



# AUGUSTA COMTE

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# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ◉ Recognize his Major Works
- ◉ Comprehend his Major Contributions
- ◉ *Course of Positive Philosophy*
  - Comprehend the two general goals of this work
  - Define Positivism or Positive Philosophy
  - Identify the three stages of human culture/knowledge
  - Discuss the law of classification of the sciences
- ◉ Comprehend his contribution to the science of sociology
- ◉ Analyze his thoughts on systematized positivism as a secular religion

# ISIDORE AUGUSTE MARIE FRANÇOIS XAVIER COMTE (1798 - 1857)

- ⦿ 1826 he was taken to a mental health hospital-disappeared from the public until 1844

# MAJOR WORKS

- ◉ *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830-1842)
- ◉ *System of Positive Polity or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity* (1851-54)

# MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- ◉ Founder of Positivism, a philosophical and political movement
- ◉ First philosopher of science
- ◉ Founded the social sciences - coined the terms “sociology” and “altruism”

# Positivism

A view of scientific methods and a philosophical approach, theory, or system based on the view that, in the social as well as natural sciences, sensory experiences and their logical and mathematical treatment are together the exclusive source of all worthwhile information

# WORKING WITH COUNT SAINT-SIMON

- ◉ 1817 became secretary to the French utopian socialist Saint-Simon
- ◉ Comte took over three ideas from the complex thought of Saint-Simon
  - The contrast between organic and critical periods in history
  - Idea of industrial society
  - The idea of spiritual power

# *COURSE OF POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY*

- The *Course* pursues two general goals
  - A foundation for sociology or 'social physics'
  - The coordination of the whole of positive knowledge
- First three volumes dealt with the physical sciences (mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology)
- Latter three emphasized the coming of social science

# POSITIVISM / POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

- ◉ Follows previous philosophers
- ◉ We have no knowledge of anything except Phenomena
- ◉ Our knowledge of phenomena is relative
- ◉ Constant resemblances link phenomena together
- ◉ Constant sequences unite them as antecedent and consequent are called their "laws"
- ◉ The essential nature and ultimate causes of phenomena are unknown to us

# POSITIVISM & THEORY OF HISTORY

- Theological: Universe as governed by single and direct volitions of beings, real or imaginary
  - Animism
  - Polytheism
  - Monotheism
- Metaphysical: accounts for phenomena by ascribing them to realized abstractions
- Positive: Understanding the scientific laws that control the world

# POSITIVISM & THEORY OF HISTORY

- Process through the three stages was inevitable and irreversible
- Process is also asymptotic - we always approach but never obtain, perfect positive knowledge

# POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY & THE LAW OF THE CLASSIFICATION OF SCIENCES

- ◉ Examined the physical sciences (mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology)
- ◉ Attempted to demonstrate that each science is dependent on the previous science

# SCIENCES

- Related to one another in a scale that goes from general to particular; simple to complex
- Order of the sciences
  1. Numbers, Geometry, Mechanics
  2. Astronomy
  3. Physics
  4. Chemistry
  5. Biology
  6. Sociology

# SCIENCES

- ◉ Each develops by a logic proper to itself which can be discovered by studying its history
- ◉ Distinguishes between doctrine and method
- ◉ Method is superior - the value of a science rests in its methods

# POSITIVE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

⦿ Comes in different forms:

- Astronomy = observation
- Physics = experimentation
- Biology = comparison

# SOCIOLOGY

- ◉ Claimed he discovered a “final science”, **sociology** - not yet entered its positive stage
- ◉ Sociology
  - Would give Ultimate meaning to all the other sciences
  - It was the once science which held the others together
  - Would reveal that man is a developing creature who moves through three stages in each of his sciences

# SOCIOLOGY

- ◉ Divided into two distinct parts
  - Social statics - the study of socio-political systems relative to their existing level of civilization
  - Social dynamics which entailed the study of the three stages

# SOCIOLOGY

- ◉ Needed to be a synthesis of order and progress in a higher scientific form
  - Once a science of society had been developed, opinions would 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

# *SYSTEM OF POSITIVE POLITY OR TREATISE ON SOCIOLOGY, INSTITUTING THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY*

- ◉ Purpose to provide a new religion and a new faith
- ◉ The main theme was positivism that was transformed into "*Complete Positivism*" which is the "continuous dominance of the heart"
  - Positivism transformed science into philosophy; *complete* positivism now transforms philosophy into religion but does not yield a "religion" of science

# SYSTEMATIZED POSITIVISM AS A SECULAR RELIGION

- ◉ Priests and a calendar of positivist saints - the worship of great men
- ◉ Scientific-industrial elite would replace the Catholic clergy
- ◉ The *ancient regime* and its destruction by the French Revolution had to be synthesized and made meaningful by a new clergy of elites (technocrats)
- ◉ This insight, religious in nature and intuitive in form was then reformulated by Comte and his followers in terms of a “positive science”

# THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

- ⦿ A non-theistic, atheistic religion - a religion of man and society
- ⦿ Goal was not an affluent society
  - Positive religion urged everyone “to live for others”
  - Sought to moralize one and all - a cure for humanity not for one class at the expense of another

# SUMMARY