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## **AUGUSTE COMTE AND SOCIOLOGY**

It is presented Auguste Comte who coined the term «Sociology», and is usually regarded as the first sociologist. Sociology is the science that comes after all the others; and as the final science, it must assume the task of coordinating the development of the whole of knowledge.

**Key words:** Auguste Comte, Positive Philosophy, Sociology.

Auguste Comte was born in Montpellier (Jan. 19, 1798) died of stomach cancer on September 5, 1857 in Paris, France. He was buried in the Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. Best known for: 1) Founder of positivism; 2) Coined the term sociology; 3) His emphasis on systematic observation and social order [5]. And now his apartment, where he lived from 1841 to 1857, has been preserved as the Maison d'Auguste Comte which is a private museum.

After attending the Lycée Joffre and then the University of Montpellier, Comte was admitted to the École Polytechnique in Paris. The École closed in 1816 at which time Comte took up permanent residence in Paris, earning a precarious living there by teaching mathematics and journalism [5]. In 1817, he met Henri de Saint-Simon, a social theorist, and became his secretary and collaborator. Owing to a dispute of the authorship of their writings, this partnership ended in 1824 [2]. The relationship between Saint-Simon and Comte grew increasingly strained for both theoretical and personal reasons and finally degenerated into an acrimonious break over disputed authorship. Saint-Simon was an intuitive thinker interested in immediate, albeit utopian, social reform. Comte was a scientific thinker, in the sense of systematically reviewing all available data, with a conviction that only after science was reorganized in its totality could men hope to resolve their social problems.

Though Comte did not originate the concept of sociology or its area of study, he greatly extended and elaborated the field. Comte divided sociology into two main fields: social statics, or the study of the forces that hold society together; and social dynamics, or the study of the causes of social change. While the concept of sociology was around before Comte, he is credited with coining the term sociology [5]. His major publications are: *The Course on Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842), *Discourse on the Positive Spirit* (1844), *A General View of Positivism* (1848) [1], *Religion of Humanity* (1856) [5]. His works had great influence on renowned social thinkers like Karl Marx, George Eliot to a great extent. His concept of social evolutionism acted as a great inspiration for the development of modern academic sociology [2]. His influence on 19th century thought, in general, was immense, although he is almost always

overshadowed by Marx and Darwin. His ideas influenced John Stuart Mill (who supported him financially for many years), Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, and Edward Burnett Tylor.

Comte coined the term "sociology", and is usually regarded as the first sociologist. His emphasis on the interconnectedness of different social elements was a forerunner of modern functionalism [7].

Auguste Comte or Isidore Auguste Marie François Xavier Comte was a prominent French philosopher. He introduced a new discipline namely Sociology and divided this subject in two categories – "social statics", which denotes the forces holding society together and "social dynamics", which indicates the forces responsible for social change. He, for the first time, proposed the idea of positivism, a philosophy of science that gained wide recognition in the second half of the nineteenth century. Most of his works reflect the influence of the utopian socialist Henri Saint-Simon with whom he worked as a secretary. He endeavoured to cure the social maladies of the French Revolution with the help of his newly developed positive philosophy. His law of three stages is an attempt to describe the historical sequence of human mind in three steps - theological, metaphysical and positive [2].

One universal law that Comte saw at work in all sciences he called the 'law of three phases'. It is by his statement of this law that he is best known in the English-speaking world; namely, that society has gone through three phases: Theological, Metaphysical, and Scientific. He also gave the name "Positive" to the last of these because of the polysemous connotations of the word.

The Theological phase was seen from the perspective of 19th century France as preceding the Enlightenment, in which man's place in society and society's restrictions upon man were referenced to God. By the "Metaphysical" phase, he was not referring to the Metaphysics of Aristotle or any other ancient Greek philosopher, for Comte was rooted in the problems of French society subsequent to the revolution of 1789. This Metaphysical phase involved the justification of universal rights as being on a vauntedly higher plane than the authority of any human ruler to countermand, although said rights were not referenced to the sacred beyond mere metaphor.

What he announced by his term of the Scientific phase, which came into being after the failure of the revolution and of Napoleon, was that people could find solutions to social problems and bring them into force despite the proclamations of human rights or prophecy of the will of God. In this regard he was similar to Karl Marx and Jeremy Bentham. For its time, this idea of a Scientific phase was considered up-to-date, although from a later standpoint it is too derivative of classical physics and academic history. The other universal law he called the 'encyclopedic law'. By combining these laws, Comte developed a systematic and hierarchical classification of all sciences, including inorganic physics (astronomy, earth science and chemistry) and organic physics (biology and for the first time, physique sociale, later renamed sociologie) [7; 3].

Comte formulated the law of three stages, one of the first theories of the social evolutionism: that human development (social progress) progresses from the *theological*

*stage*, in which nature was mythically conceived and man sought the explanation of natural phenomena from supernatural beings, through *metaphysical stage* in which nature was conceived of as a result of obscure forces and man sought the explanation of natural phenomena from them until the final *positive stage* in which all abstract and obscure forces are discarded, and natural phenomena are explained by their constant relationship. This progress is forced through the development of human mind, and increasing application of thought, reasoning and logic to the understanding of world.

A. Comte offered an account of social evolution account, proposing that society undergoes *three phases* in its quest for the truth according to a general 'law of three stages'. The idea bears some similarity to Marx's view that human society would progress toward a communist peak. This is perhaps unsurprising as both were profoundly influenced by the early Utopian socialist, Henry de Saint-Simon, who was at one time Comte's teacher and mentor. Both Comte and Marx intended to develop, scientifically, a new secular ideology in the wake of European secularization [4].

The final science which Comte claimed to have discovered and one which had not yet entered its positive stage, was sociology. It was sociology, he claimed, that would give ultimate meaning to all the other sciences – it was the one science which held the others together. Only sociology would reveal that man is a developing creature who moves through three stages in each of his sciences. With this profound assertion, Comte argued that we could finally understand the true logic of mind. And in the 47th lesson of the fourth volume of the *Course of Positive Philosophy*, Comte proposed the word sociology for this new science rather than the current expression, *physique sociale* (or social physics) [6].

Sociology was divided into two distinct parts. On the one hand, there was social statics, that is, the study of socio-political systems relative to their existing level of civilization. On the other hand, there was social dynamics which entailed the study of the three stages. Statics and dynamics then, are branches of the science of sociology. Comte also added a division between order and progress. Order exists when there is stability in fundamental principles and when the majority of the members of society hold similar opinions. Progress, on the other hand, was identified with the period following the Protestant Reformation up to the French Revolution. What was now needed, Comte told his readers, was a synthesis of order and progress in a higher, scientific form. Once a science of society had been developed, opinions would once again be shared and society would be stable. Once there was true social knowledge, people would not be as willing to fight over religious or political opinions. Liberty of conscience, Comte declared, is as out of place in social thought as in physics, and true freedom in both areas lies in the rational submission to scientific laws. The gradual awareness and understanding of these laws is what Comte meant by the word progress.

Comte's sociology was overly intertwined with his own ideas of the correct polity. In his view, society had broken down as a result of the French Revolution. The Revolution was a good thing – the Revolution had also been necessary because the *ancient regime* – based as it was on obsolete theological knowledge – no longer

served as a respectable basis for shared opinions. It was the progress of the sciences that had undermined this basis. The Revolution offered no grounds for the reorganization of society because it was negative – that is, the Revolution destroyed the old without creating the new [6; 8].

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