

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF AUGUSTE COMTE. .

(Concluded).

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In the period of fetichism, or what would now be called animism⁶⁹ the family or private society was instituted and with it that fixity of residence which made the later development of the state possible.⁷⁰ In the first polytheistic period, that of theocratic or conservative polytheism (i. e., the period of the great oriental empires), the great political contribution was the founding of the city (i. e., the state) and the development of the institution of landed property. Its great defect was the attempt to found a church before the civic life had been perfected.⁷¹ Another unifying and disciplinary feature of this period was the wide development of the caste-system.⁷² In the next period, that of intellectual polytheism (i. e., the Greek age) there were no important political contributions except in a negative sense. The service of the Greeks was intellectual and was rendered by freeing humanity from theocratic influences. National solidarity was impaired by the attacks of the Greeks upon property and upon caste without providing other unifying influences, and their political life was mainly the rule of demagogues. If the Greeks made any political contribution at all it was in repelling the Persian advance.⁷³ In the Roman period, or the age of social monotheism,

⁶⁹ L. T. Hobhouse, "Comte's Three Stages," in *Sociological Review*, 1908, p. 264. For Wundt's arguments supporting fetichism as the most primitive cult see his *Volkerpsychologie, Mythos und Religion*, Vol. II.

⁷⁰ *Polity*, Vol. III, pp. 91-2, 118-23.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, Vol. III, pp. 156-161, 171-8, 201-2.

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 171-2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 216-31.

there were several phases of political progress. The most important was the development of the conception of "Fatherland," which Comte defines as "the permanent seat of all those moral and intellectual impressions, by whose unbroken influence the individual destiny is moulded."⁷⁴ "Nothing is so well adapted to consolidate social ties as their habitual consolidation around a material seat, which is equally appropriate to relations of Continuity as to those of Solidarity."⁷⁵ The world is, thus, indebted to Rome for the first definite step taken towards sociocracy.⁷⁶ Again, Roman law tended towards sociocracy, since, to a considerable degree, it substituted social sanctions for supernatural sanctions in the administration of its law.⁷⁷ Finally, when Roman warfare was transformed from conquest into defense, it resulted naturally in the transformation of slavery into serfdom and of the Empire into small-state systems, thus opening the way for the development of feudalism, the germs of which are to be found in the cession of Roman territory to barbarian chieftains.⁷⁸

The next period was that of the defensive monotheism or the Catholic-feudal transition—the period of the establishment of the Church, as contrasted to foundation of family and state in earlier periods. "The distinguishing feature of medieval civilization was the two-fold nature of the aims in view and the combination of two heterogeneous elements for its attainment."⁷⁹ The general purpose of the period was to systematize life, and this, the work of the Church, failed for the most part. The special purpose of the age was the emancipation of women and laborers, the work mainly of feudalism, and this was, to a large degree, successful.⁸⁰ Since the religion of this period was universal and political power local, there resulted the indispensable separation of church and state. At the same time warfare was finally transformed from aggressive to defensive.⁸¹ Mariolatry, with its idealization of woman, was an advance towards sociolatry or the worship of humanity.⁸² Great steps in advance were taken with the separation

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 305-6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 336, 350-1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 409.

of employers from employed, the rise of the gild corporations, and the emancipation of the serfs.⁸³

But, in spite of these important contributions, it was not for this period of defensive monotheism to inaugurate the Positivist régime. Another period, that of the "Western Revolution" had to intervene. This corresponds to the metaphysical period of mental development. The eight main forces operating to bring about this revolution were: the influence of women; scientific advances; modern industrial improvements; art; the development of the state; the decay of the Church; the work of the legists; and, finally, the negative contributions of the metaphysicians.⁸⁴ In this period industry became consolidated, as employers and employed united in their mutual interest against the other classes. Government, in turn, began to patronize industry because it recognized that its development was essential to the furnishing of the wealth needed for maintaining military activities. This reacted upon the rulers by making them responsible administrators of the public wealth. This double process marked the real entry of industry into western politics as the chief end of the modern polity. Civilization, hitherto military, now became progressively industrial in character.⁸⁵ The whole period, and particularly that of the French Revolution, was one of disintegration and of preparation for Positivism.⁸⁶

In the preliminary work of the next or Positive period, important beginnings had already been made before Comte. Condorcet had laid the philosophic foundation for sociology. De-Maistre renewed the veneration for the best elements in the Middle Ages. Scientific advances had been made by Lamarck, Bichat, Broussais, Cabanis, and Gall. Comte discovered the two fundamental laws of sociology, and his system, which was too intellectualistic in the *Philosophy*, was well-rounded on its emotional side by his friendship with Clotilde de Vaux, and appeared in a more complete form in the *Polity*. On the intellectual side, then, everything was ready for the institution of the Positivist system and, strangely enough, at just this same time the *coup d'état* of 1851 had revived the institution of the Dictatorship, which was the great preliminary step in the political field preparatory to the inauguration of Positivism, and Comte himself stood ready to as-

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 412-13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 434-446.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 487-9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 423-4.

sume the office of supreme pontiff of the new religion.⁸⁷ Psychology and history had, thus, conspired, through man's fundamental mental make-up and the struggles of ages, to render the Positivist system as inevitable as it was desirable. In this last stage of social evolution "Family, State, and Church are finally to be distinguished and harmonized, or fixed in their proper organic relations to each other, so as to preclude forever their warfare or intrusion upon each other's provinces."⁸⁸

4. *Forms of the State and the Government.*

As to the forms of the state and government, while Comte was familiar with the conventional Aristotelian classification, it was regarded by him as of minor importance and superficial significance. To him there were only two fundamental types of society, state, and government—theocracy and sociocracy.⁸⁹ The former was the government of theologically oriented priests, in which the temporal power was subordinated to the spiritual. The latter was the condition to be reached in the Positivist state, where spiritual and temporal power were to be separated and properly coördinated, and in which social organization was to be based on the principles of Comte's sociology. It has been the problem of the greater part of human history to effect the transformation from the former to the latter.⁹⁰

5. *Sovereignty.*

In a system of social control like that proposed by Comte, in which authority was to be divided into moral, material and intellectual, each to be enforced by separate organs, and in which the latter, while the most important, was to be administered through persuasion and suggestion, it is easy to see that there was no place for any such concept as that of political sovereignty in its conventional modern sense.⁹¹ Probably the directors of material activities, that is, the leaders of the employer class, came the nearest to having sovereign power of any of Comte's proposed governing agencies; at least they were to possess the functions of ordinary civil government. As far as he discusses the problem of sovereignty he seems to mean by it participation in government.⁹²

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 526-30.

⁸⁸ Caird, *op. cit.*, p. 35. For Flint's rather unsympathetic treatment of Comte's philosophy of history see his *History of the Philosophy of History in France*, 1894, pp. 575-615

⁸⁹ *Polity*, Vol. II, p. 344.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, *passim*.

⁹¹ Cf. Chiappini, *op. cit.*, pp. 97ff.

⁹² *Polity*, Vol. I, pp. 106-110.

The nearest he gets to a positive theory of sovereignty is his approbation of Hobbes' doctrine that government has an important basis in force.⁹³ He says, in speaking of popular sovereignty, that the Positive theory on this point separates the elements of truth from those of error in the metaphysical doctrine. He here accepts two different conceptions of popular sovereignty: one a political connotation, applicable in special cases, and the other a moral interpretation suitable in all cases. By the political application he means that the voice of the people should be appealed to in cases which concern the practical interests of the whole community and are intelligible to the masses, such as declarations of war and the decisions of the law-courts. On the other hand, it would be manifestly absurd to have the whole people decide on questions of particular interest requiring special and trained judgment. The moral aspect of popular sovereignty consists in the proposition that the efforts of the whole of society should be centered on the common good, that is, "the preponderance of social feeling over all personal interests."⁹⁴

6. *The Positivist Scheme of Social Reconstruction.*

It is difficult to grasp the full meaning and significance of Comte's theory and plan of social organization without a preliminary statement of the historical background of Comte's doctrines. He was witnessing the disintegration of the old social order, as a result of the French and Industrial Revolutions, and was keenly conscious of the evils of the new, though still transitional, society. Quite in contrast to Say, Bastiat and the French optimists, Comte joined with Sismondi in condemning the new capitalistic order. His indictment of the new *bourgeois* age is well stated by Levy-Bruhl:

Comte saw the bourgeoisie at work during Louis Philippe's reign, and he passes severe judgment upon it. Its political conceptions, he says, refer not to the aim and exercise of power, but especially to its possessions. It regards the revolution as terminated by the establishment of the parliamentary *régime*, whereas this is only an "equivocal halting-place." A complete social reorganization is not less feared by this middle class than by the old upper classes. Although filled with the critical spirit of the eighteenth century, even under a Republican form it would prolong a system of theological hypocrisy, by means of which the respectful submission of the masses is insured, while no strict duty is imposed upon the leaders. This is hard upon the proletariat,

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 247-9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 106-110.

whose condition is far from improving. It "establishes dungeons for those who ask for bread." It believes that these millions of men will be able to remain indefinitely "encamped" in modern society without being properly settled in it with definite and respected rights. The capital which it holds in its hands, after having been an instrument of emancipation, has become one of oppression. It is thus that, by a paradox difficult to uphold, the invention of machinery, which *à priori*, one would be led to believe, would soften the condition of the proletariat, has, on the contrary, been a new cause of suffering to them, and has made their lot a doubly hard one. Here, in brief, we have a formidable indictment against the middle classes, and in particular against the political economy which has nourished them.⁹⁵

Yet, the problem is not one of capitalism, as such, or its abolition. It is not the industrial or financial technique of the new industrial order which is at fault, but the failure to develop a new industrial and social morality which could exert a proper control and discipline over the modern industrial system:

That there should be powerful industrial masters is only an evil if they use their power to oppress the men who depend upon them. It is a good thing, on the contrary, if these masters know and fulfill their duties. It is of little consequence to popular interests in whose hands capital is accumulated, so long as the use of it is made beneficial to the social masses.

But modern society has not yet got its system of morality. Industrial relations which have become immensely developed in it are abandoned to a dangerous empiricism, instead of being systematized according to *moral* laws. War, more or less openly declared, alone regulates the relations between capital and labour.⁹⁶

What is needed, then, is a new industrial and social morality, to be inculcated through the Positive educational system. This will be far more effective than state socialistic schemes and paternalistic legislation. Comte's scheme of social reconstruction was, thus, one which rested more on a moral than a political basis. The socialization of the modern order "depends far more upon moral than upon political measures. The latter can undoubtedly prevent the accumulation of riches in a small number of hands, at the risk of paralyzing industrial activity. But these tyrannical proceedings would be far less efficacious than the universal reproof inflicted by positive ethics upon a selfish use of the riches possessed."⁹⁷ "Everything then depends upon the common moral education, which itself depends upon the establishment of a

⁹⁵ Levy-Bruhl, *The Philosophy of Comte*, pp. 320-21.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 328-9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

spiritual power. The superiority of the positive doctrine lies in the fact that it has restored this power."⁹⁸ "Once common education was established, under the direction of the spiritual power, the tyranny of the capitalist class would be no more to be feared. Rich men would consider themselves as the moral guardians of public capital. It is not here a question of charity. Those who possess will have the 'duty' of securing, first, education and then work for all."⁹⁹ In turning now to a more detailed consideration of Comte's scheme for a new social dispensation, it must be borne in mind that his chief aim was to develop a new social morality, believing that this would be the only force adequate to solve the problems of modern industrialism.

Comte's theory of social reconstruction, like his doctrines of social organization and his philosophy of history, rests ultimately upon the three-fold divisions of the human personality into feeling, action and intelligence. In the first place, one must turn to his analysis of the social forces. They are: (1) material force, based on action and expressed in numbers and wealth; (2) intellectual force, founded on speculation and expressed in conception and expression; and (3) moral force, based on affection and expressed in command prompted by character and obedience prompted by the heart.¹⁰⁰ It is the supreme task of social organization, as well as its chief difficulty, to combine these forces in the right proportion without the undue predominance of any one.¹⁰¹

In the state one finds that the fundamental social classes are founded on this same general principle. "In the smallest cities capable of separate existence, we find these classes: the Priests who guide our speculation; the Women who inspire our highest affections; and the practical Leaders who direct our activity, be in war or in industry."¹⁰² The agency needed to connect and harmonize these three fundamental orders is to be found in the mass of the people or the Proletariat, "for they are united to the affectionate sex by domestic ties; to the Priesthood through the medium of the education and advice which it gives them; and to the practical Leaders through common action and the protection afforded them."¹⁰²

Every social class, except the women, should be divided on an

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

¹⁰⁰ *Polity*, Vol. II, pp. 225-8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 228.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

hierarchical basis according to the principle of importance and specialization of function. "Our ultimate state will exhibit a classification of society more distinct than any we know in all sides of human life. From the High Priest of Humanity down to the humblest laborer, society will show the same principle at work distributing ranks: generality of view decreasing as independence of life increases."¹⁰⁴

The directive power, or what might perhaps be called the function of government, in Comte's state was essentially to be centered in the priests of the Positive religion and in the leaders of industry. His scheme of social, economic and political reorganization was derived in its major outlines from Saint-Simon. The temporal and military power of the past was to give way to the principle of *capacité industrielle*, as applied to the material government; and *capacité positive* as applied to the intellectual direction and moral surveillance.¹⁰⁵

The most important class in the Positivist state was to be the priesthood, or those distinguished by positive capacity.¹⁰⁶ At the outset it should be understood that Comte's priests were not theologians, but sociologists. They were to be the scientific directors of society, selected for their special talent and their immediate and extensive acquaintance with those sociological principles upon which enlightened social policy depends. They were to interpret to man the religious, or rather sociological, doctrines of Positivism, of which the principle was love; the basis, order; and the end, progress.¹⁰⁷ Aside from special training, the priesthood must be eminent for the qualities of courage, perseverance, and prudence.¹⁰⁸ Of the organization of the Positive priesthood, which Comte describes in the most minute detail, only the most general outline can be given here. It suffices to say that there were to be some twenty thousand priests for western Europe, presided over by a High Priest of Humanity with his headquarters at Paris. He was to be assisted by seven national chief priests, and this number was to be increased to forty-nine at the final re-

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 266. There are here certain anticipations of the modern socio-political theory of the functional reorganization of the state. Cf. F. Pécant, "Auguste Comte et Durkheim," in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Oct.-Dec., 1921, pp. 64ff.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Chiappini, op. cit., p. 18. "En dernière analyse, les princes de la science, ou sociologistes, et les princes de la finance, ou banquiers, seront les chefs de gouvernement. Defourny, op. cit., p. 193.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Chiappini, op. cit., pp. 134ff.

¹⁰⁷ *Polity*, Vol. II, p. 286.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 343.

generation of the world and its conversion to Positivism. The remainder of the priesthood were to be local priests and vicars attached to the local temples, which were to be distributed in the proportion of one to every ten thousand families. The priests were to be paid a fixed salary, so low as to preclude pecuniary reasons for desiring service in the profession.¹⁰⁹

It is rather difficult to say just what Comte considered the fundamental function of the priesthood, as he enumerates in various places several "supreme duties" of this class. It seems, however, that he regarded their duties in general to comprise the following. They were above all to be the systematic directors of education.¹¹⁰ They were to judge of the worth of each member of society and try, as far as possible, by means of suggestion and personal opinion, to have him placed in society according to his merits and capacities. This, Comte admits, is a rather difficult achievement, as one can hardly judge of the capacity of an individual until his career is over, but the priesthood should do its best to arrive at a correct preliminary estimate.¹¹¹ Again, the priests should foster the feeling of continuity between different generations and of solidarity between the different social classes by teaching men their relation to nature, the past, and to other men.¹¹² Then, the priests should be the general moral censors of the community, using the force of their opinions in keeping men aware of their social duties and obligations, and warning them, in case of deviation.¹¹³ Finally, they should be the general fountain-spring of useful social and scientific knowledge and advice.¹¹⁴ In short, the priests should constitute the ideal aristocracy of intellect, being not unlike the philosopher kings for whom Plato had longed.

The priests should not, however, assume to possess an iota of temporal power. It was the mixture of spiritual and temporal power which was the great defect of antiquity, and it was the great contribution of Christianity that it had separated the two. The powers of the priesthood were, rather, to be employed in the following extra-legal manner. In the first place, they were to exercise their influence through the medium of their teaching and preaching. Then they were to give a proper direction to public opinion. Again, they might give their formal condemnation to any

¹⁰⁹Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 222-225.

¹¹⁰Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 337-9, IV, p. 64.

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 266-70.

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 262, 289-90.

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 338ff.

¹¹⁴Ibid., ppp 309-10.

act. Finally, they were to have a most important consulting function in all affairs of civic life. They might suggest action by the "secular arm of the law," but must never undertake such action on their own responsibility and initiative.¹¹⁵ It seems that Comte, like Jefferson before him, relied upon the principle that the people would sufficiently admire and respect superior intellectual and moral ability to insure their willing submission to the guidance of the priesthood—a noble theory, but something which history has thus far shown to be hopeless in practice.

The material or industrial power, as well as the actual functions of civil government, were to be divided among the classes of employers, subdivided into bankers, merchants, manufacturers, and agriculturists, each arranged on an hierarchical principle and all possessing "capacité industrielle."¹¹⁶ As the most influential and least numerous of the employer class, the bankers were to possess the most authority.¹¹⁷ The general principle of concentration of power among the employers is that there should be a single manager for the whole field of industry which one man could personally direct.¹¹⁸ While the employers have the legal right to fix their incomes at any figure they may deem desirable, still they will be checked in excessive consumption by their greater need for, and desire of, public esteem, and it is a function of the Positivist priests to make the wealthy realize their social responsibility.¹¹⁹ In this manner Comte hoped to assure both industrial efficiency and social justice. In their relations to their employees the leaders of industry should always keep in mind the two following principles: "that everyone at all times should be the entire owner of everything of which he has the constant and exclusive use;" and "that every industrious citizen shall be secured in the means of fully developing his domestic life."¹²⁰ As to the transmission of wealth and industrial function, each individual has the right to nominate his successor seven years before the date of his expected retirement and to submit this nomination to the judgment of public opinion. Free testamentary disposition of wealth was to be allowed in all cases.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 339-42.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-9; Vol. IV, p. 71.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 71, 301. On this basis American society has at present made progress towards the Positivist era. See the speech of Senator R. M. LaFollette in *The Congressional Record*, March 14, 1921.

¹¹⁸ *Polity*, Vol. II, p. 338.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 328-30, 335-6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 334-5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-1, Vol. IV, p. 291.

In regard to moral authority in the Positive state, Comte held that domestic morality should be guided by the women and public morality safeguarded by the priesthood.¹²² The moral influence of woman was to be insured by the Positivist rule of indissoluble monogamous marriage and perpetual widowhood.¹²³

With respect to foreign relations in the Positivist society, Comte held that they would be largely eliminated upon the adoption of the Positivist religion, with its universal priesthood and its tendency to dissolve the greater nations into non-tyrannical city states.¹²⁴

In the matter of individual liberty and the principles of state interference Comte erected no constitutional barriers to tyranny. The individual had to rely upon the heeding of the moral exhortations of the priesthood by the governing class. Again, the individual had no private sphere of rights which was free in any sense from invasion by some organ of the directing power of society.¹²⁵ Duties, rather than rights, were the central feature of Comte's political philosophy. In fact, the individual, as such, was practically ignored and all attention was centered upon the social organism. Even universal suffrage and parliamentary government were condemned.¹²⁶ Comte, thus, solved the problem of the reconciliation of sovereignty and liberty by failing to provide for assurance of either.

In this way Comte proposed for a theory of the state a rather curious combination of religious and intellectual idealism with benevolent, though partly non-political, paternalism. This, more than anything else, separates the doctrines of Comte from those of his successor in the field of sociology—Herbert Spencer.

7. *Public Opinion and Social Control.*

Comte laid considerable stress upon the value of public opinion as an effective agent of social control. He held that it was practically the sole guaranty of public morality, and maintained that without an intelligently organized public opinion there could be little hope of any extended reform and reconstruction of social institutions.¹²⁷ The requisite conditions, he says, for the proper

¹²² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 255-6, 338ff.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 187-196.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 251, 304.

¹²⁵ Chiappini, *op. cit.*, pp. 64f, 186. "Cette substitution des devoirs aux droits est vraiment l'idée centrale du système politique d'Auguste Comte." p. 46.

¹²⁶ Cf. Chiappini, pp. 107ff.

¹²⁷ *Polity*, Vol. I, p. 111

organization of public opinion are: "first, the establishment of fixed principles of social action; secondly, their adoption by the public and its consent to their application in special cases; and, lastly, a recognized organ to lay down the principles and to apply them to the conduct of daily life."¹²⁸ The workingmen's clubs, which were then flourishing in the first flush of enthusiastic beginnings (i. e. during Revolution of 1848), Comte looked upon as likely to be one of the great instrumentalities in getting rules of social conduct adopted by the public.¹²⁹ But, to be effective, public opinion must have an able and recognized organ of expression, for its spontaneous and direct enunciation by the people is rarely possible or effective. Once more Positivism could come to the rescue, with all the needed apparatus for an effective public opinion. Its doctrines supplied the proper rules of social conduct. The proletariat furnished the necessary dynamic power. The priest-philosopher-sociologists of the Comtian régime offered an unrivalled organ for the proper expression of public opinion. All three requisite conditions for healthy public opinion were then in existence, but not yet in a proper relation to each other. The progressive step which was needed was a "firm alliance between philosophers and proletarians."¹³⁰ Finally, according to Comte, the influence of public opinion will probably become increasingly greater in the future. "All views of the future condition of society, the views of practical men as well as of philosophic thinkers, agree in the belief that the principal feature of the State to which we are tending will be the increased influence which Public Opinion is destined to exercise."¹³¹ When it has become the great regulator of society it will eliminate revolutions and violent disputes by "substituting peaceable definition of duties."¹³²

It is perfectly obvious that in a state, like that designed by Comte, with its hierarchical arrangement of governmental agents and its hereditary transmission of them, there could be no such institution as the modern political party. The nearest thing that could be possible would be a group of agitators attempting to direct public opinion in some definite manner.

8. *The Nature of Social and Political Progress.*

In regard to the nature of social evolution and the laws gov-

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 114-15.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 117-20.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹³² Ibid., p. 120.

erning its progress, Comte was about midway between the positions of Spencer and Ward, though the latter regarded him as the founder of the principle of "social telesis." He held, on the one hand, that the general tendencies of social evolution and the fundamental lines of its progress were subject to invariable laws and confined to certain fixed stages which could not be seriously altered by human interference. At the same time, he maintained that social development might be slightly modified and considerably hastened by the intelligent co-operation of mankind, based upon an understanding of the great laws of social evolution, that is, Comte's philosophy of history. All schemes of social reform, to be successful, must be in harmony with the general march of civilization and not too far ahead of the conditions of the time. It is the function of social science to gather together all of the relevant facts concerning the course of social evolution in the past, so that the political and social policy of the present may accord with what seems to be the universal laws of development. While society need not blindly obey the laws of social evolution, but may hasten progress by intelligent action, still nothing could be more foolish than to imagine that social systems can be reconstructed in a day by the drawing up of a new constitution. Comte defended his own proposal by contending that they were not his own arbitrary propositions of reform, but merely a statement of the teachings of history and social science as to the evolution and future state of society.¹³³ Some of the more significant of Comte's remarks on the above problem are the following:

It appears, therefore, from the preceding remarks that the elementary march of civilization is unquestionably subject to a natural and invariable law which overrules all special human divergencies. . . .

Political science should exclusively employ itself in coördinating all the special facts relative to the progress of civilization and in reducing these to the smallest possible number of general facts, the connection of which ought to manifest the natural law of this progress, leaving for a subsequent appreciation the various causes which can modify its rapidity. . . .

But society does not and cannot progress in this way (i. e. by making constitutions for social reform as in the French Revolution.) The pretention of constructing off-hand in a few months or even years, a social system, in its complete and definite shape

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 234-5, IV, pp. 536, 558-61; General Appendix, third part, "Plan of the Scientific Operations necessary for Reorganization Society." 1822.

is an extravagant chimera absolutely incompatible with the weakness of the human intellect.

A sound political system can never aim at impelling the human race, since this is moved by its proper impulse, in accordance with a law as necessary as, though more easily modified than, that of gravitation. But it does seek to facilitate human progress by enlightening it. . . .

There is a great difference between obeying the progress of civilization blindly and obeying it intelligently. The changes it demands take place as much in the first as in the second case; but they are longer delayed, and, above all, are only accomplished after having produced serious social perturbations more or less serious, according to the nature and importance of these changes. Now the disturbances of every sort, which thus arise in the body politic, may be, in great part, avoided, by adopting measures based on an exact knowledge of the changes which tend to produce themselves. . . .

Now in order to attain this end, it is manifestly indispensable that we should know as precisely as possible, the actual tendency of civilization so as to bring our political conduct into harmony with it.¹³⁴

9. *The Social Environment and Social and Political Theory.*

That there is a very intimate relation between the type of social and political system and the political theory of the period was one of the fundamental theses of Comte's philosophy of history. Scientific views of society could hardly be expected in the theological period. Comte states this very clearly in the following passage: "Short as is our life, and feeble as is our reason we cannot emancipate ourselves from the influence of our environment. Even the wildest dreamers reflect in their dreams the contemporary social state."¹³⁵ His best review of this point is probably to be found in his history of the attempts to found a scientific science of society before his own day.¹³⁶ The bearing of the social and political ideas of his time upon Comte's writings is evident throughout his works.

10. *Summary.*

Comte's sociology has been called by some writers a "prolegomenon" to the subject.¹³⁷ Similarly it would not be inaccu-

¹³⁴ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 536; 558-60. For Ward's appreciation of Comte's beginnings towards a doctrine of social teleosis, see *Dynamic Sociology*, Vol. 1, p. 137.

¹³⁵ *Philosophie Positive*, Vol. II, p. 11; cited by Bristol, op. cit., p. 12.

¹³⁶ Martineau, II, pp. 197-208.

¹³⁷ E. g. Defourny, followed by Bristol.

rate to declare that the same relationship exists between his theory of the state and that of most later sociologists. The main doctrines of Comte along political lines which suggest subsequent developments are the following: (1) the sociological view of the state, and the thesis that political activities and institutions must be studied in their wider social setting and relationships; (2) the organic theory of the state, later developed by Spencer, Schaeffle, Lilenfeld, Fouillée, Roberty, Worms, and others; (3) the more universal sociological doctrine that the state is not an artificial product of rational perception of its utility, but a natural product of social necessity and historic growth; (4) the theory that the only rational limits of state activity are to be determined by a study of sociological principles and not by an appeal to "natural" laws; (5) a proper recognition of the all-important function of the broader social and extra-legal methods of social control—a line which has been exploited by such writers as Professors Ross, Cooley, Giddings and Sumner; (6) a recognition of the necessary conformity between measures for social amelioration, the fundamental characteristics of human nature and the principles of sociology—a matter to which sociologists are constantly calling the attention of the social economists and philanthropists; (7) a synthetic view of the historic process through which the present political organization has been reached, particularly suggestive for its emphasis upon the transition of the state from a military to an industrial basis—a view made much of by Spencer and later writers.

Comte's immediate influence, however, was not great and his devoted followers few. Except for Littré and his French disciples and Frederic Harrison and his group in England the Positive social philosophy was not enthusiastically adopted. But a few years after the publication of the *Polity* Darwinism made its appearance. This, together with Spencerian evolution, turned sociology in large part either into the social Darwinism of Gumpłowicz and his school or into the much less fertile field of the biological analogies developed by Schäffle, Liliensfeld, Worms and others. Spencerian sociology lent its great prestige to the defence of *laissez-faire* and to the denunciation of "social teleosis." French sociology after Comte developed chiefly in the more restricted fields of social anthropology and social psychology. Sociology in America was, for the first generation, based either on Spencerianism, as with Giddings, or upon the German *Klassenkampf* doc-

trines, as with Small and his school, or upon the French social psychology, as with Ross. Only Lester F. Ward took Comte seriously, and Ward diverged so widely from Comte in his system of social philosophy that most of his readers forgot his tribute to the Frenchman. Finally, the well-nigh complete *bourgeois* domination of western society tended to discourage the cultivation of the doctrines of a writer so critical of unregulated capitalism as Comte. Whether doctrines akin to those of Comte will have any considerable vogue in the construction of future plans of social reorganization is a problem of prophecy and not of the history of social theory, but it seems safe to say that no less comprehensive scheme will be adequate to the reorganization of the social order.

INFINITY.

BY CHARLES SLOAN REID.

From mites in myriad clans arrayed at will
Upon the ample form of parasite so small
That countless millions of its kind, in feeding, fill
With but e'en slight annoyance, faring all,
Some microscopic germ whose dermal fell
Their habitat became, as nature's due,
And each an organism, with function's cell
And gland and duct and sinew moulded true—
To mighty suns whose changing paths extend
Through nameless billions of the leagues of earth,
Described in space in orbits without end,
And each a universe in fiery girth,
And each with all its wondrous starry train
Of suns and systems still of other suns,
A minute fleck of star mist in the chain
That swings in service to more distant ones—
Still thought wings ever outward on its way,
Nor gains the merest factor in the quest,
About whose base equation might array
The first crude figment of a finite rest.