

All the arts and sciences, without exception, inasmuch as they constitute innocent employments, at least of time, possess a species of moral utility, neither the less real nor important, because it is frequently observed. They compete with, and occupy the place of those mischievous and dangerous passions and employments, to which want of occupation and ennui give birth. They are excellent substitutes for drunkenness, slander, and the love of gaming.

The effects of idleness upon the ancient Germans may be seen in Tacitus: his observations are applicable to all uncivilized nations: for want of other occupations they waged war upon each other: it was more animated amusement than that of the chase. The chieftain who proposed a martial expedition, at the first sound of his trumpet ranged under his banners a crowd of idlers, to whom peace was a condition of restraint, of languor, and of ennui. Glory could be reaped only in one field: opulence knew but one luxury. This field was that of battle; this luxury that of conquering or recounting past conquests. Their women themselves, ignorant of those agreeable arts which multiply the means of pleasing, and prolong the empire of beauty, became the rivals of the men in courage, and, mingling with them in the barbarous tumult of a military life, became unfeeling as they.

It is to the cultivation of the arts and sciences that we must, in great measure, ascribe the existence of that party which is now opposed to war: it has received its birth amid the occupations and pleasures furnished by the fine arts. These arts, so to speak, have enrolled under their peaceful banners that army of idlers which would have otherwise possessed no amusement but in the hazardous and bloody game of war.

Such is the species of the utility which belongs indiscriminately to all the arts and sciences. Were it the only reason, it would be a sufficient reason for desiring to see them flourish and receive the most extended diffusion.

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2 Auguste Comte (1798–1857) ‘The Nature and Importance of the Positive Philosophy’

Comte is generally regarded as the founder of the modern discipline of sociology. His ‘positive philosophy’ exercised an enormous influence on nineteenth-century thought, both for its emphasis on the proper aims and methods of scientific enquiry and for its more ambitious claims concerning the realization of a new age of science. From 1817 he came under the influence of the social reformer Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, working as his secretary until their violent quarrel in 1824 (cf. IA5, above). Comte’s principal work, the *Cours de philosophie positive* (Course in positive philosophy), was published in six volumes, from 1830 to 1842. The present extract is taken from the opening section of the first volume, in which Comte sketches the broad outlines of his new ‘social physics’. Comte contends that human knowledge passes through three great stages, the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific or positive. Though the latter has irrefutably established itself in the domain of the natural sciences, enquiry into the existence of ‘invariable natural laws’ has yet to be extended to the study of social phenomena. The ambition of Comte’s positive philosophy goes beyond the merely descriptive in so far as he maintains that insight into such general laws will offer a basis for social re-organization and for

overcoming the 'great political and moral crisis that societies are now undergoing'. In 1853 Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* was translated and condensed into a two-volume English edition by Harriet Martineau, herself an important interpreter of economic, social and political theory and a forceful advocate of women's rights. These extracts are taken from the first volume, published under the title *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, London: John Chapman, 1853, pp. 1-2, 5-8, 14-16.

In order to understand the true value and character of the Positive Philosophy, we must take a brief general view of the progressive course of the human mind, regarded as a whole; for no conception can be understood otherwise than through its history.

From the study of the development of human intelligence, in all directions, and through all times, the discovery arises of a great fundamental law, to which it is necessarily subject, and which has a solid foundation of proof, both in the facts of our organization and in our historical experience. The law is this: – that each of our leading conceptions, – each branch of our knowledge, – passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive. In other words, the human mind, by its nature, employs in its progress three methods of philosophizing, the character of which is essentially different, and even radically opposed: viz., the theological method, the metaphysical, and the positive. Hence arise three philosophies, or general systems of conceptions on the aggregate of phenomena, each of which excludes the others. The first is the necessary point of departure of the human understanding; and the third is its fixed and definitive state. The second is merely a state of transition.

In the theological state, the human mind, seeking the essential nature of beings, the first and final causes (the origin and purpose) of all effects, – in short, Absolute knowledge, – supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings.

In the metaphysical state, which is only a modification of the first, the mind supposes, instead of supernatural beings, abstract forces, veritable entities (that is, personified abstractions) inherent in all beings, and capable of producing all phenomena. What is called the explanation of phenomena is, in this stage, a mere reference of each to its proper entity.

In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws, – that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance. Reasoning and observation, duly combined, are the means of this knowledge. What is now understood when we speak of an explanation of facts is simply the establishment of a connection between single phenomena and some general facts, the number of which continually diminishes with the progress of science.

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The Law of human development being thus established, let us consider what is the proper nature of the Positive Philosophy.

As we have seen, the first characteristic of the Positive Philosophy is that it regards all phenomena as subjected to invariable natural *Laws*. Our business is, – seeing how

vain is any research into what are called *Causes*, whether first or final, – to pursue an accurate discovery of these Laws, with a view to reducing them to the smallest possible number. By speculating upon causes, we could solve no difficulty about origin and purpose. Our real business is to analyse accurately the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by the natural relations of succession and resemblance. The best illustration of this is in the case of the doctrine of Gravitation. We say that the general phenomena of the universe are *explained* by it, because it connects under one head the whole immense variety of astronomical facts; exhibiting the constant tendency of atoms towards each other in direct proportion to their masses, and in inverse proportion to the squares of their distances; whilst the general fact itself is a mere extension of one which is perfectly familiar to us, and which we therefore say that we know; – the weight of bodies on the surface of the earth. As to what weight and attraction are, we have nothing to do with that, for it is not a matter of knowledge at all. Theologians and metaphysicians may imagine and refine about such questions; but positive philosophy rejects them. When any attempt has been made to explain them, it has ended only in saying that attraction is universal weight, and that weight is terrestrial attraction: that is, that the two orders of phenomena are identical; which is the point from which the question set out. Again, M. Fourier, in his fine series of researches on Heat, has given us all the most important and precise laws of the phenomena of heat, and many large and new truths, without once inquiring into its nature, as his predecessors had done when they disputed about calorific matter and the action of an universal ether. In treating his subject in the Positive method, he finds inexhaustible material for all his activity of research, without betaking himself to insoluble questions.

Before ascertaining the stage which the Positive Philosophy has reached, we must bear in mind that the different kinds of our knowledge have passed through the three stages of progress at different rates, and have not therefore arrived at the same time. The rate of advance depends on the nature of the knowledge in question, so distinctly that, as we shall see hereafter, this consideration constitutes an accessory to the fundamental law of progress. Any kind of knowledge reaches the positive stage early in proportion to its generality, simplicity, and independence of other departments. Astronomical science, which is above all made up of facts that are general, simple, and independent of other sciences, arrived first; then terrestrial Physics; then Chemistry; and, at length, Physiology.

It is difficult to assign any precise date to this revolution in science. It may be said, like everything else, to have been always going on; and especially since the labours of Aristotle and the school of Alexandria; and then from the introduction of natural science into the West of Europe by the Arabs. But, if we must fix upon some marked period, to serve as a rallying point, it must be that, – about two centuries ago, – when the human mind was astir under the precepts of Bacon, the conceptions of Descartes, and the discoveries of Galileo. Then it was that the spirit of the Positive Philosophy rose up in opposition to that of the superstitious and scholastic systems which had hitherto obscured the true character of all science. Since that date, the progress of the Positive Philosophy, and the decline of the other two, have been so marked that no rational mind now doubts that the revolution is destined to go on to its completion, – every branch of knowledge being, sooner or later, brought within the operation of

Positive Philosophy. This is not yet the case. Some are still lying outside: and not till they are brought in will the Positive Philosophy possess that character of universality which is necessary to its definitive constitution.

In mentioning just now the four principal categories of phenomena, – astronomical, physical, chemical, and physiological, – there was an omission which will have been noticed. Nothing was said of Social phenomena. Though involved with the physiological, Social phenomena demand a distinct classification, both on account of their importance and of their difficulty. They are the most individual, the most complicated, the most dependent on all others; and therefore they must be the latest, – even if they had no special obstacle to encounter. This branch of science has not hitherto entered into the domain of Positive Philosophy. Theological and metaphysical methods, exploded in other departments, are as yet exclusively applied, both in the way of inquiry and discussion, in all treatment of Social subjects, though the best minds are heartily weary of eternal disputes about divine right and the sovereignty of the people. This is the great, while it is evidently the only gap which has to be filled, to constitute, solid and entire, the Positive Philosophy. Now that the human mind has grasped celestial and terrestrial physics, – mechanical and chemical; organic physics, both vegetable and animal, – there remains one science, to fill up the series of sciences of observation, – Social physics. This is what men have now most need of: and this it is the principal aim of the present work to establish.

It would be absurd to pretend to offer this new science at once in a complete state. Others, less new, are in very unequal conditions of forwardness. But the same character of positivity which is impressed on all the others will be shown to belong to this. This once done, the philosophical system of the moderns will be in fact complete, as there will then be no phenomenon which does not naturally enter into some one of the five great categories. All our fundamental conceptions having become homogeneous, the Positive state will be fully established. It can never again change its character, though it will be for ever in course of development by additions of new knowledge.

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The Positive Philosophy offers the only solid basis for that Social Reorganization which must succeed the critical condition in which the most civilized nations are now living.

It cannot be necessary to prove to anybody who reads this work that Ideas govern the world, or throw it into chaos; in other words, that all social mechanism rests upon Opinions. The great political and moral crisis that societies are now undergoing is shown by a rigid analysis to arise out of intellectual anarchy. While stability in fundamental maxims is the first condition of genuine social order, we are suffering under an utter disagreement which may be called universal. Till a certain number of general ideas can be acknowledged as a rallying-point of social doctrine, the nations will remain in a revolutionary state, whatever palliatives may be devised; and their institutions can be only provisional. But whenever the necessary agreement on first principles can be obtained, appropriate institutions will issue from them, without shock or resistance; for the causes of disorder will have been arrested by the mere fact of the agreement. It is in this direction that those must look who desire a natural and regular, a normal state of society.

Now, the existing disorder is abundantly accounted for by the existence, all at once, of three incompatible philosophies, – the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive. Any one of these might alone secure some sort of social order; but while the three co-exist, it is impossible for us to understand one another upon any essential point whatever. If this is true, we have only to ascertain which of the philosophies must, in the nature of things, prevail; and, this ascertained, every man, whatever may have been his former views, cannot but concur in its triumph. The problem once recognized cannot remain long unsolved; for all considerations whatever point to the Positive Philosophy as the one destined to prevail. It alone has been advancing during a course of centuries, throughout which the others have been declining. The fact is incontestable. Some may deplore it, but none can destroy it, nor therefore neglect it but under penalty of being betrayed by illusory speculations. This general revolution of the human mind is nearly accomplished. We have only to complete the Positive Philosophy by bringing Social phenomena within its comprehension, and afterwards consolidating the whole into one body of homogeneous doctrine. The marked preference which almost all minds, from the highest to the commonest, accord to positive knowledge over vague and mystical conceptions, is a pledge of what the reception of this philosophy will be when it has acquired the only quality that it now wants – a character of due generality. When it has become complete, its supremacy will take place spontaneously, and will re-establish order throughout society. There is, at present, no conflict but between the theological and the metaphysical philosophies. They are contending for the task of reorganizing society; but it is a work too mighty for either of them. The positive philosophy has hitherto intervened only to examine both, and both are abundantly discredited by the process. It is time now to be doing something more effective, without wasting our forces in needless controversy. It is time to complete the vast intellectual operation begun by Bacon, Descartes, and Galileo, by constructing the system of general ideas which must henceforth prevail among the human race. This is the way to put an end to the revolutionary crisis which is tormenting the civilized nations of the world.

3 Marie-Camille de G. (dates unknown) 'Fine Arts. Salon of 1834'

It is usually assumed that few if any women wrote art criticism in early nineteenth-century France. In fact the number increased as the periodical press expanded during the 1830s, and issues concerning women and the visual arts were discussed with some frequency, normally in the context of the annual Salon exhibitions. There had been a tendency for women critics to use male pseudonyms or to retain anonymity. This tendency declined as the market increased, however, since the establishment of a recognizable persona was a necessary condition of earning money by writing. Marie-Camille de G. was a member of a small group of utopian socialists who wrote and produced the short-lived *Tribune des Femmes* (originally entitled *La Femme libre*), distributing it through street sales. Surnames were withheld not in the interests of anonymity but in order to avoid use of the patriarchal names of husbands and fathers. The journal was shut down in 1834 when uprisings in several French towns were answered by repressive measures from the government. This text was originally published as 'Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1834' in *Tribune des femmes*, volume II, April 1834, pp. 158–64, from which these extracts are taken. Translation