

DAVID SHILLAN

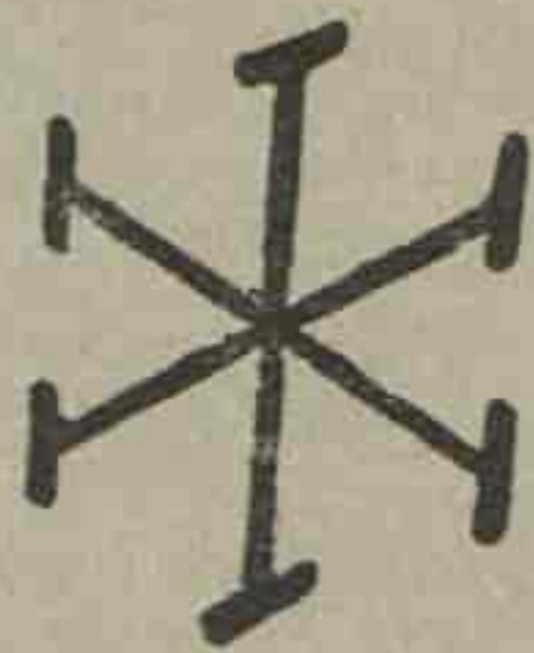
176 2213
19

THE ORDER OF MANKIND

AS SEEN BY

AUGUSTE COMTE

NINTH
FOUNDATION LECTURE
1963



New Atlantis Foundation

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТСКА БИБЛИОТЕКА
"СВЕТОСЛАВ ЦАРКОВИЋ" - БЕОГРАД
И. Бр. 174222



10-4436 8655
17519 100,00
obuelp

THE ORDER OF MANKIND AS SEEN BY AUGUSTE COMTE

Six years ago, the New Atlantis Foundation Lecture, given in this place, was devoted to 'The Christian Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov'. Solovyov himself was considerably influenced by the man whom, in a friendly reference, he called 'the godless infidel Comte', and has written some admirable pages of critical appraisal of his work. Dimitrije Mitrinović, the Founder of the New Atlantis, drew attention to the significance of Comte and often spoke of him in connection with Solovyov—and he kept this plaque of Comte's impressive head among the portraits near his desk. There are clearly excellent reasons why a New Atlantis Foundation Lecture should be dedicated to his memory and to considering Comte's place in philosophy and sociology.

For the New Atlantis is concerned with Man's taking responsibility for his life and for the world, in a way that would not have been possible in earlier times, when human consciousness was not individuated as it is today, and when the world was not yet the One World that we can hardly fail to be aware of now. A great effort of reconciliation is needed, on every plane. To enable Man's responsibility to be effective we need to move towards new, as yet unrecognised, sciences: Anthro-philosophy; then Anthro-biology, Anthro-psychology, and Anthro-sociology, representing the past and the present and the future of Man seen concretely. The first of these Foundation Lectures used the term

Anthropo-philosophy. The term Anthropo-biology has already appeared in another Foundation Lecture—that given on aspects of the work of Jaworski. Can we begin to see the possibility of Anthropo-sociology in what Sir Patrick Geddes called ‘the magnificent pro-synthetic sketch of Comte’s sociology’?

Now it is, or should be, known that the word ‘sociology’ was invented by August Comte—in 1839, to be precise—for what he had first called ‘social physics’. As a hybrid of Greek and Latin, this word symbolized the role of European culture in the leadership which he believed was the responsibility of the West to the world.

The basic elements from which society is formed had been studied in ancient India; and the modern Indian sage Bhagavan Das, to whom last year’s Foundation Lecture was devoted, developed this study in a way that makes it applicable to modern life, in ‘The Science of Social Organisation’. The particular role of Comte was to carry further than anyone else before him the theory of the application of science to society. But he has a further and possibly even more important claim on our attention, because in a manner transcending his own rationalistic theory he advanced and upheld a vision of Humanity—past, present and future—as constituting a living organism—‘Le Grand Etre’, the Great Being which alone gives meaning to our individual existences.

Comte, though the founder of the Religion of Humanity, is a very French figure—as one might say that William Morris, for instance, is a very English figure. His cast of thought, and to a considerable extent his sources, are French. We have to think of him as the prodigy of a young scholar, waiting at Montpellier because he had passed first into the Ecole Polytechnique—one of the greatest European institutions of higher education—before he was sixteen; looking out on the France that was trying to find itself after the cataclysm of the Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire and its fall, a cataclysm that had reached its climax just about the time when he was born. It had been a time of sweeping away, of tearing down, of trying to express in action some of the results of critical thinking which had characterized the preceding period, the

time of Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopædists. There was a creative and reconstructive side to their thinking too; but to collect, synthesize, formulate and advance men's thought and action after the defeat of Napoleon and in the reactionary climate which followed, was a tremendous challenge. Bridges reminds us that Comte was a contemporary of Shelley's and 'his boyhood, like Shelley's, had been marked by precocious zeal for the widest interests of humanity. Like Shelley,' says Bridges, 'he was an ardent Republican, and like him he had very early come to see that the dogmas of the Established Church were unbelievable. But to these conditions he added a vigour and firmness of character which to those who knew him recalled the old Roman type; a tenderness of nature like that of Dante, and a philosophic grasp and breadth which to some of us appears without a parallel since the age of Aristotle.'

From his young man's five or six years as secretary to the great Saint-Simon, Comte derived major influences and indeed many definite ideas that are sometimes credited to himself alone. Saint-Simon's mind was astonishingly fertile and he was a brilliant continuer of ideas first put forward by the Voltairean Condorcet, but some of them already to be seen in the work of Francis Bacon and of the XVIIth century Italian philosopher Vico, who in some sense anticipated Comte by indicating a law of three stages. Condorcet may claim to have been the first to call for a science of society based upon the study of history and aiming at a verifiable and scientific polity—and this was no later than 1792, six years before Comte was born.

Saint-Simon wrote a 'Mémoire sur la science de l'homme' in 1813. In 1817 his big work on Industry included an important contribution by Comte. At his death in 1825 Saint-Simon was working on a book called 'New Christianity'. It is possible to see that a number of the leading Comteian motifs, and indeed the first conception of Positivism itself, are to be found in Saint-Simon. In his 'System of Positive Polity', produced after his 'Positive Philosophy', Comte harshly repudiated what he called the morbid liaison of his youth with a depraved juggler; yet in a letter to a friend (quoted by Durkheim) he had admitted his debt to it and said:

‘This influence strongly served my philosophic education.’ He added ‘I certainly owe a great deal intellectually to Saint-Simon, that is to say, he contributed powerfully to launching me in the philosophic direction that I have clearly created for myself today and that I will follow without hesitation all my life’.

To the same friend he writes in 1818:

‘I have learned through this relationship of work and friendship with one of the men who sees furthest in philosophic politics. I have learned a mass of things I vainly would have sought in books, and my mind has made more headway these six months of our connection than it would in three years, had I been alone’.

It was the first chapters of the ‘Positive Polity’ that first appeared incorporated with Saint-Simon’s work on Industry, and when it was published separately—in a style somewhere between the two extremes of comment just quoted—Comte wrote:

‘Having reflected for a long time on the main idea of Saint-Simon, I applied myself exclusively to developing and perfecting that portion of the views of this philosopher which relates to scientific direction . . . I thought I had to make public the preceding statement so that, if my works appear to deserve some approval, it may go to the founder of the philosophic school of which I am honoured to be a part.’

I go into these relations between the two thinkers because it is seldom made clear. The English Positivists, for instance, were essentially Comtists, and were not much interested in doing justice to Saint-Simon. Justice to him must be done, however, when we realise that he was the intellectual father not only, in some respects, of Comte, but of four or five other French thinkers of some or of great importance, the most remarkable of whom are Fourier (though the influence in this case is disputed) and Proudhon; besides the more recent Durkheim, who is more a Saint-Simonian than a Comteian. But perhaps the best conclusion to this brief allusion to the problem would be some words of John Morley (who did not write as a Comtist himself): ‘The most cursory glance into Saint-Simon’s writings is enough to reveal the thread

of connection between the ingenious visionary and the systematic thinker. We see the debt, and we also see that, when it is stated at the highest possible, nothing has been taken from Comte's claims as a powerful original thinker, or from his immeasurable pre-eminence over Saint-Simon in intellectual grasp and vigour and coherence'.

I have mentioned the English Positivists. They were a notable group, first led by four Oxford men, all of Wadham College:—Congreve, and three of his pupils, Harrison, Beesley, and Bridges. They all attained to some eminence in their respective professional worlds, and certainly exercised some influence in the great social questions of the day, including trade-unionism, education (at the time when the first great Education Act, 1870, was beginning to be thought of), industrial welfare, and Home Rule for dependent peoples. Among much interesting information, the valuable book by McGee gives an example of how they carried Comte's ethical teachings into the fray of any prominent issue; as when there was a public exposure of the extent to which vivisection was being carried on, and Drs. Congreve and Bridges condemned it absolutely in connection with teaching, declaring that the student does not need it; and maintained that while it is useful as an instrument of research, it should be used only for a specific problem and not as a means of chance discoveries. Their reason was that a debased rule of behaviour towards animals not only tends to harm the investigators themselves but is an influence ramifying far beyond them, carrying in its train some weakening of the finer sympathies, some callousness to human suffering.

As to their feeling on the human score, there is a tremendous article by Harrison in the 'Fortnightly Review' for June, 1865, attacking with the fire of a Ruskin the flagrant abuses and exploitations of workers, especially women and children, which were still there to be attacked, in industry and in housing, in the England of less than a century ago. And not only the 'works reeking with cruel blots' came under the lash, but also 'gangs of women and children driven from farm to farm by an actual slave-driver. Is there not our rural labourer, the portent of England, without hope or energy, plodding wearily through life like his ox? And where such abomination is not, is there not amidst the

healthier forms of labour a deep class feud, and spirit of strife, sweeping across our modern industry, as the plagues and famines of the Middle Ages swept over Europe—gigantic outrages and strikes, shaking the fabric of society, and threatening its institutions; on the one side a wild sense of wrong, on the other a raging desire to be rich? These are the evils we see, and for which we need a remedy; evils of moral, of social kinds, coming out of rotten systems of life and ungovernable passions’.

I make these references to show that what we are discussing is not something confined to an ivory tower or a laboratory, but was taken by men inspired by Comte straight into the forefront of the social struggles of the day. The full history of Positivist intervention into public affairs would be a remarkable document, as is even the condensed treatment of it by McGee. In the field of trade unionism it has been recognised in the researches of Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

The theoretical fortunes of the Positivist system were perhaps less favourable. John Stuart Mill, having first responded with such enthusiasm that he organised personal financial aid for Comte at a time when it was much needed, afterwards fell out with him and with his ideas. A second leading figure in English XIXth century thought who also attacked him—in a manner which does him little credit—was T. H. Huxley. A third giant who wrote against Positivism, in the person of Harrison, was Ruskin, but his attack was the least well-informed of all: he did withdraw from it in face of Harrison’s counter-attack. But there was still another of the giants of the age waiting to pounce: this was Herbert Spencer, who inveighed directly against Comte for his ‘consummate passion for regulating humanity’. If the leading English philosophers and scientists of the XIXth century turned against him, among those who responded with great enthusiasm were the writers Harriet Martineau (who translated some of his work), and George Eliot (who translated Feuerbach).

We have to wait for Sir Patrick Geddes to see, and to carry over into our present century, the profound significance of Comte’s intuitive grasp of basic sociological factors, (he did not apparently study the ancient Indian sources : did he perhaps know something

of the work of Fabre d'Olivet?) and to fructify it by a synthesis with the thoroughly positive researches and methods of Frédéric Le Play. It is from this synthesis that a living and truly human sociology becomes possible, however little this study has succeeded in establishing itself in our Universities today (except perhaps among some Geographers!)—some Universities, I believe, teaching 'Sociology' without studying Comte—or Geddes—while others retreat into 'Social Science' or 'Social Studies' is an attempt to conform more closely to the scientific prejudices of our day. Another remarkable sociological writer—apparently quite forgotten today—who arises directly out of Comte is Benjamin Kidd.

Particular appreciation of his work has been found farther field, in the young nations of Latin America, where his renovation of a Catholic conception of order has evidently met a need. I have myself met a Chief Justice of Brazil who is an enthusiastic Positivist; and indeed the national flag of his country carries a motto from Comte.

But one cannot avoid a sense of historic failure about both Comte's thinking and his proposals, as he seems to have understood them himself and as they have been taken by others up to now, in comparison with his younger contemporary Marx, whose success has been a remarkable feature of the last hundred years. That is to say, Marxism has in the last half-century conquered empires, and Positivism has lost even its Chapel for the Religion of Humanity off Red Lion Square; but this turn of Fortune's wheel of historic facts may be deceptive as an indication of ultimate human significance.

The work of Comte does indeed lend itself to criticism on several scores—but mainly as a result of not being taken as a whole. His famous Law of the Three Stages (already indicated in outline by Saint-Simon) has been well, and fairly, dealt with by Solovyov, and also by Caird. But first let us hear it in Comte's own words (from the 'Fundamental Principles of the Positive Philosophy', 1830, based on his original course of lectures):

'In studying the total development of human intelligence in its different spheres of activity, from its first and simplest beginning up to our own time, I believe that I have discovered a great



fundamental Law, to which the mind is subjected by an invariable necessity. The truth of this Law can, I think, be demonstrated both by reasoned proofs furnished by a knowledge of our mental organisation, and by historical verification due to an attentive study of the past. This Law consists in the fact that each of our principal conceptions, each branch of our knowledge, passes in succession through three different theoretical states, the Theological or fictitious state, the Metaphysical or abstract state, and the Scientific or positive state. In other words, the human mind—by its very nature—makes use successively in each of its researches of three methods of philosophizing, whose characters are essentially different, and radically opposed to each other. We have first the Theological method, then the Metaphysical method, and finally the Positive method. Hence there are three kinds of philosophy or general systems of conceptions on the aggregate of phenomena, which are mutually exclusive of each other. The first is the necessary starting-point of human intelligence: the third represents its fixed and definite state: the second is only destined to serve as a transitional method’.

That is the bald first statement of the Law—many pages are devoted to expanding and illustrating it. The criticism by Solovyov, if I put it very briefly not to say crudely, is that Comte had no feeling for Theology and did not understand Metaphysics, so that to interpret his Law as a succession, according to which Theology and Metaphysics had become obsolete, was to talk nonsense, for in fact they co-exist with Science, but in different spheres. If, however, we apply the three stages to modes of explaining observed phenomena, the statement is correct and is a clear summary of the advent of scientific method as called for by Francis Bacon who (was an acknowledged predecessor of both Comte and Saint-Simon).

As to the question whether Comte is properly speaking a philosopher at all, we may perhaps accept his own definition:

‘I regret to have been obliged to employ, for want of another, a word like *philosophy*, which has been so improperly used in a multitude of different meanings. But the qualifying adjective *positive* appears to me clearly to prevent any misconception, at all events on the part of those who know its proper meaning. I

will, therefore, simply say that I use the word *philosophy* in the sense in which it was employed by the ancients, and especially by Aristotle, as comprising the general system of human conceptions; and by adding the word *positive* I wish to denote that I am considering that particular manner of philosophizing which holds that the purpose of theories, in any class of idea, is to co-ordinate facts'.

Comte's own rationalising tendency and clear logical mind (and we must remember that he gave his entire course of Philosophy in 72 lectures without a note) undoubtedly led him dangerously far, in both his explanations and his expectations, since he seems at times to have assumed that all that was needed was to indicate and propagate correct ideas, and the right human results would follow. Here he reveals a lack, for which he cannot however be blamed—since Psychology as now understood had not yet been discovered. Today, however rarely Psychology may justify the name of a science, it is known even to laymen that human actions are not normally determined by pure reason, or by a combination of reason and morals, or by feelings or motives of which we are conscious; and the absence of this knowledge in Comte undoubtedly tends to weaken his sociology and reduce his authority in modern eyes. Together with his apparent lack of humour it opens the way to the excesses of his rationalistic planning, including the insistence on Paris as the Rome of the new Religion of Humanity, and himself as its Supreme Pontiff. The hierarchic discipline of his scheme was enough to rouse the ire, and indeed the fear, of such champions of liberalism as J. S. Mill, and is a major cause of its failure as an organised movement.

At a later date, Comte's thinking is completely out-rationalised by the brilliance of a Pareto, striking sparks on him right and left. But one cannot live by Pareto, as men have lived by Comte.

Taking it together, as we must, with his own life-story—the devout Catholic mother, the unfortunate marriage, the abortive romance with Clotilde de Vaux and the rigid cult of her memory,—we see the man in his human limitations. But to judge him by these would be unworthy of his stature and false to his method, and our concern must be to see in what his greatness really consists, and to try to develop our own power to appreciate it.

In attempting to assess the significance of Comte for Sociology, and as one of the forerunners of Anthro-po-sociology, it is perhaps wise not to go into too much detail. Comte himself was so confident of the rightness of his conception, worked out with such exceptional consistency for a whole lifetime, that he did go into considerable detail of his plan for the immediate reorganisation of the West and the World. He would no doubt have been wiser to allow pupils and colleagues to work out the details, to begin to take over the extension of his work, and to prepare for direct succession to himself in authority. As it was, he left too much in apparently rigid form of instructions, and no one whom he was prepared to recognise to fill the supreme position which he had undertaken himself. He sometimes reminds us of the Christians of the early Church, who confidently expected the Last Judgment in their own lifetime, for he estimated as no later than the end of the XIXth century the time when the largest nations of Europe would be Portugal and Ireland. Yet the significant point here is not the timing, which he may even have adopted deliberately as a way of dynamising his followers, but the soundness of his principle. It required some prescience in mid-nineteenth century to foretell that there would be a separate Irish nation within a century, as indeed came to pass. His view that within the same time France would have become seventeen small republics is not a crazy delusion but an indication of a very sound principle, fully supported by Sir Patrick Geddes in the present century, that a federation of Swiss-type cantons, representing a modern form of the Greek city-state, would be a great deal healthier and more human than the bigger and bigger Leviathan states and blocks with which we have, in general, been afflicted. The break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was indeed a step in Comte's direction, and the possibilities of such movements are far from being exhausted. As Geddes put it—and this is fully in the spirit of Comte—we should aim at making communities more individualised and individuals more socialised. We see an example of this in the nation of Yugoslavia—emerging from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and today consisting not of a unitary state but a federation of six Republics and two Autonomous Regions. Our current newspapers in this country tell us of a Government proposal to set up a

centre of government at Newcastle for the Province of the North-East, and of a vision of Wessex reborn in glory with King Alfred's golden dragon standard flaming from its flag-pole when the Governor and Executive Council meet in their Palace at Winchester.

To follow Comte's thinking towards its application to society we must establish the step from his Law of the Three Stages, referred to already. He saw the first or Theological stage as being marked by conquest, the second or Metaphysical stage as being concerned with defence, and the third or Positive stage as being the age of Industry. (His debt to Saint-Simon must be noticed in this connection.) In order to apply science to society, an ordering of the sciences is needed, and this necessary step towards a philosophy of the sciences is carried out by a fine example of Comte's thinking. He wrote, in the first chapter of his 'Positive Philosophy':

'Now that the human mind has founded celestial physics, terrestrial physics (mechanical and chemical), and organic physics (vegetable and animal), it only remains to complete the system of observational sciences by the foundation of Social Physics. This is at the present time, under several important aspects, the greatest and most pressing of our mental needs'.
He adds:

'The formation of Social Physics at last completes the system of natural sciences. It therefore becomes possible and even necessary to summarise these different sciences, so that they may be co-ordinated by presenting them as so many branches of a single trunk, instead of continuing to look upon them as only so many isolated groups'.

And again further on:

'All that is necessary is to create one more great speciality consisting in the study of scientific generalisations'.

And he adds:

'At the same time, the other scientists, before devoting themselves to their respective specialities, should have received a previous training embracing all the general principles of positive knowledge'.

Later on he makes a further observation even more obviously



relevant to one of our main educational problems of today, when he says:

‘An intelligent person who wishes at the present day to study the principal branches of Natural Philosophy, in order to acquire a general system of positive ideas, is obliged to study each separate science in the same way and with the same amount of detail as if he wished to become an astronomical or chemical specialist, etc. This renders such an education almost impossible and necessarily very imperfect, even in the case of the most intelligent minds, placed in the most favourable circumstances’.

The significance of this remark is enhanced later on, when he says:

‘The great political and moral crisis of existing societies is due at bottom to intellectual anarchy. Our gravest evil consists, indeed, in this profound divergence which now exists among all minds, with regard to all the fundamental maxims whose fixity is the first condition of a true social order’.

Comte, by the whole trend of his thinking, looks to a historical order of classification for the sciences, but keeps in view at the same time a logical order based on decreasing generalisation.

‘Thus it appears to me unquestionable that in the general system of the Sciences, Astronomy should be placed before Physics (properly so called); and yet several branches of physics, especially optics, are indispensable to the complete exposition of astronomy’.

Nevertheless he is able to sum up:

‘Physicists who have not first studied Astronomy, at least under its general aspect; Chemists, who before applying themselves to their special science, have not previously studied Astronomy and then Physics; Physiologists who have not prepared themselves for their special labours by a preliminary study of Astronomy, Physics and Chemistry; all these lack one of the fundamental conditions of their intellectual development. This is still more evident in the case of students who wish to devote themselves to the positive study of Social phenomena, without having in the first place acquired a general knowledge of Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry and Physiology’.

The synoptic view of the sciences thus worked out by Comte

therefore gives us, in descending order of generality and increasing order of complexity:—

1. Mathematics,
2. Astronomy,
3. Physics,
4. Chemistry,
5. Physiology,
6. Social Physics—later christened Sociology,
7. Ethics or Morals—added subsequently as the final science.

It is now possible to see how his thinking led him in the end back to religion—the Religion of Humanity, a religion without the supernatural—which Huxley jeered at as ‘Catholicism minus Christianity’.

Comte saw, and it is one of his great values, that in society there operate the three factors which are distinguishable in the individual man—his willing, his thinking, and his feeling. This basic tri-unity has indeed been studied and systematized in philosophy from ancient India, through ancient Greece, and in Christianity. Comte’s own view was that if these principal functions of life can be attributed correctly and pursued consciously, the result would be a harmonious, healthy and creative life for society and for mankind as a whole. For he did take the unusual step of conceiving mankind as a whole, and really meant it literally and seriously—as so few have done. His use of the word ‘organic’ shows how literally he meant it, even though the conception of ‘function’, sociologically speaking, was not so fully developed in Comte as it later became in Geddes and Ramiro de Maeztú. From a fairly early stage in Comte’s work he insists that we must ‘prendre la direction organique’, and his ‘Grand Etre’ only gives difficulty to rationalistic followers of Positivism because his vision of it transcends the obviously observable phenomena of Man Present, to include simultaneously Man Future and Man Past. He points out that we the living are only a minority of Humanity. But it must be noted that he emphasizes that not everyone in human form is worthy to be considered as a member of Humanity. One of his definitions of ‘Le Grand Etre’ is:

'the assemblage of beings, past, future and present, who of their own free will work together towards the perfecting of universal order'.

With the almost mystical quality which entered his work after the death of Clotilde de Vaux, he reaches a stage, with his Religion of Humanity, which no one could have foreseen from the logical development of his thinking as set forth in the seventy-two lectures of his Course of Positive Philosophy (which, it may be remembered, were attended by some of the greatest mathematicians and biologists of the age). Yet it would be a mistake to separate this part of his work from what most people would regard as his social philosophy pure and simple, for his is not in fact a purely 'scientific' observation of data, in the modern sense of 'scientific', but a view of society which is *concerned* about society and about man's destiny. It might therefore be defined as a 'normative' sociology—hence perhaps its unpopularity today.

To return, then, to Comte's analysis: he sees the WILL function as represented by Industry, with its two sides of Workers and Chiefs working together; THINKING is represented by Intellectuals, led by those who according to the Religion of Humanity would be the Priests—men qualified in all seven of the sciences; while FEELING is represented by Woman. This fourfold view of society, which it is very interesting to compare with the ancient Indian view, is later developed by Geddes.

Comte, with his synoptic view of the sciences as a whole, was able to interweave them with unusual flexibility. Hence his striking use of the terms 'Social Statics' and 'Social Dynamics'. The former deals with the conditions of existence common to all human societies: that is to say it is the Theory of Order. The latter deals with the laws of the evolution of societies: that is to say it is the Theory of Progress. Both are necessary for the constitution of a Positive Sociology. As Comte himself pointed out in surveying the state of such studies known to him, the theory has constantly outstripped the known facts and has acquired a metaphysical flavour. A modern writer on sociological method (John Madge in 'The Tools of Social Science') maintains that this is still the case.

Comte laid an emphasis on the basic principles of human order which modern social scientists find unpalatable, and which, since

Geddes, have been allowed to drop. An example of these principles is the attention given to Spiritual and Temporal powers, and the right relationship between them. Solovyov takes this distinction very seriously and traces it as a mainspring of European history. Another is the factors *State, Family and Church*. It is necessary for us to make the effort to follow him in the processes of thought and vision which led him from his Positive Philosophy to his Positive Polity and thence to the Religion of Humanity, with its implication of a New Order which was to be the final Order of Man, through its expression, in social and cultural forms, of the essential and unchanging functions of the Being Man.

In his ethical teaching and in the rituals and social sacraments of the Religion of Humanity, Comte maintains a theoretical basis consistent with his whole Positive philosophy. But, as Caird points out: 'Comte's own theory, like every intelligible view of the world, involves a metaphysic and ends in a theology'. Caird emphasises that 'Comte is not simply an agnostic; he does not deny the reality of the wants which Metaphysics and Theology have hitherto striven to satisfy; nor does he hold that these wants are, by the nature of things and of the human intelligence, for ever precluded from satisfaction'. What he does maintain is that it is the function of Religion to *unify*, and he believes that correct thinking has led him to a conception of Religion which is universal and final. Some of his ethical precepts show how warmly as well as deeply he considered human needs and the surest ways of meeting them, as for example:

- 'Act from affection, and think in order to act',
- (or as its original metrical form has been rendered in English—
- 'Action from impulse springs; thought guides the act'.)
- or 'Live for others; live openly'.
- or 'Between the World and Man, we need Humanity'.

He believed that Humanity depended for its fulfilment on the element of affection, devotion and self-sacrifice which he saw as represented by Woman. (It should be understood that he always spoke of *Le Grand Etre* as a feminine being, and it was sometimes represented in his followers' meeting-places by a reproduction of the Sistine Madonna. Solovyov has a most interesting discussion

of this in relation to his own vision of Sophia). Much of Comte's teaching on these matters is expressed in a dialogue between a priest of the Church of Humanity and a woman, brought up as a Catholic, who seeks instruction. The Priests (who, you remember, have been educated in all seven of the sciences and who are doctors of medicine) are obliged to marry, so as to ensure that they come under this beneficent, altruistically-inspiring influence of woman. Marriage for all is to be lifelong and indissoluble. As Comte puts it:

'Between two beings so different as man and woman, is our short lifetime too much for getting to know and to love each other worthily?'

Comte, like Solovyov, sees conjugal love as a gateway to the possibility of universal love: he is not so naive as to expect anyone to attain to love of humanity without achieving love in a number of intermediate relationships, including family and motherland, and attaches a quite special importance to the love of man and woman.

Like Rudolf Steiner, he saw particular significance in the seven-year stages of human life, and devised appropriate sacraments for each. Among these it was only at the Sacrament of Destination, at the age of 28, that a man could become a Priest (as one may well imagine from the fullness of his preliminary training). This was indeed the age by which any man was to be formally launched on his chosen and trained career. The Priests were to be maintained through life by a 'sacerdotal subsidy' contributed by the faithful; and this was in fact how Comte himself lived for most of his life. The principle in force was one which Comte applied in a very important way to all forms of service to Humanity. He said that all such service was essentially free and that it should be granted by society the dignity of material appreciation, that is maintenance, in return. One of his mottoes should be remembered in this connection:

'Wealth is social in its source, and should be used for social purposes'.

What was Comte's attitude to existing religions? As Bridges puts it: 'The discovery of a natural law of growth in human beliefs made it possible for the first time to sympathise fully and deeply with the religions of the past; to recognise the immensity of

our debt to them; to feel our continuity with them. It lies therefore at the very root of the religion of Humanity'. It is curious to note that of the three stages into which the Theological stage is subdivided—Fetichism, Polytheism, and Monotheism—it seems to be what Comte calls Fetichism that comes nearest to his active sympathy. As Bridges puts it 'The affinity between Fetichism and Positivism is one of the most impressive and fertile conceptions of his philosophy'. Comte sees in this light all the manifestations in which our reverence and love flow over from animate to inanimate things—as they do in the poetry of a Wordsworth or the prose of a John Cowper Powys. This particularly applies to everything associated with the great figures of Humanity.

In this spirit Comte drew up a reformed calendar (one aspect of which, a fixed date for every day of the year, has just been agreed by the Vatican Council), and he used it as a way of bringing home to his followers how literally he meant them, and wished for all men, to practise the truly religious activity of veneration. He called his thirteen months after the thirteen great men whose contribution seemed to him the most significant in the history of humanity. Others were remembered each week, and indeed there was one for each day, the first day of the year being set aside as a sort of All Saints Day. (Incidentally, for those who are curious to know what he thought of us islanders, more than sixty of his selection of great men are British). In all of this we see how seriously and how concretely he takes his vision of Humanity, a somewhat similar view of which emerges at about the same time in the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach.

The seven Sacraments of the Church of Humanity have already been referred to. Together with the regular veneration of the great figures of Humanity, the main practice of the Positivist religion, as such, was prayer. This, naturally enough, was to be understood as an extended expression of veneration, adoration and dedication of one's powers to the service of Humanity, and not a supplication for benefits to be received. Fine examples of such devotions are to be found among the published writings of Dr. Bridges. The finest statement of Comte's considered attitude to religion is in his own words, at the beginning of the last volume he lived to write. It was a treatise on mathematics, intended to be

followed by three volumes dealing, respectively, with human nature, education, and man's work in the world. This is how the treatise on mathematics begins:

'The subordination of Progress to Order, of Analysis to Synthesis, of Self-love to Love of others; these are the three modes, practical, theoretical and ethical, of describing the problem of man's life; the attainment of complete and lasting unity. These various ways of stating what is in truth one question correspond to the three sides of our nature, activity, intelligence, and feeling: but so inter-dependent are these, that the three aspects of the problem are not merely connected, they are identical. Nevertheless the last of these takes precedence of the two others, since it alone touches the direct source in which the solution is to be found. For Order implies Love; Synthesis is impossible except as the result of Sympathy. Consequently unity in speculation and unity in action are impossible without unity in feeling. Therefore Religion is more important than Philosophy or Polity. And thus in the last resort it may be said that the problem of life is to bring about harmony in our feelings by enlarging social love and repressing self-love. To do this implies the subordination of change to permanence, and of the spirit of detail to large conceptions of the whole.'

So here we have, I suggest, the answer to those who would pay lip-service to Comte but set aside his Great Being and his Religion of Humanity as impossible eccentricities. A truer interpretation might be to maintain that Comte's religion *is* his sociology. Academic sociology has rejected this, and so the word itself has degenerated until it can legitimately be said by one of the most serious and sensitive of our Christian educationists today, that 'there is no need for sociology or psychology or any of the sciences to *believe* in man'. This makes the dilemma plain. Comte has proclaimed the science of society: 'science' must mean, in the generally accepted terminology of our day, measurement without valuation. And so Sociology has been defeated because the meaning of 'science' has shrunk. The word originally meant 'knowledge', so that a true science of man would mean knowledge of

man. And that means Man in his entirety, his thinking, his feeling, his willing; his bodily and his non-bodily attributes—in short, his body, soul, and spirit.

‘Auguste Comte’, wrote the Christian philosopher Solovyov, ‘is the first to deserve the honour and merit of not being satisfied with the clear and well-looking conclusion’ that it is the State which bestows fullness of life on the individual, as man and citizen. Comte, he says, ‘was one of the first and the few to understand that the nation in its actual empirical reality is essentially relative’. ‘It is a still greater merit and glory of Comte’s that he indicated more clearly, fully and decisively than any of his predecessors that ‘something’ other—the collective whole which, in its inner essence and not merely externally, surpasses every individual man and actually completes him, both ideally and really: he indicated *humanity* as a living positive unity embracing us, as pre-eminently ‘The Great Being’—‘*le Grand Etre*’.

As Comte himself puts it:

‘Careful study of the world-order reveals to us the pre-eminent existence in it of a real Great Being which, as destined continually to perfect that order and make it conform to itself, represents in the best possible way its true nature. This indubitable Providence, the arbiter of our fate, necessarily becomes the common centre of our feelings, thoughts and actions’.

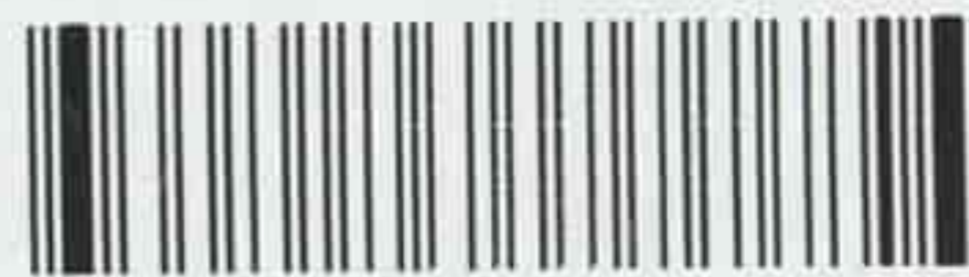
To Solovyov this vision of Comte’s, though only half understood by Comte himself, represents the very essence of Christianity; and in the current efforts of Christianity to understand itself—that is to say, to become thinkable and actable, and to build a bridge between the Churches and the rest of the world—we can see that there is an essential place for the vision of the Order of Mankind as seen by Auguste Comte.



M



ПБ19 2213



300174222

COBISS ©

Published by
New Atlantis Foundation
Norfolk Lodge
Richmond Hill · Surrey