprocity of advantage.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *System (Engl.)*, III, 2; IV, 322-3.

¹¹⁷ David Todd, “Transnational Projects of Empire in France, c. 1815-c. 1870,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 12/2 (2015), 265-93.

¹¹⁸ Congreve, “The West,” 37.