

# AUGUSTE COMTE<sup>1</sup>

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Sometimes, midway through tranquil nights of work, a crisis of incertitude, caused by fatigue, throws my spirit into turmoil and confusion. My pen slips away and ideas cease following each other steadily. I get up, shake the sort of torpor that results in immobility; but, neither walking nor physical rest restores that lost assurance to the spirit; he needs assistance which is spiritual and which moves him with images worthy of him. This is not the moment to appeal to the poets, nor to open some science handbook, because totally pure science would seem cold and poetry all by itself would be like an infinite void. I regard as happy those men of my generation who, without being positivists in the proper sense of the term, can, in the same situation, recall the ethics and logic of Comte.

If it is true that there were masters, if it is false that heaven and earth, and the means of interpreting them, came into the world only on the day of our birth, I knew no man's name which is necessary to pronounce with a feeling of more vivid recognition. His image cannot be evoked without emotion.

This small emaciated old man, with gentle eyes, whose tragic facial expression reminds us at the same time of Baudelaire and Napoleon, brings together great and precious resources against our sudden weaknesses and the treasons of destiny. I am not one of those who recites to himself some of Comte's expressions while accompanying them with signs of cabal and religion; but, familiar with them for quite some time, I cannot give to any one of them an indifferent sense. The most abstract of them touch me, incidentally, with a magnetic light.

In a low voice, in the silence of the night, it seems to me that I repeat the holy syllables:

- Order and Progress
- Family, Country, Humanity
- Love as the principle and order as the basis, progress as the goal
- Everything is relative, that is the absolute principle
- Infer in order to deduce, so as to construct
- To know in order to foresee, to foresee in order to make possible
- The spirit must always be the master of the heart, never its slave
- Progress is the development of order
- Subordination is the basis of improvement

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<sup>1</sup> There are in Paris two quite distinct sources of teachings on the work and life of Auguste Comte, both valuable: the famous building of the Positivist Society, 10 rue Monsieur-le-Prince, and the place of the testamentary execution, 41 rue Dauphine. The latter meeting place is less known. It is from there however that the most active publicity comes. The *Appel aux Conservateurs*, the *Testament*, the *Synthèse*, a volume of Letters, the latter previously unpublished, were published in the rue Dauphine in a very short time. In any case, it is never necessary to lose the view that such a book of Comte, when missing in the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, is plentiful in the rue Dauphine, and vice versa.

- The most noble phenomena are everywhere subordinated to the coarsest
- The living will always, and more and more, be governed by the dead
- Man must more and more subordinate himself to humanity

The weightiness of these phrases, their austerity, their coarseness adds to them the charm of naïve vigour. One hears them completely only after the time and leisure of introduction. An habitué of Comte ends up surprised to hear the dryness of his philosophic language criticised. He cannot help ranking these sentences with the best moral and proverbial verses of a Lysis, a Virgil, or a Pierre Corneille. He finds them swollen with shrewd consolations and subtle encouragements like all the verities that defy doubt. Gentleness, tenderness, firmness, incomparable certitudes, it is all that encloses for a student of Comte the terrible word, so little understood<sup>2</sup>, of Positivism!

We would understand nothing of the master if we don't form first of all a clear idea of his follower. It is with this that we must begin.

## ANARCHY IN THE XIX<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

In the last days of 1847, or the first of 1848, a young man barely of age, heard at the College of France someone—I don't know who—announce from his rostrum these words, perhaps emphasised with applause: "The victor, in the great battle to which we are still witnessing, is the principle of scrutiny; the vanquished is the principle of authority. Thus the government of the future will be the Government of Scrutiny. I don't say that this is a good thing, I recognize all its drawbacks, but I consider it to be a fact."

These are the words of the century. All the children of last century were more or less enthralled by the official report of this alleged fact.

Although born in a period of crisis, the young Charles Jundzill (the name of the listener at the College of France) was constrained early on to give a precise sense to the words which he heard. He forced himself in vain to find a plain meaning to the term "government of scrutiny", and no normal mind, in one of the normal ages of humanity would find this meaning, which does not exist. Whoever scrutinises no longer governs; whoever governs no longer scrutinises. The proper act of government and the proper act of scrutiny exclude each other. A government can begin by surrounding itself with the light of scrutiny; from the moment that he governs, he took his course of action, scrutiny ended. All the same, scrutiny can reach, by chance, the government: as long as it remains itself, scrutiny does not govern.

And, without doubt, Charles Jundzill saw well that the custom of scrutinising had been established in his century and in his own intellect: but he did not see how to draw a direction from that custom and his experience showed him that one should draw from it the opposite.

"Strange government that of scrutiny!" he told himself. "Strange mental and social situation that those who insist on always scrutinising, then scrutinise again. Strange spirits who mutually discern each other, or who attribute to themselves, the titles of philosopher and thinker, and whose view is at this point limited, that they take *the means for the end, that they regard as the result of the crisis what is nothing but the crisis itself!*..." Charles Jundzill translated here the astonishment and the outrage that brought him the wager that his entire century upheld in political matters; but he suffered from it in many other regards. He suffered from it in the organisation of his life: for the principle of scrutiny no longer

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<sup>2</sup> Positivism accepts, in general, only what is seen and touched!

furnished any means of ordering private conduct; he suffered from it again in the march of his thought: scrutinising teaches neither to choose nor to classify nor to organise useful ideas and true ideas.

He suffered from it. I would have had to say that he had suffered from it, for the personal malaise of Charles Jundzill found itself already dissipated when he explained it to Auguste Comte in a letter<sup>3</sup> that I summarise and develop according to the likelihood of his spiritual state. This preliminary uneasiness was eminently typical and significant. It represents with much vigour the uneasiness of almost all the spirits born Catholic, but who had become estranged from Catholicism. Charles Jundzill, originally from Poland, was from birth and formation very purely Roman: now, since before his nineteenth year, he had thought up to the evidence his incapacity for faith, and especially faith in God, principle and end of the Catholic organisation.

Was it philosophy, was it science that had reduced him to the impossibility of believing? Whatever the influence the young man was subjected to, this was the fact. He no longer believed, and from that came his worry. We would be using quite an inexact language if we said that he missed God. Not only God was lacking in his spirit. But his spirit felt, if I dare express myself this way, a rigorous need *to lack God*: no theological interpretation of the world and of man was any longer endurable to him. I'm not examining here whether he was right or wrong, nor whether he was moving forward or backwards. He was there. But, with God eliminated, there remained the intellectual, moral, and political needs which are natural to all civilised men and to which the Catholic idea of God had provided in full for a long time.

Charles Jundzill and those like him no longer admit God, but order is necessary to them in their thought, order in their life, order in the society which they are members of. This need is without doubt common to all our fellow human beings; it is particularly alive for a Catholic, accustomed to receive on these three themes the greatest satisfactions. A Negro from Africa would not know how to desire very deeply that state of supreme intellectual and moral order to which he had never had access. A Protestant, son and grandson of Protestants, were early on understood to say that examination is much more precious than the order of the spirit and unity of the soul, and this tradition, fortified from one age to the next, erased from its spirit the remembrance of marvellous *all* Catholic age: although subject to the same appetites for unity and order as the other human thoughts, he is not obsessed with the image of a lost paradise: he even draws a very naïve pride from his disorder.

But, among the Catholics distant from the faith, this type of nostalgia can become so conscious, that the apologists of their religion formed an argument for it of extreme intensity. Human life, they say, has only one axis, lacking which, it dissociates itself and floats. Without the divine unity and its consequences of discipline and dogma, mental unity, moral unity, political unity disappear at the same time; they reform themselves only if one re-establishes the primal unity. Without God, more than true or false; more than law, more than right. Without God, a rigorous logic is as good as the worst folly to the most perfect reason. Without God, to kill, to steal are acts of a perfect innocence; there is no crime which becomes indifferent, nor revolution that is legitimate; because, without God, the principle of scrutiny subsists alone, a principle which can rule out everything, but which can constitute nothing. The Catholic clergy gives the choice between its dogma with the high organisation that it includes, and this absolute lack of measure and rule which nullifies or which squanders activity, God or nothing, this is the alternative proposed to the spirits tempted by doubt.

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<sup>3</sup> Auguste Comte placed this letter at the beginning of the *Synthèse subjective*.

A few who accept it flatly choose the nothing. Rather than admit a starting point which their spirit refuses to accept, they resign themselves to the decline of institutions and customs. Such is the case of the least happy natures, for whom the idea of God appeared rather as a check and inconvenience than an excitatory and regulating principle. Such is also the case of weak natures, quick to despair, among whom all steadfast customs, once lost, can no longer be replaced. Charles Jundzill, whose case I continue to describe to you, was neither one nor the other. All while agreeing with the Catholic priests against the imbeciles and the lunatics who profit from philosophic doubt in order to disrupt order or allowing upheavals, he necessarily had to declare himself against this third and fourth class of spirits who, without resigning themselves to the nothing nor to evil left the Catholic God without leaving Him.

It was at first these church wardens of Scrutiny who, having once used intellectual Liberty against the idea of God, trained themselves to think that this liberty, placed on the throne of God, furnished them a good model of thought, morality, and civilisation: as much to hope from the axe the services of the compass or the level. This was finally this last category of anarchists who departed from Catholic dogmas, but now surreptitiously retained from them all the deductions and consequences of the moral order.

We know in France, England, and Russia many Christian atheists who construct a morality, but are afraid to motivate it. They prescribe a discipline to men, and this discipline is "independent" of all conviction; an ensemble of duties, and these duties are not attached to any faith; a system of human dependencies, and man does not depend on any system of the world for it. But it would be necessary however to choose: or better, each man is sovereign, and is only subject to his own will, or, if he is subject of a debt, it is necessary that he be told why. Liberal morality strenuously refuses to justify its imperious whims. "Hypothetical imperatives!" it says with disdain. It believes it dictates to us an absolute and categorical Imperative. Its building lasts only to the middle of some honourable pun, which conceals as best as it can the real and strong links by which these spirits hold, without knowing it, to the doctrine that they pride themselves with abandoning. If some weak heads furnished us the proof of their softness in accepting the disorder in the hatred of God, they demonstrate an equivalent type of impotence: after having broken from the Idea of God, they didn't know how to press nor to examine all those of their ideas that rested on that central idea or what derived from it. There is no accord between their fundamental denial of the divine Absolute and their not less fundamental affirmation of the absolute moral Conscience, which is itself only an unnamed and shameful God. They leave the God of the theologians behind and hardly take care in accepting, according to Rousseau and the Germans, the sovereignty of their individual Conscience, they only do to auction themselves to themselves and former attributes of God.

If you believe in the Absolute, be staunchly Catholic, a Charles Jundzill shouted to these people.

"If you don't believe in him, it is necessary to try, as we try, to reconstruct everything without the Absolute: unless, however, the priest is correct against us, as he is correct against you, and this reorganisation is a pure chimera..."

## THE POSITIVE ORDER ACCORDING TO COMTE

Was it a chimera?

When Jundzill wrote to Comte, it was exactly twenty five years previously that the philosopher pursued his program of *reorganising*, in effect, *without God or king*<sup>4</sup>.

More than Jundzill and without doubt more than anyone, the young Auguste Comte had felt the wound of anarchy and the defects that it inevitably leaves to us: nothing shows better the nobility of that spirit and the Latin blood of his race than the vigour of his reaction against such a great evil. As he says it in his Testament, he was born in Montpellier, under the Peyrou of Louis XIV, “of an eminent Catholic and monarchist family”: but since the middle of his adolescence just before entering the polytechnic school, he had repudiated the theologism in politics as well as in religion. But in spite of that he had not conceded the qualities of the divine Being nor those of the absolute Sovereign to the ideas of free examination or equality, which had served him in reaching this radical denial,. These ideas were certainly able to be accepted as “dogmas”, and “absolute dogmas”, from the time that they were necessary to destroy theologism: this acceptance could only be provisional; they don’t have their own value; they could neither control nor rule and, as principles, they are condemned to death.

For example, one cannot hold in politics, a Doctrine “which represents the Government as being, by its nature, the necessary enemy of society, against which one must carefully form a continual state of suspicion and oversight” (Liberalism); a Doctrine according to which it is necessary to “always scrutinise without ever deciding” (Protestantism); a Doctrine contradicting or unaware of this “continual progress of civilisation”, which “tends by its nature to develop in the extreme intellectual and moral inequalities”<sup>5</sup> (Democracy). This moral and political doctrine could only push to the limit an anarchy from which the young Auguste Comte, who felt a vivid disgust of it, wanted to free himself at any price.

Plato remarked that certain political questions pose to us in capital letters problems written in thin and small strokes in individual cases. Auguste Comte had perhaps been less clairvoyant if the events at which he was present<sup>6</sup> had not placed before him, in very pressing political social terms, under a revolutionary and bloody form that he calls, in the strictest and most moving of his expressions, *the huge question of order*.

In order to find order, intellectual order and moral order as well as political order, he limited the domain of anarchy the best he could.

An original fact struck him.

If anarchy had: 1<sup>st</sup> almost the entire society, 2<sup>nd</sup>, various provinces of the heart, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, several departments of intelligence, he observed however that there existed serene regions in which this anarchy

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<sup>4</sup> The words *royalty* and *king* have for Comte a well defined sense: they mean *king and royalty of divine right*. Properly speaking, neither Louis XVIII, Louis XIV, Henri IV, nor Louis XI were kings for him. Several times he calls them dictators, to indicate that there is nothing in common between their type of authority and theological sovereignty of the princes of the Middle Ages. The positivists who engaged me in a bitter dispute about that have shown they did not know their author. See the *Appendix*.

<sup>5</sup> *Cours de philosophie positive*, i. IV.

<sup>6</sup> One would find in scrutinising the correspondence of Auguste Comte, the traces of a deep emotion that caused him troubles at the same time. He experienced a sorrowful astonishment from it and the victories of order caused him a still more lively appreciation. “To see current attitudes,” he wrote, “one asks oneself what the social world would become if the living in spite of their modern revolt were not, and even more and more, governed by the ensemble of the *Dead, happily impassive* in the middle of our vain panics of devolution or anarchy.” (*Lettres d’Auguste Comte*, various, t. I, première partie.)

did not reign or no longer reigned. We find in one of the opuscles of 1822 this remark worthy of a long dissertation, since it inaugurates an epoch:

“There is no freedom of conscience in astronomy, physics, chemistry, or even in physiology, in the sense that each one would find absurd to not believe trustworthy in the principles established in these sciences by competent men. If it is otherwise in politics, that is only because the ancient principles having fallen and the new ones not yet formed, there still aren’t, properly speaking, established principles.”

*To establish new political principles*, and to establish them in a way that they are unshakable, that is to say, to found them on the same bases that support the unshakable sciences, there is the project that rolled around that twenty four year old head when he conceived his *Plan of the scientific works necessary to reorganise society*.

“In order to reorganise”, this was his principle idea: thus his goal was revealed.

“The scientific works” were “necessary”: He showed his method and defined it.

This word – scientific – is to be taken in a strict sense. Astronomy, physics, chemistry, physiology looked for and found the laws of the appearances<sup>7</sup> that they studied: it is necessary to examine how they go about it and having done this, to found in the same way a science of the higher life of man. This science will be, like the others, relative to appearances; but these appearances will be, like the others, linked by laws. To substitute the simple research of laws for the research of causes and substances which, real or imaginary, remain for us elusive: that was the new method. This method was destined to furnish the new doctrine which would be the principle of a new authority, itself destined to conquer the spirit of inquiry and to replace our transitional anarchy with the new order.

But the spirit of inquiry is not the only factor of intellectual anarchy. It determines an absence of order which is almost as pernicious as that spirit itself. Our acquired notions and even the best established are wrongly classed among them. At the interior of each science one divides and subdivides to excess. A coherent spirit never finds in it the unity whose model and love he guards. Mathematician by profession, Auguste Comte forced himself first of all to organise each branch of science that he taught. But the same work of organisation was to construct in each of the other sciences. In each one, in effect, the specialities battled for life, and their ephemeral empires, following their confused disputations, swung from moral anarchy to sterile tyranny. The specialists set themselves up as lords and masters in each branch; the concern for detail that interests them overwhelms the conception of the whole, and the spirit of detail enslaves and immobilises the human spirit.

But those who rose to the point of desiring that the whole prevails in the end over the detail is here constrained to seek what is, in general, in the scientific *order*, the detail and what is the whole, what is the most all-embracing circle and the subordinate circle, what is then the queen of sciences and what are the servile sciences: now, these determinations of the relations of the sciences either do not exist or have never been posed with rigour. To the demon of liberty that shakes up and divides each science, the demon of equality is added from one to the other. In order to hunt it, it is necessary to examine them

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<sup>7</sup> Comte said the *phenomena*. We translate here the Greek term by its literal French equivalent, in order to make it understood at what point this doctrine, affirmative and positive like science, imitates the circumspection of science, and affirms of things only *what appears in them*.

successively, to assign to them the level and dignity that belong to them. Thus the hierarchy of the sciences is reached.

This hierarchy is one of the chefs-d'œuvre of the human spirit. The philosopher naturally wanted for it to correspond to the intrinsic agreements of the objects to which each science is applied. But it also required on the one hand that it aided in the future development of the sciences in stimulating and directing their spirits, on the other hand, that it reflected the historic order in which these sciences were successively invented by the spirit of man. To satisfy the first point and to correspond to the objects of knowledge, Auguste Comte arranged the sciences in the order of decreasing generality or increasing complexity: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, and ethics. Each science is thus found determined and circumscribed, according to its proper object and particular laws. But, it is a fact of history that the most general and least complex sciences were really born first: they were and remain the condition of the existence of the more complex sciences, born in effect after them. All the same, the earlier are not useless to the later, because they plot for them a trail, they indicate to them the direction in which the progress of the human spirit is normally made. Comte says: they furnish for them precise "Destinations". As mathematics is indispensable to astronomy, astronomy to physics, physics to chemistry, chemistry to biology, biology to sociology, sociology to ethics, thus, conversely, ethics explains, perfects, directs sociology; sociology, biology; biology, chemistry; chemistry, physics; physics, astronomy; and astronomy, mathematics.

If one wants a particular example, the relations between astronomy and mathematics provide it to us. One cannot do astronomy without calculus, but the more and more subtle observations of the stars oblige calculus to become more and more complex. Calculus then permits astronomy to build up, but the progress of astronomy obliges calculus to perfect itself.

The same game of the influences from front to back and from back to front is necessarily reproduced at the other end of the chain. Ethics, that supreme policy, that type of religion to which it will be necessary that man gives his faith when he will feel that such a faith, being demonstrated to him, always remains demonstrable, ethics does not exist in the state of science, as long as sociology is not advanced; but, in its turn, in order to advance, sociology needs ethics, which poses the cases to resolve, the questions to elucidate, the precise ends to attain. Finally, both of them, sociology and ethics, cannot be properly conceived without the help of all the antecedent sciences, mathematics included; but the most remote, the first, the oldest, mathematics itself is also attracted and so *aspired* by the development of sociology which alone, according to Comte, can regenerate, systematise, and utilise it. Mathematics provides to sociology the conditions of existence; it receives from it the rules of its latest movements.

Through this beautiful and profound view, which he didn't stop clarifying and developing up until his death, Comte introduced into the sciences a new element, which would seem strange to them. To subordinate mathematics to the science of societies, isn't that to subordinate science itself to its practical utility and to thus fall again under the criticism of utilitarianism, such as Auguste Comte had himself formulated?

He had written in 1830:

*The most important applications constantly derive from the theories formed in a simple scientific purpose and which often were cultivated during several centuries without producing any practical result. One can cite a very remarkable example of it in the beautiful speculations of Greek geometers on conic sections which, after a long series of generations, served, in determining the renovation of astronomy, to*

*finally lead to the art of navigation to the degree that it attained in these days and to which it would never have appeared without the purely theoretical works of Archimedes and Apollonius; so that Condorcet was able to say with reason in this matter: "The sailor whom an exact observation of longitude preserves from the shipwreck owes his life to a theory conceived two thousand years before, by men of genius who had in view simple geometric speculations."*

This difficulty that Auguste Comte had thus set against himself can be resolved by a very simple observation. The situation of the Greek geometers was quite different from that of modern mathematicians. From their time, the science of societies has been reduced to a rather vague empiricism, and the social utility of which one could be advised then was very insular: the *Science* of societies was founded today; to the static laws discovered by Aristotle, other static laws were added, and the dynamic laws, formerly completely unknown, were just understood. All these discoveries of which Auguste Comte is the author change the face of the problem: sociology was constituted, it advances. A science, having reached its degree of organisation, became worthy of its object. When one subordinates oneself to it, one does not leave the scientific sphere, one does not make empiricism practical, one submits to the general law of human consciousnesses, which is the submission of analysis to synthesis and from the detail to the whole: the synthesis, the whole being the unique explainer and the unique indicator.

But to truly classify the sciences, is also to classify the objects of science. If all the sciences converge to the science of societies, it is because man in society represents the entire body of nature. He summarises it and crowns it. Mathematical number, member of the solar system, physical element, chemical element, living being, man is moreover a social being: it is by this latter quality that he is man; the best type of man, he who will be the most normal and the most human, who will then be the most eminently social. This will be the man in whom sociability will impose itself and rule.

In the plexus of our instincts, that pre-eminence of the social instinct establishes a new principle of classification, thanks to which moral anarchy can be eliminated, as mental anarchy had been thanks to the classification of the sciences. Sociability, instinct of instincts, plays the same role as sociology, science of sciences: it subordinates itself completely to the rest. As we know the order in which man must think, we reach here the order according to which he must feel.

Can he feel as he must? A being like man, who is eminently social, that is to say, who pulls almost all that which he is from society, its substance and its milieu, a being who lives only from others and through others, can he also live in others and for others? Can he live more and more outside of himself? One would know not to deny that he often takes pleasure in it and that disinterestedness, devotion, and sacrifice belong to mankind. The natural powers of man certainly go up to that point. There were from all times, everywhere, under all the disciplines of ethics or religion, some spirits and hearts, whose nature reaches to the sublime when they renounce themselves and prefer others. But, as Comte says, "the holy human problem" constitutes in "instituting" in a continuous and permanent manner, in a "habitual" manner, this "predominance", ordinarily temporary and accidental, or very exceptional, "of sociability over personality". It is about subordinating constantly "man to humanity", to perfect man while making him more worthy of himself, more human.

How to do it? There lies a new problem.

Sociology seized on the fact of the eminently social nature of man; ethics just makes precise what is the rule which must prevail in order to develop the best element, the social element of the human nature. Thanks to these two sciences, we know what must be done: to found the practice, to discover the



means of assuring the advantage to the best human type; these means found, it still is necessary to find the strength to put them in use.

Auguste Comte is one of the rare moralists who didn't confuse these two or three very distinct points of view. In 1826, he wrote: "Neither the individual nor the species is destined to consume their life in a sterilely argumentative activity of discoursing continually *on the conduct that they must keep to*. It is this activity that the mass of men are essentially called to." Now, nice sentiments do not suffice to direct activity. "The best impulses are habitually insufficient to direct private or public conduct when it remains always devoid of *any convictions destined to prevent or correct these deviations*."<sup>8</sup> Convictions are necessary, that is to say, a faith, that it is to say, a dogma. The "voluntary rule" must always rest on "an involuntary discipline", and this discipline must be "cherished". "*All consistency must be forbidden to sentiments which are not aided by convictions*."<sup>9</sup> In other words, a dogma is necessary: a beloved dogma. And, in order to be presented to the imaginations, to resound in hearts, these convictions require an ensemble of habitual practices. Dogma summons a cult. To this condition only religion will be complete and religion is indispensable to all morality that wants to be practiced and lived. Without religion, no effective and living morality: now, we need a morality to put an end to the anarchy of sentiments, just as a classification of sciences is necessary to put an end to the anarchy of spirits.

Auguste Comte therefore instituted a religion. If the attempt gives rise to a smile, I well know from experience that one smiles only from the error of not having penetrated very deeply his reasons for it.

Catholic dogma puts at its centre the greatest being that can be thought, *id quo majus cogitari non potest*<sup>10</sup>, the being par excellence, the being of beings and the one who says *sum qui sum*. Positivist dogma establishes at its centre the greatest being which can be known, but known "positively", that is to say, outside of all theological or metaphysical processes. The positive sciences seized and named this being in the last term of their chain when they are treated *human* society: that is the same being that proposes to every man, as its natural object, the instinctive revelation of love in the quiet solitude of a heart, which never seeks anything but it: a similar and different being, exterior to us and present at the base of our souls, near and far, mysterious and manifest, at the same time the most concrete of all the Beings, the highest of abstractions, as necessary as bread and miserably unknown by the one who has life only by it! What the synthesis says, what sympathy whispers, a religious synergy of all our natural powers will repeat it: The Great-Being is Humanity.

As one of the best disciples of Comte, M. Antoine Baumann, very justly remarked, *humanity* does not mean in any way the whole of men scattered among the living on this planet, nor the simple total of the living and the dead. It is only the group of men who have cooperated in the great human work, those who persist in us, whom we continue, those of whom we are the true debtors, the others being at times only "parasites" or "producers of manure". This large human elite is not a futile image. It forms what there is of the most real in us. We feel it as soon as we reach down to the secret of our nature. Subjects of mathematical and astronomical facts, subjects of physical facts, chemical facts and the facts of life, we are moreover subjects of special facts in the human family. We depend on our contemporaries. We depend even more on our predecessors. What thinks in us, before us, is the human language, which is not our

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<sup>8</sup> *Synthèse subjective*, 1856

<sup>9</sup> *Appel aux Conservateurs*, 1855

<sup>10</sup> Saint Thomas, following Saint Augustine and Saint Anselm (*Summa theologica* prima primae q. II. Art. I. 2)

personal work, but the work of humanity, it is also human reason which preceded us, which surrounds us and anticipates us; it is human civilisation in which a personal contribution, as powerful that it may be, is never but a molecule of a tiny energy in the drop of water added by our contemporaries in the current of this vast river. Actions, thoughts, or feelings, are products of the human soul: our personal soul is there almost for nothing. The true positivist repeats rather like Saint Paul: *in ea vivimus, movemur et sumus*,<sup>11</sup> and if he put his heart in harmony with his science and his faith, he can only add, in an act of adoration, the slightly modified words from the Psalmist: *Non nobis, Domina, non nobis, sed numini tuo da gloriam!*<sup>12</sup>

Assuredly religion so conceived is good only for us: it has a rapport only with the human race and the world where this race lives. The infinite and the absolute elude it, but it is necessary to observe here that this condition doesn't impose itself less on the most rigorous science. "Nothing prevents us," says Comte, "from imagining, outside our solar system, worlds still left to a completely disordered inorganic activity, which would include only a general law of gravity." This imagination of disorder serves furthermore to make us appreciate better and to even *cherish* (the word comes back often) the benefits of the physical order which rules around us<sup>13</sup> and of which we are the most complete expression.

This point well considered, it is useless to stop at speculative curiosities. Human logic, or philosophy, is only "the whole of the means proper to reveal to us the truths which belong to us."<sup>14</sup> The truths which belong to us. Not the others. What would we make of it? Comte doesn't cease to formulate his indifference<sup>15</sup> in regard to the latter, at the same time broadening and making precise the sphere of "what belongs to us". But in being so broadened, his philosophy approached the borders of religion that it did not delay joining. The definition we just read is from 1851. He corrects it five years later.<sup>16</sup> True logic no longer appears to him as narrow to "reveal *the truths*" which belong to us: it embraces the field of action. It systematises and rules it; "for we must systematise as much our conjectures as our demonstrations, the one and the other having to be put in the service of sociability, *the only source of true unity*." True logic is thus defined as "the normal support of the sentiments, images, and signs to *inspire* in us" (in place of *unveiling*) "the conceptions" (in place of *truths*) "which belong to our moral, intellectual, and physical needs." This philosophy and this logic want to surround and to lift up the whole soul.

Thus, knowing human needs, we will supply them, in view of satisfying them, with all that we have: truth, when we will possess a truth; fables, when the truths will fall short: neither the human spirit nor the human soul wait. What moves the sun and the other stars in the *Canticle* of Dante, the love, that Auguste Comte calls "the motor" of all activity, that love, that desire throws us forward. Let us take care to despise nothing that belongs to us. Poetry is "larger" and "not less true" than philosophy. What the philosopher can require from poetry is only to not contradict what science reveals as certain about human nature. Under this condition, may poetry have a free field! It will be able only to add to the magnificence

<sup>11</sup> "In him we live, move and have our being." [Tr.]

<sup>12</sup> "Not to us, O Mistress, not to us, but to thy name give the glory." The Psalm has "Domine" (Lord) instead of "Domina" (mistress). [Tr.]

<sup>13</sup> "Man is so disposed to the affection that he extends it without effort to inanimate objects and even to simple abstract rules, provided he recognizes in them an ordinary place with its own existence." (*Système de politique positive*, t. II.)

<sup>14</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. II.

<sup>15</sup> To the reproach of utilitarianism, same response as above. Comte would say that the sphere of what belongs to us is, thanks to him, organized: ethics is a science.

<sup>16</sup> *Synthèse subjective*.

of religion by its ornaments. Does it desire to attribute imaginary qualities to the body? It suffices that it is not “in opposition with the established qualities.” Does it desire to conceive of beings absolutely fictional? It will suffice that they serve the Great-Being and contribute to render the synthesis as moving as it is true.

Auguste Comte gave an example of it. Since the Great-Being shows us, as effectively as possible, “the entire plenitude of the human type, where intelligence assists the sentiments to direct their activity”, why not include this Planet in the tributes made to the Great-Being, with the entire system which serves it as home. Why stop there and not add to this pair of gods the Space which envelops our system? That the Earth and the planets move themselves, nothing prevents seeing in that an act of will. That Space lets itself pass over, nothing prevents explaining that this free course was led to the choir of our stars by the continuous act of immense sympathy. Nothing prevents any more of dreaming that, if Space was, that is so that the Earth, its satellite, its companions, and its sun can flourish there; it is not difficult any longer to imagine supplementarily that the Earth, which was indispensable to “the supreme existence”, wanted to compete in fact with the Great-Being. Poetry has the duty to not hold the concordance as an accident. As the savant explains men by the law of Humanity, the appeal of this Great-Being will make the poet aware of the subtle benevolence of the innumerable streams of ethereal Space<sup>17</sup> and of the courage that the Earth (and also the sun and the moon “that we owe specially honour”) exhibits and will exhibit for the common service of triumphant Humanity.

Here, the philosopher, perhaps concerned about the excess of the philosophy of history and desiring, as he says, to incorporate fetishism at the same time as a certain degree of polytheism in his religion of humanity, was regrettably wrong to ruin, while giving them an unfortunate name, these dreams which are quite beautiful. But before laughing at the Great-Fetish—that is the name that he dared to bestow on the Earth-mother—I would like that one consult, less on the world than on the thing, competent spirits and I mean the poets. I will not demand it from M. Sully-Prudhomme who has nothing of a positivist.<sup>18</sup> But M. Charles de Pomairols who spoke of the Earth with the inflexions of a pious grace, knows quite well that the sense of the terms of which he made use, for he was a very good philosopher and Comtist as orthodox as well as elegant and pure poet.

The Great-Fetish animates the cadence of these beautiful verses:

... J'ignorais tout de toi, vierge, ô blanche voisine :  
*Mais notre pays même avec grâce et douceur*  
*M'a conduit vers le bien qui manquait à mon cœur,*  
 Et, m'étant approché du parfum des prairies,  
 Invité par l'éclat des pelouses fleuries,  
 Un jour, il m'a suffi, le plus doux de mes jours,  
 De faire sous mes pas plier leur fin velours,  
 De suivre à l'abandon le ruisseau qui serpente,  
 De me laisser aller comme lui sur la pente,  
*D'entendre d'un esprit docile le conseil*  
*Que la forme du sol, sous l'éternel soleil,*  
*Avait déposé là dès l'origine ancienne,*  
*Vierge ! et je t'ai trouvée et je t'ai faite mienne !*

... I don't know everything about you, Virgin, o  
 white neighbour  
*But our same country with grace and sweetness*  
*Led me toward the good that was missing in my*  
*heart,*  
 And, having approached the perfume of the  
 prairies,  
 Invited by the splendour of lawns in bloom,  
 One day, it sufficed for me, the sweetest of my  
 days,  
 To make under my step bend their fine velvet,  
 To follow to abandon the stream that winds,  
 To let myself go like him on the slope,  
*To hear from a docile spirit the advice*

<sup>17</sup> Or Great milieu.

<sup>18</sup> The poet of *la Justice* evidently follows Kant.

*That the form of the earth, under the eternal sun  
Had settled there since ancient origins,  
Virgin! and I found you and I made you mine.*

The poets of all times had to recognize in Cybele a living body, a spirit, a will, desires. But this attribution, ordinarily due to the inspiration of instinct, is in M. de Pomairols systematic<sup>19</sup>, just as Comte's spirit wished.

Let us be quite careful about the principal characteristic of that system, which is the *natural*: the author of the *Synthèse subjective* didn't pride himself on creating his material. He had hardly dared to say like Pascal: "Order is from me." Order, in fact, was himself inscribed in the nature of things. Comte wasn't limited to discovering it there, and he made up in a rigorous series of sentiments, ideas and habits which, before him, had always more or less existed in an unattached state. That is what is necessary to not forget if one wants to know, understand, appreciate what that man, who seems prideful and who was so humble, had in his thought when he founded *his religion*. Its dogma is so little arbitrary that Comte's Mount Olympus has always made the object of the worship of delicate sensibilities and exalted imaginations, to whatever type of religion that they may belong to.

He equally classed, named, qualified all the other instinctive veneration. He organised and so to speak, adjusted as a moralist, but also as a mathematician, with precision and finesse, the noblest drives of modern man: *honour, glory, decency, enthusiasm, dignity, integrity*. He never claimed to invent them. The formulas of that system and that order could be found surprising or shocking. Before mocking them or censoring them, it is necessary to see if they correspond to recognized facts.

It is a fact that, in many spirits, religious life became an affair of tradition rather than of faith, a point of personal or domestic honour more than individual certitude.

It is a fact that the worship of the dead developed in the great cities of the Western world.

It is another fact that the judgments of posterity and visions of the future, impress and condition great souls. Before Comte had been able to speak of subjective immortality, the proud Danton had thrown to the revolutionary Tribunal his response: "*My home? Tomorrow in the nothingness, and my name in the Pantheon of history!*"<sup>20</sup> Comte observes what moves us and what rules us: he thinks about it, analyses it, generalises it and codifies it.

The worship that he adds to the dogma and ethics of his religion is only the development of Catholic worship, and that is without doubt what made it strange at first sight. Those invocations, confessions, effusions, new sacraments, that calendar in which the days and the months of the year are dedicated to the "Great types of humanity", sometimes take the aspect of a totally pure trace and other times that of a burden. All the same, the guardian angels (mother, daughter, wife, who are also named domestic goddesses), the utopia of the Virgin-Mother, the priesthood, the temple of Humanity. All the same, the establishment of the spiritual power presided by a high priest of Humanity, pope of the future. Eh! Doesn't the ritual of Catholicism also owe to the rituals of the religions which preceded it? All the religious institutions which have lived, have pulled their substance from immediate predecessors. Those who look closely at the dreams of Auguste Comte promptly grasp the reason for each rite or observance.

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<sup>19</sup> Charles de Pomairols, *Regards intimes*. – Paris. Lemerre.

<sup>20</sup> Émile Antoine. *Revue occidentale* du 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1893.

Here, the critic is limited to the observation that there is hardly an example of a cult so organised from a spurt in a single head; again there is a response to that: once the premises of Comte are posed, many of the consequences that he deduces cannot be avoided.

The worship rendered to Humanity serves precisely as continual and consistent excitatory to the powers of enthusiasm and energy accumulated in the dogma. Either Humanity will be only a general and vague term without efficacy, or we will have to rigorously clarify what it is necessary to venerate in it: time, place and persons. It will be necessary to name the great men, to dedicate days, weeks, and months to them. It will be necessary to show you the religious element, the dust of Humanity which floats around you and, as always, to classify and organise it. You will see it in the family: you will erect the domestic altar to it. You will see it in the fatherland and patriotism will have its particular rites. The woman whom you love will be you also, in all necessity, a sensitive, living and powerful image of the flame of love that chases man from himself and reveals to him that he is made for others. But, if the founder of your cult loved before you, could you refuse to accept her election to the rank of patroness and the blessed? She will represent the Woman in Humanity. With an exactitude that will touch even your senses, she will signify the rule of the heart<sup>21</sup>, but of a heart present with all the clarities of intelligence, of a regenerated and reorganised heart. She will make blossom the triumph of the soul, having arrived at its fullness on a dry and naked reason. Nothing inorganic, nothing impersonal, nothing confused can be suffered in the prescriptions of positivism. That is an extremely vibrant philosophy, depicted with the latest precision. The colour and the life which are natural to him are intensified again by that strength and clarity of design.

All the minute details to which Comte reaches, are explained the same way. Either religion, ethics, politics will hold hands; or the positive synthesis formed in spirits will not affect conduct. A positivist can abstain, by natural aridity, from repeating the celebrated formulas established by Auguste Comte with some passages from the poets that he preferred:

Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,  
Quella ch'empadisa la mia mente  
Ogni basso pensier dal cor m'avulse! Etc.

But this positivist is exactly in the same situation as the Catholic bereft of the mystical. Their worship is not complete precisely because their type is unfinished. Pure personal infirmity, which cannot stop our judgment. The different parties of Comte's positivism combine to pull the spirit or the heart from anarchy that causes it to suffer; but the entire work or that work conceived on a plan so general that this will be only capable of organising completely, definitively, head and heart, person and State. The influence of that work can be infinite: it is not unsuccessful that, in a language worthy of the highest algebra, of poetry without equal, Auguste Comte prides himself in making man "*more well-ordered than the heavens*".<sup>22</sup>

Well-ordered, not at all enslaved. From the day when this Positive Religion was established, order, having become the condition of progress, imposes the spontaneous respect of tradition, even

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<sup>21</sup> It is necessary to be heard, in fact, when one writes that the ethics of Comte established the rule of sentiment. With what disdain he writes of a person whom he didn't like: "Emanated from a stupid and anarchic father, this young woman believes and says that life never needs to be systematically ruled and that sentiment suffices to lead us". (90<sup>th</sup> letter to Dr. Audiffrent, 25 Aristote, 69)

<sup>22</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. IV.

better, “the love” of that “noble yoke of the past”, and of a more general way, the sentiment of the superiority of obedience and submission over rebellion. Everyone submits to the law, the wise man knows it, but the pious man is fond of it. If then the cult of the human Great-Being was disseminated and made obvious, the relations of universal dependence and universal hierarchy would be precisely the object of these elations, these enthusiasms, and all the sensory unrest that are exercised today in the opposite direction: this great revolutionary factor, individual temperament, sentiment, Love would be the auxiliary of the general peace.

Who has great duties must command great powers, both material and monetary: one no longer squabbles with the Governments nor other social forces which are charged with heavier responsibilities, the material and ethical capital which are necessary to them to carry the burden of it. The elective regime is replaced, in a positive sociocracy, by a type of adoption which gives to the “worthy leaders” the right to designate their successors. The strong devote themselves to the weak, the weak venerate the strong. A powerful patriarchy is constituted; the proletarians group themselves around it, all “envious sources of democratic revulsion” having been fully dried up: masters and servants know each other totally formed one in view of the others. The directors rule themselves on the advice of the priesthood, a spiritual power which keeps itself from usurping power,<sup>23</sup> knowing that its function is only that of advising, not to assume rulership in any case.

Sterile discussion is finished forever, human intelligence dreams to be fruitful, that is to say, to develop the consequences in place of discussing the principles. The dissidents are few. The conquests of order eliminate necessarily the last partisans of the ideas of the Revolution, which form “the most harmful and the most backward of the parties”.<sup>24</sup> All the good elements of the revolutionary party abjure the principle of free inquiry, of the sovereignty of the people, of equality, and socialist communism: “revolutionary dogmas that all truly organic doctrine must exclude beforehand”, and for those one would like to impose “today materially a legal reverence.” These subversive dogmas are going to die from weakness. The good elements of the reactionary party abjure, at least in politics, theology and divine right. Positivists make a political alliance with the first party, and with the second, a religious alliance. For the first have ardour and life, seeds ignited by progress and the second possess a discipline of the greatest price. “Without having to become fully positivist, the true conservatives can wisely make some use of it.”<sup>25</sup> Man abdicates his claimed rights, but he fulfils the duties that perfect him. The spirit of anarchy comes to an end, the old order merges little by little with the new order.

Without skipping a beat, the cult of Humanity is substituted for Catholicism, which Comte dares to call “the polytheism of the Middle Ages”, by means of the transition carefully handled by the Virgin Mother, that “goddess of the Crusaders”, “true goddess of southern hearts”, “sweet spontaneous predecessor of Humanity”.<sup>26</sup> The conflict between poetic enthusiasm and the scientific spirit is pacified.<sup>27</sup> Peace in souls. Peace in the world. Violence will have disappeared along with fraud. With civil war, foreign war will fade away under the green flag of a Western republic, presided by Paris, extended around the

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<sup>23</sup> If this usurpation can be produced, one would have, according to Comte, *pedantocracy*, or the most frightening of regimes.

<sup>24</sup> *Appel aux Conservateurs*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Passim: Système de politique positive*, t. III, *Appel aux Conservateurs*, and *Synthèse subjective*

<sup>27</sup> *Synthèse subjective*.

“central people” (France) to Italy, Spain, England and Germany. The Great-Being, which is not yet, Comte admits<sup>28</sup>, the Great-Being will finally be: men will bathe in the delicious unity of hearts, spirits, nations.

## VALUE OF THE POSITIVE ORDER

Pierre Laffitte, who directed positivism from the death of his master up until recent times<sup>29</sup>, was accustomed to say that Comte was mistaken about the speed of the transformations predicted by his genius. An exact critique of Comte’s mistakes was not yet made and the size of his encyclopaedia makes it difficult. Certain very important points can be doubted. Is sociology as advanced as Comte held?<sup>30</sup> Must the law of social dynamics, his cherished law according to which humanity passes necessarily through the three states of theological affirmation, metaphysical critique, and positive science or religion, be considered demonstrated? Finally, regarding the division of the instincts into altruistic and egotistic, is there the evidence that one would wish for?

However serious are these doubts, they don’t extend to the doctrine, whose main features survive.

The history of contemporary Europe, say from around 1854 to 1904, likewise offers a refutation to the pacific daydreams of the religion of Humanity; but this refutation of detail imparts to the total system a vigour, an interest that can be called topical: positivism appears all the more true and useful as its best hopes are frustrated.<sup>31</sup> It is, above all else, a discipline.

No more that he diminished the family for the advantage of the country, Comte weakened the country for the advantage of humanity: the formation of Italian unity and Germany unity, the expansion of the British and American empires, and our defeats of 1870 would have probably inspired Comte, if he had attained, following his dream, the longevity of Fontenelle, to some very serious but very simple alterations, and that several of his disciples did not fear accomplishing, on the article of French Defence and the strengthening of our nationality.<sup>32</sup> Until the new order, for a very long time perhaps, the country will represent the human type for each given group of men, and this “national egoism will not dispose them to universal love”<sup>33</sup>, Auguste Comte himself observed.

Under these reservations and by means of these supplements, secondary issues in a subject which holds to the very whole of things, the critic must admit that Auguste Comte has resolved, as far as the essentials, the problem of positive reorganisation. If he has not ordered the present “*according to the future inferred from the past*”<sup>34</sup>, it can be said that he has, as he boasted, “reasonably well and fully systematised good sense.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. II

<sup>29</sup> He died in January 1903. Charles Jannolle followed him.

<sup>30</sup> “Biology isn’t done,” objects Anatole France very justly in the “Garden of the Epicure”.

<sup>31</sup> Let us note that they were conditional hopes.

<sup>32</sup> It would be easy to find in the *Revue occidentale* of Pierre Laffite some quick indications of these necessary alterations. On his side, Antoine Baumann, who does not belong to the obedience of Laffitte, a (more profoundly) blamed the same tendencies.

<sup>33</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. II.

<sup>34</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. III

<sup>35</sup> *Cours de philosophie positive*, i. VI.

He did it with incomparable good sense. The utopias that one encounters in his work are called utopias in black and white, fictions of fictions, theories of theories; still he resists pure theories, games of spirit that he throws back to the academicians. "Academic degeneration", he says.<sup>36</sup> What he theorises is the practical.<sup>37</sup> And, an admirable thing, perhaps something unique in the succession of the great men of his family, this theoretician of altruism who desired the good so passionately, was not an optimist, he did not believe that what he proposed or advised was found from then on accomplished: he called ceaselessly as he says "*the personal impulses to the aid of social affections*"<sup>38</sup>, guarding himself from distorting the mechanism of man to improve him in imagination.

A trait not less rare and on which he is also without rival, Maistre and Bonald having only shown him the way, he felt profoundly that there was something anarchic and "subversive" to concentrate "sociability on simultaneous beings", that is to say to believe that we form society only with our contemporaries, to be mistaken about "the necessary empire of previous generations"<sup>39</sup>, and finally to make solidarity prevail in space over continuity, which is solidarity in time: in reversing such a flawed relation, which rendering to dead men and men yet to be born the first place in the thought of the best, he truly based his philosophy and glory.

## THE FOUNDER OF POSITIVISM

This good sense was therefore Comte's main ability. It intensely ruled over his other powers, excepting a period of one year (1826-1827). The crisis of alienation which reached an intense fury could bear witness to the extraordinary force of the imagination and sensibility to which that spirit had the burden of presiding over. The persistence of the images in him were so strong, his memory was so perfect that he was accustomed to compose from memory, sentence by sentence, the seven or eight hundred pages of his treatises. The meditation thus led up to the last word of the last sheet, he drafted it all at once, almost without deletions: his printers could not follow him in the speed of his writing.

Clear and strong in the opuscles of his youth, one will find vague and long expression in the books of his maturity; but the latter, principally the *Système de politique positive*, show an immense progress. The sentence, shortened and serious, sings the holy laws. He imposed on himself, in the composition in order to write it, a sort of rhythm; he increased this rhythm with new mathematical artifices, the explanation of which held too much place, when he wrote the *Synthèse subjective*. This austere regime that he had wanted to impose on the poetry of his time, as to his particular art, tended, he said, "to concentrate the aesthetic or theoretic composition, in those souls *capable of appreciating in it the efficacy without fearing its rigour*." The immutable setting of this regime "belongs otherwise only to the great intelligences strongly prepared where these forms assist convergence and concision."

He rendered justice to himself in classifying himself among the great intelligences: as Dante put himself among the great poets. If memory furnished him a countless number of materials from all order, drawing from science, history, poetry, languages or even everyday experience, this treasure was used by a critical reason and a power of systematisation which didn't have anything irregular in it. But the work

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<sup>36</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. III

<sup>37</sup> He has the sense of detail and the exception, which does not stop him from submitting the detail to the whole. For example, the *unremitting adversary of divorce, the does not hesitate to allows it in certain cases*. He allows it for the case of Clotilde de Vaux. He does not allow it for himself.

<sup>38</sup> *Système de politique positive*, t. II.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, t. II.



made itself as much more energetically as it was activated by a more vociferous soul. Few sensibilities would be worthy of being compared to that of Comte. It did not cease to feel the sting of the mediocrities of life.

But the strong do not suffer in vain. Auguste Comte started off like most young people. He basked in the errors of his youth. Similar to the great poet whom he preferred above all the others and whom I love to cite in regard to him, Comte would have been able to admit that “almost at the beginning of the ascent of his life”, the panther in the supple body leapt before him:

Temp’era dal principio del mattino  
E’l sol montava ...

“It was the hour of the beginning of the morning, and the sun rose.” The fervent enthusiasm of his Southern blood tied him to the beautiful multicoloured animal which symbolizes the lust of youth. The letters later addressed to Clotilde de Vaux give us information on the daring existence which was juxtaposed to so much toil. Looking for love, finding debauchery, the marriage appeared to him to reconcile one and the other of these two goods with the care of his peace and quiet. It is thus that his young mistress, Caroline Massin, become Mrs. Comte.

He wailed about her too much, he then blackened her reputation, the voice of his disciples too often accompanied his so that it is indiscrete to tell the truth today. This marriage, contracted under dreadful circumstances, united him to his bad demon. Without lacking spirit, Caroline was a silly woman. As long as age permitted it, she had, with full knowledge of her husband, kept up as a prostitute: a Parisian Bovary who, when she was not dominated by other ardours, could dream only of transforming her husband into an “academic machine, earning for him some money, titles, and positions.”<sup>40</sup> Ignorant otherwise of the intellectual value of Comte, to the point of declaring to him one day before witnesses that she placed Armand Marrast far above him,<sup>41</sup> her silliness and follies had to contribute to the mental crisis of 1826. Four times, for rather longer periods, she left the domestic roof.<sup>42</sup> Comte deemed “that the man must nourish the woman”: he was never completely set free from his companion, even when he separated from her after seventeen years of marriage in 1842. In 1870, the shrew, aided by Littré or aiding him, became again strove to seek the ash of that unfortunate philosopher and husband.

For him, long before dying, he had found a peace on which neither Littré nor Mrs. Comte could do anything. It is in 1845, in the month of April, as in the sonnets of the poets of the Renaissance, that Auguste Comte met the woman he had to call “his true spouse”, “his holy companion”, “the mother of his second life”, “the positivist virgin”, “his patroness”, “his angel”, and finally “the mediatrix” between Humanity and him. This language of myth does not fool us. Poor Comte began by being infatuated with the world for the third time. Clotilde de Vaux overexcited a nature whose weakness and intensity he didn’t admit. Wistful and poor love of a man of forty seven years for a young woman of thirty! The latter, shattered by a remarkable love affair<sup>43</sup>, had loved, was perhaps disposed to love again: but in the end she did not love and was not a woman to give herself without love.

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<sup>40</sup> *Testament.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Testament.*

Her intelligence was worthy of the philosopher. Comte played up the value of the literary compositions, prose or verse, that she had passed on to him, but we can cite some touching maxims fallen from Clotilde's lips or pen, this notably very beautiful: "It is unworthy of the great hearts to spread the trouble that they feel." She had felt the Comtean influence and showed it, in writing, for example, of society: "Its institutions are respectable, like the hard work of the times." But such a pure influence did not satisfy the philosopher, consumed, burned by other fires. His disgrace, which would be amusing in the theatre, made in the book muse on the most touching groans. We forget the lay of Aristotle; we even dare to dream of the *Vie nouvelle*. P. Gruber, in his excellent biography of Comte, pleasing the poor doctor: "He is unhappy when a letter meets a light delay at the mail. He numbers all the letters; he keeps them like relics; he rereads them constantly in order to better taste what they contain." R. P. Gruber speaks of him at his ease. Comte is not so ridiculous! The same rigour of the formulas that he employs to describe his ordeals to himself to himself can arouse only a sympathetic smile, when, for example, he reassures Miss de Vaux on the feelings that he devoted to her: "At the age of twenty," he said, "I had respected you like a sister .... Why should I be today less thoughtful, *since I am at bottom more pure than then, and even more tender without being less ardent?*"<sup>44</sup> The poor woman protected herself, then finished by ceding the hint of a promise. She was dying. In her agony she regretted, Comte tells us<sup>45</sup>, that "she had not granted" to love "an ineffable pledge." "This spontaneous regret", the philosopher adds that love had transformed him into a priest and poet, "will always leave me a more precious memory than would have been able to be up to now the too elusive memory of a full achievement."<sup>46</sup>

On April 5, 1846, after a year of privacy, Clotilde de Vaux passed away. She did not die. She entered "subjective immortality". Living always and living better in Auguste Comte's memory, she was incorporated by him in the Great Being, who must never forget her.

Such oblivion is not possible. Humanity would know how to forget, through that woman, that the philosopher who formulated positivism became fully conscious of his aspirations and the aspirations of the human species. How inflated such language appears, that encapsulates that of Comte, it is in fact that Clotilde's love kindled in the philosopher new lights and grew each day. The system gained in extension, in coherence, in depth. Sentiment had wisdom in it and this latter faculty became thus swifter to see in everything the sparks of a universal hearth: the daily adoration of Clotilde inspired this constant progress. I don't think that, without her, Comte would write so many remarks where subtle insight contends with magnificent sharpness, this for example, of which would do honour to a Pascal or to a Vauvenargues:

*The least mathematical studies can thus inspire a true moral attraction to well born souls, who cultivate them worthily. The result of the private satisfaction that brings us the full conviction of an unshakable reality which, surpassing our personality, even mental, subordinates us freely to the exterior order. This sentiment is often distorted, especially today, by the pride which excites the discovery or the possession of such truth. But there can exist with complete purity, even in our day. All those who, at any regards, abandoned metaphysical fluctuations, have certainly proved how much this sincere submission sweetly affects the heart. He can thus bring out a little exalted, but very stable, true love for the general laws which dispel then the natural hesitance of our opinions.*<sup>47</sup> **For man is so disposed to the affection**

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<sup>44</sup> *Testament*, Letter of December 6, 1854.

<sup>45</sup> *Testament*, annual confession of 1847.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Up until his final years, Comte appeared to have been insensitive to the bad effect of these words ending in *-tion*. They ruin some beautiful phrases. In a general manner, Comte's style grows distant by the

***that he extends it without effort to inanimate objects and even to simple abstract rules, provided that he recognises in them some tie with his own existence.***

This page was pulled from a volume of the *Système de politique positive*, published in 1852. He had not written anything similar to it in the six volumes of the *Philosophie positive*, and I believe firmly that, without the idea of Clotilde, this page would have always slept in his heart. This sweet Beatrice, whose charm a very detailed cult could not destroy, awoke in Comte the “great soul”, “the soul of the elite”, which was initially unknown in him. The naivety of the philosopher could increase, with that pride, arising from a natural confidence, without which he would never have attempted his works; he thus gained true nobility, should I say sanctity? ... “He reminded me of one of these paintings of the Middle Ages which represents Saint Francis united to Poverty. There was in his features a tenderness that one would have been able to call ideal rather than human. Through his half closed eyes, burst such a kindness of soul that one was tempted to ask oneself if it did not surpass even his intelligence.” So spoke someone who visited him toward the end.

When, two years before his death, he wrote his Testament, the work took three weeks; but, as he made his disciples and his friends the abandonment and the distribution of his material properties, he noted what inspired in him this effort of detachment in spirit: it was the perfect sentiment of death to oneself. “Willingly casting aside everything,” his eye, grown cold by interior death, constantly went against the objects of which he felt himself to be only the guardian and trustee, for they had “received from the specified owners” by the stipulations of his writings. “His eternal soul” was to him purely “subjective” for nine entire years: in his turn he was or thought himself to be, for two years, “subjective” to himself. “Living in an anticipated tomb, I can at this point bring to the living a posthumous language which will be better freed from the prejudiced old men, especially theoretical, from which our descendants will find themselves deprived.” It is in execution of that thought that the *Synthèse subjective* was assumed written in 1927, in full “western reorganisation” and to cooperate in the implementation of the system of that time.

On September 5, 1957, the remainder of his life was taken from him.

## CONCLUSION

I wrote: sanctity; I could have written magnanimity. I hear gentle voices advise me instead: pure folly, reasoning folly. But no. Almost as much as the lack of coherence, the excess of order in the dream, in the sentiment, in life, *plays* sometimes alienation. One point is certainly assured to us. The judgment of

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strangeness, the difficulty. “You read Auguste Comte, which is not amusing,” says Mr. Jules Lemaitre to his celebrated friend. Taine, who read Hegel in German, yet could not stand Comte’s French. This French often has the colour of another idiom: a colour which is not due solely to the abstract tone, common to all philosophers; it is necessary to take account of an almost constant recourse to the special language of mathematicians, as much for its locutions as for the images. Mr. Gagué declares that this jargon has a name in no language. Mr. Aulard feels that it suffices to take away the adverbs to give lightness to the sentence. I propose to cut off the legs of Mr. Aulard to instil some heaviness to his step – the attentive critic will observe in Comte a curious distinctive. The words which he uses always have an aptness, in the sense that they could very well be the suitable words: but these are not what general usage has chosen. So he constantly says the *Pont-Nouveau*. Now, we say the *Pont-Neuf*. He does not seem to be in doubt about it. This great man, who invented a large part of his language and who thus reached the strangest eloquence, was not able to give himself any excuse other than the fact that he was born in Montpellier into a family of modest conditions, where the dialect of langue-d’Oc was the only current usage.

Auguste Comte, as shown in his letters, always retained its intensity, perceptiveness, even nuance. Nothing then justifies Littré's calumnies. Only, everything permits them.

Few spirits would want to follow without sacred dread a project like Comte's, which reduces the most spontaneous impulses of the life of the heart to systems, to systems which command him to great deeds ... In a contemporary mind, it is simpler to conceive of such prodigies in the remoteness of history than near to us. The great religious founders and reformers have well experienced their faith like this; I would want to dare to say that they thereby knew how to die in it. From that time, Comte's astonishment was to not have inspired these *complete devotions* which, he said, Saint Paul and Mahomet did not lack. But the astonishment that some of his words inspire results deep down from the difficulty that there is always at imagining the brilliant intersection of a thought with a sentiment, of a pure theoretic formula with an action. Auguste Comte was not crazy and the more he astonished, while advancing in age, the men of his times, the closer he came to the same reason. This vertiginous approach is perhaps the most poetic of the sensations that his books give and that a book can give.

Recall those extraordinary drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in which the living curve, masterpiece of a supreme art, brushes and mimics in places the regular curve, but everything *otherwise* regular, which is proper to the drawings of geometry. The circumscribed forms are already ideas, and their concreteness touches the abstract, so that we ask ourselves with a little anguish if the virgin or the nymph are not going to burst in an eternal simplification. Auguste Comte arouses the same impression, but in the opposite direction: it is the methodical thought, severe and hard, which holds to life: it aspires to it; it approaches it, is the most challenging and nimble of numbers approaches infinity or, of the circle, the most carried away of the myriagon. These two heroic efforts are always missing something. But, in order to strengthen virtue, to give the wing of Victory to courage, nothing equals the spectacle of such an effort.

We would no longer be Frenchmen, nor the people who, after Rome, more than Rome, integrated rule to instinct, art to nature, thought to life, if Auguste Comte's philosophy, eminently French, classic<sup>48</sup>, and Latin, was only suitable to inspire us some doubts on the health of that great man. He reopened for us, who live after him in the vast bosom of the Great-Being, high sources of wisdom, pride, and enthusiasm. A few among us were a living anarchy. He rendered order to them or, what amounts to the same thing, the hope of order. He showed them the beautiful face of Unity, smiling in a heaven which did not appear too distant.

Let us not leave him without prayers. Let us not abstain from the benefit of his communion.

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<sup>48</sup> He is certainly unusual, unless he is quite natural, that the great evolutionists, famous historians of the transformation of literary and philosophical types had spent ten or twelve years of their life in speaking to us about Auguste Comte without having taken account that positivism, reorganising everything relatively and *subjectively* to the type of man, represents the latest evolution and the latest improvement of the "humanism" of the Renaissance. It is true that other professors came to confuse the religion of Humanity with humanitarianism!