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AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

by

Andrew Wernick

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity

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The thesis aims to re-think the totalisation attempted by Auguste Comte, with particular attention to the post-theistic religious project taken to be its animating centre. Comte’s work needs to be understood against the background, I argue, not only of its immediate context (the exigencies of reconstruction in post-Revolutionary France) but also of a longer term Western project to reconcile faith and reason. In the transposed, post-Baconian, terms of Comtean positivism, reason is rendered in terms of science, while faith focuses on Humanity as the ‘positive’ successor to God. Theology, demystified, is replaced by sociology, a crowning science whose epistemological object is ‘demonstrated’ to be the proper object of worship for a Humanity finally entering its mature phase of development.

An interrogation of Comte’s thought in such terms, I suggest, affords a vantage point from which to examine the intellectual underpinnings of faith in the collective human subject as a progressive and non-nihilistic response to the ‘death of God’. To that end, it
facilitates a non-sterile ‘left-wing’ engagement with French post-structuralism, by
highlighting a complex of issues concerning the relation between social being,
(transformist) politics and the transcendent which have persisted in French social theory
even after the deconstructive turn.

The analysis proceeds through an examination of Comte’s thought at three levels: (1) the
overall logic of Comte’s developing system of systems; (2) his sociological thematisation
of the contemporary ‘religious’ crisis of industrialism; and (3) Comte’s idea of Humanity
as a Great Being evolving towards moral-affective perfection. The internal contradictions
of this whole effort are identified and anatomised. Two conclusions are drawn: first, that
Comte, who sought to replace God by a divinised idea of the human collectivity, is,
unwittingly, the first thinker of the ‘end of the social’; and secondly that by making
explicit, and taking cognizance of, the ‘second death of God’ in which Comte’s religious
project founders, recent French thinkers like Althusser, Baudrillard and Nancy have
revived, in a critically renewed theoretical and ideological register, a form of theorising
which might address, in a post-theistic way, the transcendent dimension of a socially
engaged politics.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: RETHINKING COMTE

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight [Benjamin: 253].

The project of Positive Religion

At the heart of the Comteian program for resolving the 'crisis' of (early) industrial society, and explicitly so with the publication, in 1851, of the first volume of La Système de Politique positive, ou Traité de Sociologie, was a project for 'positivizing' religion by, as its subtitle announced, ‘instituant la religion de l'Humanité’.

Homologous with the Catholic form of Christianity it was 'destined' to replace, the religion of Humanity was to be a triple institution¹. Its full establishment required a doctrine (dogme), a moral rule (régime) and a system of worship (culte), all organized and co-ordinated through a Positivist Church. The first of these, the doctrine, could be considered established in Comte’s

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¹ Comte provides a detailed account of Positive Religion in Volume IV of Politique Positive. Its three parts, moving from culte to dogme to régime, are outlined in Chapters 2-4. See X: 9-248.
own writings, though not yet in complete form. The 'objective' synthesis of Comte's *Philosophie positive* needed to be complemented by a 'subjective' one, for which the *Politique positive* was to provide the groundwork; and beyond that, though he never got beyond a sketch-plan, there was to be a summarizing and integrating *science de la morale*². Taken altogether, the Positive System was to provide the scientific-humanist equivalent to what systematic theology had been in the high Middle Ages. It would serve as the intellectually unifying basis of the new order.

Of course Positivism would be without effect if not disseminated. Hence the need for an educational reform, which in turn was part of a broader pattern of institutional changes designed to provide industrial society with an entire régime of cooperative purpose and order³. Specifying the 'normal' elements of that régime under the intellectually and technologically changed conditions of industrialism was the aim of Positive Politics itself. What it entailed for the individual was a life-long process of moral education⁴, first in the home under the tutelage of

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² In the full-scale version of the doctrine, as taught to those destined for the *sacerdoce*, there were to be ten books or courses: 'First philosophy' would summarize the methodological principles of Positivism from both a scientific and moral viewpoint; 2-8 ('Second Philosophy') would consist of the Subjective Synthesis, summarizing the 7 branches of human knowledge; 9 would be the practical part of *la Morale* (the 'theoretical part' was the final seventh of the Subjective Synthesis itself); and 10 ('Third Philosophy') would systematize *l'action totale de l'Humanité sur son Planète* [X: 246-7].

³ *Quand la discipline inspirée par l'amour se trouve ainsi fondée sur la foi, le régime la complète et la consolide en développant une activité d'où résulte la réaction, à la fois directrice et répressive, de l'ensemble envers les parties* [When discipline inspired by love finds itself founded on faith, the régime completes and consolidates it by developing an activity through which the whole can react, at once through the directives of reason [*directrice*] and through the force [*répressive*] of opinion upon its parts] [X: 167].

⁴ Besides the direct inculcation of *altruisme*, 'in the name of happiness and duty' the formula for recalcitrant impulses is that the *instinct nutritif* should restrained, the sexual instinct extinguished, and that envy and vanity should be weakened [X:344].
mother, then in the schools under (male) teacher-priests, with a revamped curriculum\(^5\), and then in the sermons and ceremonies which Positive Religion would install in a systematic and pervasive ritual round. Prominent among the latter were the sacraments (présentation, initiation, admission, destination, mariage, maturité, retrait, transformation, incorporation\(^6\)) which were to accompany each stage of the life-course, and through which each servant of Humanity would re-dedicate himself (or herself)\(^7\) to a life of service. But it was not only the individual who was to be 'rallied' and 'regulated'. The régime also governed the form and functioning of the 'tissues' and 'organs' which made up the social body as a whole. Hence a mass of prescriptions for the harmonious (re-)ordering of each of the institutional milieus by which the individual was surrounded. The family: role-divided, chivalric, extended (replete with children, servants and animals) [X:292-6]. The sphere of production: cooperative, functionally ordered, justly meritocratic [338-342]. The polity: reduced to the humanly manageable scale of a small republic\(^8\), oriented to production not war, and linked to others in an ultimately global confederation, itself spiritually united by the Religion of Humanity.

Overarching direction would be provided by a complementary leadership of temporal and spiritual authorities. The former (les patriciens) was to consist of bankers, industrialists and engineers

\(^5\) From ages 7-14, with one year being devoted to each of seven courses of study, corresponding to the seven branches of knowledge [X: 250-252].

\(^6\) The last sacrament, incorporation (into le Grand-Etre) would come after death, following a favorable judgment for those deemed worthy of remembrance [X:130].

\(^7\) For women though, destined for marriage and motherhood, and excluded from external careers, there would be three fewer -- i.e. no destination independent of mariage, and correspondingly no maturité or retrait [X:123].

\(^8\) The world, with an estimated population of 140,000,000 would be divided into 70 republics with 300,000 family households and 1-3 million inhabitants each [X:309-10].
from whom, in each republic, a governing committee of thirty, topped by a triumvirate, would be selected [345]. The new 'Spirituals', on the other hand, were the scientists-philosophers-teachers-pastors encadred in the priesthood of Positivism itself9. As with Positivism's feudal-catholic predecessor, the two leading powers of industrial society were to be not only functionally distinct, but each was to have its own form of rule. The elites who coordinated production (and, according to socially fixed rates, paid all the salaries), controlled the repressive organs of the state. The officers of the Positivist Church, commanding neither wealth nor force, were to exercise a purely moral suasion [VI:504]. But there were also differences. The priests of Humanity would have not only care of souls, but also — having regard to their integrated expertise in all the sciences of Man — of bodies too10. As well, their spiritual authority — i.e. their capacity to mobilize public opinion, whether against incorrigible displays of egoism and immorality, or against destructive social conflict over the distribution of social wealth11 — would be rooted not only in the prestige of their office as representatives of Humanity and mediators of its grace. It would also rest in the special ties ‘spontaneously developed’ between themselves and their natural allies. Thus Positivism would draw the support of les prolétares as industrialism’s indispensable, but oppressed and civically excluded, class12. It would also forge links to women in all classes,

9 'La triple fonction du pouvoir spirituel, conseiller, consacrer, et régler, se trouve de plus en plus suspendue, en Occident, depuis la fin du moyen âge...Ranimée par la foi définitive, elle prendra désormais une inaltérable efficacité' [X:9]. For its guiding role, as spiritually imbued specialists in the general, within the industrial intelligentsia as a whole see X:253-55.

10 'La santé consiste, autant que le bonheur, dans l'unité, considérée corporellement ou cérébralement' [X:281].

11 Salaries would be fixed according to a just scale and dispensed centrally through the employer-based civic authority [X:340]

12 Strictly speaking, it was not to be considered a 'class' at all, but the 'nutritive' function's 'moral milieu' [X:332-3].
finding in femininity a ready-made moralizing influence\textsuperscript{13} hitherto confined within the familial household, for which Positive Religion would provide, at last, due place and recognition. More surely than in its degenerated Medieval forebear, the new moral-spiritual hierarchy -- priests, women, workers, industrial and financial directors -- would invert the politico-economic one, and provide compensatory satisfaction for those at the base. Nor would this just be through some payback beyond the grave. The Positivist Church and its loyal adherents would be fortified in the knowledge that from a religious perspective, demystified and reconstituted as the self-consciousness of Humanity itself, the moral order of industrial society, which the humble labour to produce, is what actually, and even materially, counts.

The third element of positive religion was its cult: the organized yet ‘effusive’ worship of Humanity. Under the guidance of the new priesthood, this was to be conducted through public festivals (calibrated with the Positivist Calendar in ‘appreciations’ for the greatest aspects and benefactors of the \textit{Grand-Etre}\textsuperscript{14}), through worship at the family hearth and ancestral tomb, and thrice daily private devotions and prayers[131-130]. If the doctrine was designed to \textit{synthesize} the understanding, and the regime to \textit{synergize} action, the cult was to mobilize and canalize that benevolent harmonization of the instincts Comte called \textit{sympathie}, as the proper inspiration for the other two. The living centre of Positive Religion was, indeed, precisely here: in the feelings

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Le caractère propre au sacerdoce ressort naturellement de sa comparaison générale avec celui qui convient à la femme. Plus sympathiques et plus synthétiques que le milieu pratique qu’ils doivent discipliner, les deux éléments de la spiritualité ne différent que par la proportion des deux qualités, dont la première est plus féminine et la seconde plus sacerdotale’ [OX:72].

\textsuperscript{14} The Festivals are discussed throughout the \textit{Politique positive}. The \textit{Calendrier} itself, subtitled \textit{Tableau Concret de la Préparation Humaine}, with its thirteen lunar months and prescribed daily festivals, is appended to the \textit{Catéchisme positiviste} [XI:334].
of venerative, identificatory, and devotional love towards Humanity which the ritual life of its Church was designed continually to engender. As with Feuerbach [1959], Positivism took sentiments -- especially those of the most elevated forms of love -- to be the essence of religion. In Comte's general formula: feeling guides action in line with practical knowledge supplied by the intellect. The worship of Humanity was to fix in its adherents a lively impression of such harmonious co-ordination of the whole human being. The effusions of its rituals would also strengthen the altruistic impulses seen as vital for the correct orientation of thinking and acting. To which there was a corollary. If the cult of Humanity 'consecrated feeling over intellect', it also, in the Romantic vocabulary of gender dimorphism, elevated the symbolic role of women, identified by Comte as a sex naturally predisposed to express and embody the finest (and least grossly physical) sentiments of all. From medieval chivalry and Maryolatry Positive Religion would distill guardian angels, subcults of Clotilde ('*ma sain te ange'*) and the *Vierge-Mère*. Not to mention the sacred icon of *l'Humanité* itself: in the statuary of its Temples, a thirty-year old woman cradling a boy-child in her tender arms [XI:127].

Looking back on the period of his first synthesis Comte liked to think of himself as the Aristotle of Positivism. With the religious programme announced in the second, he aspired to be its St Paul -- not only as the clarifier and popularizer of the new faith, but also, and above all, as the

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15 *Destinée surtout à nous apprendre à vivre pour l'autrui, la religion doit essentiellement consister à régulariser la culture direct des instincts sympathétiques* [X:85]. This would 'healthily' reverse the priority which Christianity (in traditional form) had given to doctrine over worship [bid].

16 As he called *Mon éternelle amie, Madame Clotilde de Vaux (née Marie), morte, sous mes yeux, au commencement de sa trente-deuxième année*, in the *Dédicace* which prefaced the first volume of *Politique positive*. 
organizer of its Church. Besides congregations, there were literal churches to be built, surrounded by elaborate cemeteries, and Positivist priests to be recruited, trained, and set to work. The Religion of Humanity was to have 200 residential presbyteries in France alone, with one priest per 6000 inhabitants\(^\text{17}\). Beyond which, beginning with the most advanced societies of Western Europe, but then spreading from the 'white races' to the 'less advanced' regions of Asia and Africa, it was to expand into a federated world system, coordinated by national councils and culminating in the primacy of the *Sacerdoce* in Paris [X:323-7]. Not merely St Paul, in fact, Comte was to be Positivism's St Peter as well, inaugurating the office of *Grand Prêtre de L'Humanité* in his own august person\(^\text{18}\).

**Comte, Nietzsche, Marx**

In practical terms, Comte's founding religious project was a complete, even preposterous, failure\(^\text{19}\). It was, like Comte himself, an easy to satirize victim of its own rigidities, archaismns and inflated ambition. Nevertheless, the thinking behind that project is worth reflecting on because in two important respects the problems with which Comte was grappling in the aftermath of the

\(^{17}\) Each to house 7 vicars and 3 fully fledged priests, plus lay workers and any number of trainees. Altogether, there were to be 100,000 fully qualified Positivist priests world wide. The master-plan is outlined in *Catéchisme Positive* [XI:272].

\(^{18}\) *Toute la hiérarchie théorie* [i.e. the Positivist priesthood] *subit immédiatement l'impulsion continue du Grand-Prêtre, qui nomme, déplace, suspend, et même révoque, sous sa seule responsabilité, ses membres quelconques* [X:325-6]. He would be aided by a college of seven metropolitans.

\(^{19}\) For a first hand account of the Positivist Society and its aims see Littré:592-603. As a curious residue of the Society's Latin American influence, the official state motto of Brazil, where Positivists were active within the modernizing elite at the end of the nineteenth century, is to this day *Ordem e progresso*. 

7
French Revolution not only endured but, it can be argued, belong within the still unsurpassed horizons of our own epoch.

First, Comte’s positive faith in Humanity is suspended over the abyss which Nietzsche inscribed with ‘the death of God’, to which it can be interpreted as both a panic reaction and a strategic response. Comte, like Nietzsche’s madman in the marketplace, is ‘seeking God’. Yet he is doing so from the very midst of the vertiginously disorienting consequences of God’s cultural demise — consequences that were vividly present to him in the endless turmoil of post-Napoleonic France. For Comte, as for Nietzsche, the waning of theism in the dawn of gathering positivity entailed, at the limit, not just the decay of belief in an external yet ineffable super-being; nor indeed just the delegitimizing moral-political consequences of this. At the deepest level it entailed a shattering epistemic break. For Comte as for Nietzsche, the rise of a scientific world-view spelt the end of all supernaturalist ontologies, whether explicitly theistic or attenuated and metaphysical, and their displacement by an immanentist materialism, grasped as the primacy of experienced actuality behind and beyond which we cannot go. At the same time, partly by unmasking the real beyond the actual as a screen for anthropomorphic projection, partly through the very discoveries of empirical science, this same shift induced a profound de-centering. After Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton, at least in the minds of the most knowledgeable, the human species was discovered not to be the centre of anything.

The discovery, or rather the proof, of the double movement of the earth constitutes the most important revolution in science belonging to the preliminary stage of human
reason...it is by virtue of the earth’s motion that the Positive doctrine has come to be directly incompatible with all theological doctrine by making our largest speculations relative, whereas previously they had an absolute character\textsuperscript{21}.

The disintegration of a shadowy beyond implies the valorization of human actuality. Yet the Copernican turn undermined the naive anthropocentrism on which the old theism had depended. To make humankind the measure and source of all moral and epistemological value could henceforth only be regarded as an arbitrary belief that proceeds from our own inclination and, if done reflectively, as a deliberate act of will. With or without such an affirmation, indeed, a return to innocent illusion was barred. If the humanity pitched into an a-centric universe was to provide itself with a new map and compass, this could only be done in full cognizance of the perspectival relativity of all human constructions and without transcendental guarantees concerning their Truth\textsuperscript{22}.

The affinities between Comte’s and Nietzsche’s understandings of the paradoxical implications of the scientific break from theism are not accidental. Nietzsche cites or alludes to Comte in several

\textsuperscript{20} The historical course of the \textit{décadence de Dieu} is traced in the third volume of \textit{Politique positive} [IX:507 et seq].

\textsuperscript{21} ‘C’est pourquoi la découverte, où plutôt la démonstration, du double mouvement de la terre constitue la principale révolution scientifique propre au régime préliminaire de la raison humaine...C’est, en effet, d’après le mouvement terrestre que le dogme positif est devenu directement incompatible avec tout dogme théologique, en rendant profondément relatives les plus vastes spéculations, qui jusqu’alors pouvaient conserver un caractère absolu’ [XI:190-1]. The fuller schema for the scientific basis of the ‘relative’ outlook adds an objective subjective factor: the innateness of the benevolent instincts: ‘L’innéité des penchant bienveillants et le mouvement de la terre constituent les principaux résultats de la science moderne, comme posant les deux bases essentielles, l’une objective, l’autre subjective, de la vraie relativité’ [X:20].
of the texts\textsuperscript{23} in which he discusses what it would mean to become contemporary with, and take responsibility for, the enhanced scientific and technological power of the species, and the this-sided grasp of the world on which such knowledge depends. But the relation is two-way. If Nietzsche, in a certain measure, appropriated Comte, Comte can also be read in the light of Nietzsche. That is: his entire reconstructive effort can be seen as an attempt to grapple with the disorientation — and nihilism — which Nietzsche was to place at the foreground of attention. Of course it is a different response. Rather than pushing either perspectivalism or nihilism all the way Comte strenuously reacts, in the medium of a traumatized ex-Catholic sensibility, against the threat of ‘anarchy’, both social and interior to the individual subject. And where Nietzsche, allergic to ‘moralic acid’, embraced Dionysus (as a figure for the divine but amoral pro-creativity of Life) against the Crucified, Comte followed the ‘secularizing’ path of those who sought, contrariwise, to extract from Christianity, indeed from all religions, the rational kernel of its ethic, its elevation of love, and Humanity as the truth of its God.

The stormy passage, from Hegel to Nietzsche via the Young Hegelians, of the immanent critique of religion in nineteenth century German thought has been examined by Löwith in a celebrated debate with Blumenberg about ‘secularization’\textsuperscript{24}. A comparison with the corresponding French

\textsuperscript{23} Macherey [1989:31-3; 121-2] also suggests a similarity between Comte’s relativism and Nietzsche’s perspectivism, though without reference to the ‘Copernicanism’ that is a recurrent theme in Comte [e.g. VII:46 and IX:349].

\textsuperscript{24} Besides the general reference to ‘positivism’ in the ‘History of an error’ section of \textit{Twilight of the Idols} [Nietzsche, 1990:50], there are two passages in \textit{The Joyful Science} explicitly commenting on Comte [Nietzsche, 1992:82;215-216]; I discuss these in Chapter 7 below.

\textsuperscript{24} Löwith’s \textit{From Hegel to Nietzsche} (1967), which in fact runs from Goethe to Lagarde and Overbeck, argues the continuity of modern German philosophy with Protestant theology, particularly in those moves which proclaimed a break from, or supercession of, the latter. The
narrative would be instructive. In general terms, the German development proceeds from the immanentization of 'spirit', an innering of the divine principle that had already been individualized and de-sacerdotalized through Protestantism; whereas the French, in the current that runs through the *idéologues*, Saint-Simonians, and sociologists, generated a civic humanism saturated with the corporatism and religious externalism of the unreconstructedly Catholic. Thus the divinization of Man implicit, for example, in Feuerbach’s ambition of translating theology into anthropology, focussed on the generic essence of the human individual. For St. Simon, Comte and Durkheim, on the other hand, divine predicates were shifted onto a meta-individual topos constituted by the human collectivity in a strong and organic sense.

Nietzsche, it can be said, broke from any version of this neo-Christian schema, while Comte clearly did not. Indeed, Comte’s religion of Humanity can be regarded as just a stop-gap, or detour, in the ‘self-devaluing of the highest values hitherto’[1968:9] which Nietzsche, drawing more vertiginous conclusions, wished to push through to a ‘transvaluation of all values’. As such, it would be a case of what Heidegger called ‘incomplete nihilism’, a critique of metaphysics that takes fright at

general framework is laid out in *Meaning in History* (1949), and it is this text which Blumenberg addresses in *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1985:27-29). For Löwith, modern thought in repudiating God only secularized the Christian theme of salvation in/through history and so did not involve a fundamental break. The real break was Christianity’s own turning away from the cosmos to history as the ground of meaning in the first place. Blumenberg attacks this view as ‘substantialist’, and insists that intellectual modernity is indeed discontinuous, particularly with regard to its changed grounds for the legitimacy of knowledge and judgment.

25 Albeit that Feuerbach’s ‘essence of Man’ consisted in his self-consciously being a member of the human species. See Feuerbach, 1959 chapter two.

26 Incomplete nihilism does indeed replace the former values with others, but it still posits the latter always in the old position of authority that is, as it were, gratuitously maintained and the ideal realm of the supersensory. Completed nihilism however must do away even with the place of value itself, with the supersensory as a realm...’ [1977:69]. For Heidegger, Nietzsche’s own
the abyss of evacuated faith and tries to staunch the wound with debris from the shattered idols. It can even be read as not a real rupture at all. As John Milbank observes, "society is God" can always be deconstructed to read "society is God's presence" [1993:52].

It can nevertheless be argued that Comte still belongs to a Nietzschean problematic because, in his effort to reconstruct subjectivity in light of the scientific transformation of knowledge, he aimed to root out not only supernaturalism, but any absolutely fixed truth, and even — notwithstanding any worshipful way La Déesse was to be imagined — any essentialist 'mysticism' about humanity itself. Against readings of Comte, then, that primarily emphasize his continuity with the ideology [Nisbet,1973] and theology (Milbank,1993) of the Catholic reactionaries, I would like to insist that his religiosity is also marked with the deeply reflected tension of a thought which is, so to speak, becoming post-theistic. As such, its lines of flight intersect with contemporary discussions which, via Heidegger, Bataille and the postmoderns, have revived Nietzsche's scenario of dying gods and twilight idols, as the groundless ground on which to construct an understanding of our own discontents and possibilities.

Comte's contradictory position as an anti-metaphysician who sacralizes a socio-historical conception of the human also holds an interest for those trying to think through what it means, at 'positivist' enmeshment in a vocabulary of values and valuation, left him still within the modern philosophy of the subject so that his own transvaluation was itself only 'incompletely nihilist' [Ibid:104-9].
27 Nisbet's emphasis on the great influence of conservative religious thought generally on French sociology [e.g. 1973:238-241] leads him to misunderstand some aspects of the latter, including its inner connections. Speaking of Durkheim he observes 'His positivism has little to do with Comte's brand...' [1965:28].
millenium's end, to be of (or on) the Left. As an eccentric outrider of the Saint-Simonians, Comte belongs to the ideological pre-formation of modern socialism. As such his work may be dismissed as a historical footnote to the founders. What is worth highlighting, though, is precisely what was entailed by this pre-formative role. Comte not only espoused, but probed the rationale for a co-operative form of society, linking this on the one hand to the fundamental (and historically developing) nature of social being, and on the other to the problems of developing a non-transcendentalist religious perspective in tune with the scientific age. Considering that the deepest presuppositions of the transformist impulse -- for so long 'wizened and out of sight' both in the Marxism that has prevailed on its radical side and in the moralism (latterly transmuted into identity politics and the 'equity agenda') that has prevailed on its reformist side -- have become fragile and exposed in the unraveling of the socialist project in the last decades of this century, we can see here a second order of contemporary significance. As displayed, for example, in Habermas's reflection on communicative rationality [1987], Derrida's spectrological meditations on justice as the 'messianic' element in Marx [1993], Levinas's phenomenology of the Other [1969], and (at a less exalted theoretical level) Lerner's 'politics of meaning' [1996], a reconsideration of the ideological, and even religious, roots of socialism has moved (back) onto the agenda. Re-examining earlier figures like Comte, then, can become part of a renewed effort to clarify, and soberly rethink, what most deeply defines a progressive, emancipatory, or -- to use the maligned word -- communist commitment.

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28 For Comte's place among the larger contemporary Parisian constellation of prophetic and utopian thinkers, see F. Manuel, *Prophets of Paris* [1962:249-96].
Comte, to be sure, is a strange mirror to hold up. His political relation to the socialist tradition is ambiguous, to say the least. A top-down reformist who eschewed the collectivization of private property in favour of measures to ensure its morally responsive stewardship, his politics clearly had much in common with the Saint-Simonian current, in whose direct orbit he was from 1817-25. Early on he had noted that 'it is on the revolutionary school alone that ... we can expect that the positive polity can experience a predominant influence, because this is the only one that is always open to new action on behalf of progress'. In that spirit he was an anti-monarchist during the Bourbon restoration, while under Louis-Phillipe he urged a cross-class alliance of workers and 'patriciens' to pressure for the reforms that would permit the new industrial/positive system fully to emerge. At the same time, and increasingly, Comte was a partisan of order as well

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29 Private property would be socialized and moralized in its operation through such measures as the establishment of a fixed scale of salaries (fixed in its ratios by Politique Positive itself [X:340-343], the institution of local salons for mingling and instruction, which would bring patriciens and prolétaires together in the same moral milieu [X:314-315], and a succession process in which the passage of property on to heirs would be vetted, and eventually, through artificial conception [X:278], separated from heredity as such. The total intended effect would be to civicize both production and capital through a cooperative ethos in which all would be cooperating in a collective and above all future-oriented task: 'En effet, c'est seulement en travaillant pour une destination future ou lointaine, mais actuellement indéterminée, qu'on peut habituellement convertir les occupations personnelles en fonctions civiques' [IX:491].

30 In 1819 Comte became Saint-Simon's personal secretary and editor of his house journal, l'Industrie. The master's refusal to acknowledge Comte's authorship of key articles, and arguments about who was stealing ideas from whom, led to a bitter break. On Saint-Simon's death in 1825, Comte nonetheless agreed to contribute an essay to the founding issue of le Producteur, which his closest followers put together a bare three weeks after the old man was gone. For a detailed account of Comte's break with Saint-Simon, see Gouhier [1965: 95-109] and Pickering [1993:192-244]. The essay at the centre of their final dispute (which Comte wrote in 1922 but which Saint-Simon only published, and with a disclaimer, in 1824) was Prospectus des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société. He always referred to it as mon opuscule fondamentale. He republished it, with five other early opuscules as an appendix to the last volume of Politique Positive.
as progress. In that vein he was hostile to any form of insurrection, or indeed democratizing project. With the rise of a radical workers’ movement in the watershed decade of the 1840s, accordingly, he began to seek alliances on the right. In the upheavals of 1848-51, he detached himself from the republicans, argued for a ‘dictatorship’ (as under Danton), then gave cautious welcome to Louis Bonaparte, whose regime he tried to win to the cause. When that came to nothing he was again pushed into opposition, where he confined his attention to appealing for money, developing a core of acolytes and propagandizing for Positivism and its Church.

The limitations of nineteenth century French ‘socialism’, in the non-Marxist stream that runs from the Saint-Simonians to the social-democracy of Jules Jaurès and the solidarism (with which Durkheim was briefly associated) of Léon Bourgeois, are easy enough to state. It reduced to a moral plane both the problem of, and solution to, the contradictions of industrial capitalism.

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31 Martineau, 1853 Vol 2: 437. A critical but ‘appreciative’ assessment of the revolutionary spirit (‘époque critique, ou âge de transition révolutionnaire’) of ‘the metaphysical philosophy’ is laid out in the 55th leçon of le Cours de Philosophie Positive [V:394-623].

32 A sense of Comte’s political journey is given by Pickering, 1993, especially chapters 2 and 10, and Gouhier, 1965:144-8. Comte’s critique of the Bourbon Restoration for its ‘retrograde’ alliance with remnants of the ancien régime continued into the Orleanist régime of Louis-Phillipe. Unlike other moderate Republicans, though, he equally opposed Parliamentarism, as he made clear in a letter (with other signatories) he sent to Louis-Philippe in 1840 [Pickering:432]. After seeking the support of women and workers in the Catéchisme Positiviste of 1852, he sought those of les hommes d’etat, practically stressing the need for subsidies to establish (his own) sacerdoce in 1885 in his Appel aux Conservateurs. Its tone may be gathered from the new slogan that appears in its frontispiece: La Famille, la Patrie, l’Humanité.

33 After Comte’s death in 1858, the Positivist Society, under Pierre Lafitte, continued to propagate Comte’s ideas. Its last major public involvement was a campaign, in alliance with the Parisian Catholic hierarchy, to prevent the city authorities from relocating the main Paris cemetery outside the city limits. See Ariès [1981:541-5]. The cult of the dead was central, for Comte, to the religion of Humanity.

34 Léon Bourgeois expounded his social philosophy in La Solidarité [1896]. For Durkheim’s involvement with solidarisme see Lukes, 1972:350-4.
These contradictions it also defined as transitional rather than inherent, resulting from the incompleteness of industrialism’s emancipation from pre-industrial ways of seeing, feeling, thinking and acting. Correlative with this conflation, which was carried into the heart of Comteian, and Durkheimian, sociology, there is no conceptual room for the economic as such, either as the basis of class relations or as the moulder of social structures and processes through the logic of capital and commodities. Such phenomena are assimilated instead to technical realities (production, industry) on the one side, social-moral ones (distribution, coordination) on the other, wherewith the conflictual and disintegrative effects of the free market are defined as a pathology which can be cured by institutional reforms designed to harmonize, solidarize, ethicize etc., the whole sphere of production and exchange. Anarchists, libertarians and Critical Theorists will add that, faulty social analysis aside, there are serious weaknesses of vision in this form of socialism too. Enthusiasm for ‘l’industrie’ was the watchword for a bad utopia: society as a vast workshop, productivist, technocratic, and held together as a managed harmony of useful functions by a centrally directed state. It is a vision which hovers at the edges of the Communist Manifesto’s transitional program, and one that, for all of Marx’s own horizon of freedom beyond the realm of necessity, the ideologues of the Second and Third Internationals never submitted to much critical scrutiny.

Once such a critique is admitted, however, there remains a residue of considerations which have not thereby been entirely dispelled. One set of issues concerns the constitution and axiological status of the collective subject. ‘The standpoint of the old type of materialism’ wrote Marx in his

35 In points 6 (‘centralization of all means of communication and transportation in the hands of
‘Theses on Feuerbach’, ‘is civil society. The standpoint of the new materialism is social humanity or human society’ [Marx and Engels, 1947:199]. The dictum applies to the ideological as well as the theoretical plane. In all its variants, and however qualified by individualism, socialism’s sacral term is always some version of the first person plural. This ‘we’ forms both the ground and horizon of progressive political activity. The transformist aim is to autonomize and finally heal it, so that the organized collectivity of society is no longer coercive, no longer masks the domination structure of a pseudo-community, and does not stand in contradiction to the ‘I’s’ that make it up. But how is such a collectivity — Bloch’s ‘not-yet community’? Bernstein’s (and Habermas’s) community-as-regulative-ideal? Blanchot [1988]’s communité invouable? — to be conceived? How is to be thought with respect to social, psychological, and historical categories? How, with respect to agency? How, if we are to avoid dogmatism or idealism, can ‘social humanity’, or a guiding ‘we’, be grounded? What meaning can be ascribed to it within a critical, demythologized, socio-historical self-understanding?

I do not want to suggest that Comte provides a satisfactory answer to these questions. Nonetheless, what he projected into the category of l’Humanité arose from a persevering attempt both to do so, and in the context of a world-view which aimed to make theory practical, and return it to earth. Comte’s elaboration of that term, then, including his attempt to ground it in an ontological analysis of ‘the social tie’, might usefully be revisited as part of a wider enquiry into the social problematics of transformist thought.

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the state’) and 8 (‘establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture’) [Feuer, 1959:28].

36 For the ‘not-yet’ as a dialectical utopian category in Bloch’s social philosophy, see especially Bloch, 1995: 310-11.
Comte's treatment, however, is connected to a less digestible point. The worship of *l'Humanité* was not just designed to inspire us all forward. Its institution, as concept and cult, was tied, within a program of social reconstruction, to the perspective of unity and order. Progress itself, Comte insisted, is 'the progress of order'. And what secures order, as the complex of practices that bind individuals together in a society, and binds together this binding, is 'religion'. In so far as Comte confounds, under the technicist rubric of industrial society, the problem of capitalist order with that of social order as such, we may dismiss both his analysis and his prescriptions as a misrecognition of the problem. Given the social antagonisms and cultural corrosion that are endemic to the dynamics of capitalist industrialization, it is no wonder he proposes such a vast apparatus of régulation and ralliement to hold it all together. Has he not, in fact, simply mistaken the ideological superstructure for the base of the social formation he would religiously unify?

The objections may be granted, yet it still may be possible to learn from what Comte was aiming to do. Colletti, dismissive of determinist and economistic forms of Marxism, but equally opposed to the inflated role of subjectivity in counter-strains, suggested a policy, in such matters, of constructive engagement. The split between Kautsky and Plekhanov on the one side, and 'Austro-Marxists' on the other, he notes in 'Marxism as a Sociology', 'can be traced to the basic orientations into which bourgeois culture was split in the second half of the nineteenth century' [1972:18]. That split, with its one-sided approaches to the relation between social consciousness and social being, had persisted in orthodox Marxism's attitude to its 'bourgeois' sociological rival. Classical sociology may be judged idealist, subjectivist etc., in so far as it takes
consciousness (the *conscience collective* for Durkheim, the intentionality of social action for Weber) to be the key to explicating social structure. But criticizing this should not lead us to forget that ideology is also consciousness (as a mental appropriation which changes both subject and object) and that 'ideological social relations' are an independently efficacious part of the social whole\textsuperscript{37}. This implies the possibility of a critical appropriation in which one form of one-sidedness might correct another. Althusser, thinking more especially of French classical sociology, though less open about the appropriation he is recommending, goes further. Ideology — as the sphere in which individuals are 'interpellated' as social subjects and in which, as a crucial element of that interpellation and its cognitive consequences, individuals bear an 'imaginary relations to their real conditions of existence' [1971:152-55] — is irreducible. It is not, as some passages in the early Marx on the 'realization of philosophy' appeared to suggest\textsuperscript{38}, destined to disappear as an expression or epiphenomenon of class domination, or after 'positive science' has replaced empty 'speculation'\textsuperscript{39}. In effect, what Comte calls 'religion' is what Althusser calls

\textsuperscript{37} 'The term 'socio-economic formation' is a vivid expression of the fact that the object of *Capital* has the character of a 'whole', and this is so, as we have seen, because of the impossibility of any dualistic separation between the *material* and *ideological* levels...It is therefore a *totum*, i.e. something including in its scope both social *being* and social *consciousness*, or rather both conditions *a parte objecti* and conditions *a parte subjecti*. ...Both subject and object are part of an *objective* subject-object process. The superstructure is itself an aspect and articulation of the structure...it is however equally true that the superstructural or ideological level, though it may be *part* of the structure and of social being, nonetheless is so as *consciousness*, i.e. it has a specific role *vis-à-vis* other parts of the structure' [Colletti 1972:10-11]. It may be noted that Colletti follows Rickert in including Comte (as a small 'p' positivist) among those who do not recognize this. However, as I suggest [Chapter 4 Introduction below], such a characterization misses the mark.

\textsuperscript{38} Althusser discusses Marx's treatment of 'philosophy', and the status of his own, in *For Marx* [1969]. See especially 28-30 and Chapter 2, 'On the Young Marx'.

\textsuperscript{39} 'Where speculation ends — in real life — there real positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted,
‘ideology’\textsuperscript{40}; from which angle, the way to understand what the Comte/Durkheim tradition defined as the problem of religion and social order would be to recast it (and the mechanistic metaphor of the ‘superstructure’) in terms of the structures and processes through which the prevailing complex of social relations is reproduced.

Comte and the canon

So far I have suggested that there are substantive reasons why re-examining Comte’s thought might be worthwhile. But as the last reference implies, there is also another reason. This has to do with a second set of issues concerning mis-impressions — affecting other figures beside Comte himself — which have arisen because of Comte’s place, or rather non-place, in the canon of modern western thought.

Talcott Parsons opened \textit{The Social System} with the rhetorical question (from Crane Brinton) ‘Who reads Spencer today?’ [1968:3]. With more than equal force we could ask the same about Comte. Besides the early studies by John Stuart Mill [1961] and Caird [1885], and writings by Harrison and other partisans of the Positivist Society\textsuperscript{41}, there were, until very recently, no serious full length studies of his thought in English\textsuperscript{42}. In the history of socialism Comte’s place has been

\textsuperscript{40} For a discussion of Althusser in these terms, see below Chapter 8.

\textsuperscript{41} For example, Harrison [1879] and Congreve [1898].

\textsuperscript{42} Two recent books are especially worth mentioning. The first is Mary Pickering’s intellectual biography — the first volume of which, treating the years up to 1842, was published in 1992. The second is Robert Scharff’s \textit{Comte After Positivism} [1995]. A finely focussed rescue of Comte’s
eclipsed by Saint-Simon (whom nobody reads either), and in that of French sociology (with more justification) by Durkheim. Comte’s reputation has fared little better in France. He may have been, in the century before Sartre, ‘the only mind worthy of interest which French philosophy produced’ [1969:25], but after the initial flurry of controversy, and Lévi-Bruhl’s sympathetic explication [1903], Comte’s work was largely ignored -- buried, as Althusser puts it, under a ‘relentless hostility’.

Comte’s obscurity would be unremarkable if he had been a merely minor and transient figure. However, and leaving aside his British influence through John Stuart Mill, Comte’s influence on French thought, and so, these days, on Anglophone thought as well, has been profound.

Somewhat like Hegel, that other grand historicist totalizer of his epoch, his system broke into philosophy of science from Mill’s appropriation (and misreading), it aims to renew discussion about Comte in the ‘post-positivist’ context of Anglo-American philosophical discussion about ‘historical sensitivity and ahistorical objectivism’. These books, published since this study was begun, suggest that an interest in Comte is beginning to revive.

Partly, perhaps, as a result of Althusser’s own influence there was a revival of interest in Comte in France during the 1970s. Particularly noteworthy is the work of the anthropologist Angèle Kramer-Marietti [1980, 1982], which re-examines particularly Comte’s notion of representation, language and sentiments; the gender dimension was also explored afresh by Kofman [1978]. The cursory treatment that Foucault gives Comte in the Order of Things [1970], even in a work that focusses of the hinge period to which Comte belonged, is indicative however of the marginalized position Comte had come to hold, and this even in a work about the rise of the scientific outlook in les science humaines and which particularly focuses on the hinge period to which Comte belonged.

Comte’s thought also had an impact, scarcely acknowledged, in Germany. Husserls’ diagnosis of the ‘spiritual crisis’, with its attack on the ascendancy of a parcellating and ‘negative’ rationality, and its championing of ‘philosophy-science’, differs from Comte, inter alia, in urging a return to pre-Socratic Greek philosophical roots. But the starting point for Husserl’s diagnosis is almost identical to Comte’s: ‘[O]ur age is according to its vocation a great age -- only it suffers from the skepticism that has disintegrated the old, unclarified ideals. And for that reason it suffers from the too negligible development and force of philosophy, which has not yet progressed
pieces among his legatees. But elements of that system entered many discourses, some with a powerful posthumous theoretical career. This is evident in biology and, of course, in sociology, a word he coined. In the quest for a positive 'science of science', a Comteian imprint is also palpable in the field of historical epistemology. That is, in the project of developing a theoretical history of knowledge which was pursued in different ways by Bachelard, Koyré, Canguilhem, and more latterly, Foucault.

There have also been periodic attempts to rethink Comte's whole project, including its political and religious dimensions. Though he deployed Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Saint-Simon as his principal reference-points for explicating the formation, and mission, of sociology, Durkheim's

enough to overcome skeptical negativism (which calls itself positivism) by means of true positivism' [Husserl, 1965:145]. The allusion in the last line is unmistakable.
45 For a first-hand account of splits in the Positivist Society itself, see Littré [1864]. For the decline of the Positivist movement in Britain, see Wright [1986:240-272].
46 Besides sociology, and everything that spun out of it, the influence of Comte was profound on Émile Littré, Charles Maurras [Nolte:52 et seq], and Henri de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Movement.
47 For the influence of Positivism on biology in 19th century France, both through la Société de Biologie (founded in 1848 by Robin and Segond) and through Émile Littré, see Canguilhem [1994:251-260].
48 In his introduction to the English edition of Canguilhem's The Normal and the Pathological, Foucault surveys this development, highlighting the fact that 'for a century and a half [after 1789] the history of science carried with it in France philosophical stakes' [Canguilhem,1991:11]. For him, though, Comte is less central than a more general contrast between the French and German engagements with the 'question of Enlightenment'. The German case involved philosophy 'in a historical and political reflection on society....In France it is the history of science which has above all served to support the philosophical question of the Enlightenment: after all, the positivism of Comte and his successors was one way of taking up again the questioning by Mendelsohn and Kant on the scale of a general history of societies' [10]. Foucault's view downplays, it may be said, both the religio-political differences between France and Germany, as well as the historical and political preoccupations of Comte himself.
49 Durkheim's essay on Montesquieu, 'Quid Secondatus politicae scientiae instituendae cotulerit', written as the Latin thesis requirement for his agrégation, and his essay on Rousseau's Contrat
wider program can certainly be understood that way; as too, though the disguise is heavier, can the early Althusser\(^{50}\). With the reception of linguistic theory and phenomenology, and with the rise of structuralism and post-structuralism, the Comteian matrix which had shadowed, and partly shaped, the \textit{sciences humaines} during the first half of this century was certainly dislocated and displaced. Even here, though, Comteian themes have often been close to the surface — for example in that chapter of \textit{De La Grammatologie} where Derrida asks whether grammatology can be 'a positive science'\(^{51}\).

In France, the background presence of the Comteian inheritance has been real, but of little mainstream interest. In the Anglophone enthusiasm for new French thought, lack of acknowledgment has been reinforced by lack of knowledge. Deconstruction, received into American thinking through literary studies, and taken up by a political interest in 'decentering' the (Western, white, male, heterosexual etc) subject, popularly gave itself a pedigree that ran almost in a straight line from Nietzsche to Heidegger to Derrida\(^{52}\). A sideshoot went from Saussure and Peirce to Barthes, discourse analysis and Foucault. In such a truncated account, the fuller

\textit{Social}, posthumously published in 1918, were published together in English in 1965 [Durkheim, 1965]. Durkheim's Bordeaux lectures on socialism and Saint-Simon credit the latter, much more than Comte, with the scientific-diagnostic science of society he aimed to develop [Durkheim, 1962].

\(^{50}\) This is taken up in chapter 8 below.

\(^{51}\) In part one, chapter three. Not surprisingly, since Derrida takes writing to be the undoing of any \textit{logos}, Derrida's answer is more than negative. 'On what condition is grammatology possible? Its fundamental condition is certainly the undoing [\textit{solicitation}] of logocentrism. But this condition of possibility turns into a condition of impossibility. In fact it risks ruining the principle of science as well. Graphematics or grammatology ought no longer to be presented as sciences; their goal should be exorbitant compared to \textit{grammatological language}' [Derrida, 1974:74].
intellectual history sedimented within (post)structuralism understandably got lost in translation. The British case is less straightforward. The initial British reception, as Anthony Easthope [1991:1-33] has detailed, mainly went through Althusser, in the context of a far-reaching 70s debate within and about Marxism. What came out of that moment was a re-worked neo-Gramscian theory of hegemony, a theory of ideology which took critical social and cultural theory towards a problematization of subjectivity and discourse, and a pathway towards the galaxy of Parisian-postmoderns. Paul Hirst’s [1975] Althusserian study of Durkheim implied a corrective, and so also continuous, relation between them; but neither he nor anyone else was concerned to explore Althusser’s larger debt to Comte. When Althusser recanted the ‘theoreticist’ positions advanced in For Marx and Reading Capital, he confessed that ‘Nous avons été Spinozistes’ [1974:65]. Some, looking for elaboration, went back to Spinoza, but

52 Mark Taylor’s Altarity which sketches out the genealogy for a ‘postmodern a/theology’ from Hegel, Kierkergaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, to Derrida (and so reads the latter through the prism of the former), is a case in point.

53 Ioan Davies [1995, esp 10-62] has examined this debate, which prominently pitted EP Thomson againsterry Anderson and the dominant group in the New Left Review, and which also the rise of the Birmingham School of British cultural studies, in the course of a wider examination of the rise of a British ‘cultural Marxism’.

54 Notably in the writings of Stuart Hall [e.g. 1984]

55 The intermediary figures here were Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe [1985].

56 ‘This wholesale abandonment of critical reason in the name of a new (postmodern) dispensation devoid of transcendental guarantees... is part of a wider movement of thought among French intellectuals that has marked a return to metaphysical questions and a striking revival of interest in Spinoza’s philosophy. The earliest and probably best known example was Althusser’s project of so called ‘structural Marxism’, a project that explicitly hailed Spinoza as among the great precursors of Spinoza’s dialectic.... For Althusser, ideology is best understood as a concept precisely equivalent to Spinoza’s ‘knowledge of imagination’...In fact it is no exaggeration to say that the entire project of Althusserianism comes down to the issue of Spinoza versus Hegel, or the claims of a Marxist theoretical ‘science’ as opposed to a subject-centred dialectics of class-consciousness, alienation, ‘expressive causality’ and other such Hegelian residues’ [Norris, 1991:34-5]. Althusser’s relation to Spinoza, which he usefully documents, is also an important feature of Eliot’s study of Althusser [1987].
debate focussed on issues of theory and practice and none were disposed to challenge this characterization as the proper name for Althusser’s deviation. The price of ignorance was a missed opportunity. Had Althusser been understood against the background of what was distinctive in the modern French sociological tradition as a whole it might have been possible to see that Hegel -- and Stalin -- were not the only ghosts at the table of contemporary Marxist theory; and that the Althusserian intervention invited critical reflection not just on socialist theory, but on socialist ideology -- using that term ‘positively’ -- as well.

Whitehead observed that ‘a science that omits to forget its founders is lost’. But this only holds where knowledge cumulates in some objectifiable way, and where the results can be conceptually separated from the process of thought which produced it. It only holds, that is, for what Horkheimer called ‘traditional theory’ [1972:188-243]. Neither condition obtains in social, political and cultural theory where theory, having to grapple with the inherence of the subject in the object, must eschew a false detachment and strive instead for critical reflexivity. Nor are these conditions satisfied where the aim is to develop, not simply the one best theorization, but an entire repertoire of modes of thinking, and thinking about thinking, which might optimally help to generate a multi-dimensional understanding of a multiplex world. Under such circumstances, founding figures are certainly not to be fetishized. But neither are they to be forgotten, at least as mnemonic markers for the themes, concepts, and enframing devices carried by their thought, together with the other names that mark its subsequent development and dissemination.

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See especially the title essay in EP Thomson’s The Poverty of Theory [1978]
The question of canons -- what they include and exclude, how they are formed, and what to make of them -- has become controversial with respect to literature and the arts, as well as in the domain of theory [Guillory, 1993]. The very notion has become suspect, implying (in the medieval manner) pre-given Authorities whose lead we must follow and to whom we must defer. But in a more pluralistic, and limitedly authoritative sense, what one might call, if not a canon, then a shifting canonical assemblage of the intellectual tradition, is indispensable for theorizing in the human domain. Within such an assemblage, carrying forward the themes, categories, and metatheory of even major thinkers now passé, can provide both a principle of intelligibility vis-a-vis related, or opposed, forms of theoretical approach, and an ongoing resource, at least as a kind of second-order software, if no longer with respect to their 'effects of truth'. This is not to say that the intellectual canon is always what it should be; nor -- though it is never fixed, and always contested -- that it can be altered at will. It is just that we tend to construct our organon for thinking with the aid of what, and whom, the current canon foregrounds. To which extent, the relation to it of past thinkers, paradigms and traditions, is always worth reconsidering.

Comte's posthumous disregard can be blamed on his own idiosyncratic, and sectarian, deficiencies. However, recalled now as neither a real philosopher nor a real sociologist, we can also interpret his being forgotten as an effect of the very process of intellectual fragmentation which he strove in vain to overcome. In this respect, he belongs to a larger tradition of reflecting and theorizing about the grand themes of society and human nature which, for most of this century, has fitted poorly into the established disciplinary grid, and has been marginalized as a result. One does not have to claim Comte's genius to have been equal to that of those great
German thinkers whose philosophical reputation (deservedly) outstrips his, and whose *speculations orgueilleuses* he despised, in order to argue that this disregard is unwarranted. What makes it so is the strategic place Comte occupies in modern European intellectual history. Indeed, it is plausible to argue that that history, and its informing effects on the present, are unintelligible if we take no account of the project and meta-narrative Comte tried to synthesize, the influence it came to have in the (French) development of the human sciences, and, by way of postmodern theory, the more recent impact, and implications, of its disarticulation and collapse.

A better understanding of Comte can help illuminate, more particularly, two developments within the larger complex of European thought. The first, originating with Bacon’s *Great Instauration*, is traceable through the *Encylopédistes*, Condorcet, Destutt de Tracy and the *Idéologues* to Saint-Simon and Comte, and thence to the offshoots of *philosophie positive*. Its guiding aim was to totalize scientific knowledge, through the systematic mapping of its results and principles, as the basis both for a naturalistic understanding of humanity’s place in the cosmos, and for forging an intellectual instrument for extending human (self) control. In wider compass the project presented itself as a correction of Aristotle — particularly the Scholastics’ Aristotle — in light of the rise of natural science, together with its philosophical, technical, and social implications. If the initial target was Aristotelianism, however, the principal thought-opponent was Plato, and by extension all aprioristic, idealist, in short ‘metaphysical’ forms of reason. Comte’s contribution was to apply this critique to the rationalist social and moral theory of the *philosophes* so that, by means of a real ‘science of Man’, the Baconian matrix could be fully positivized as the subject and object of its own gaze.
The second sub-genealogy we have already come to. It pertains to the theoretical career of that post-theistic religion which, after 1789\(^5\), reconstructive reformers sought to install as the historically proper replacement for the Catholicism of the *ancien régime*. If we measure its full extent, though, it may be regarded as a (perhaps closing) chapter of a much longer French adventure with reason and faith; an adventure which issues from Christianity’s attempt, *ab initio*, to reconcile the mysteries of faith with Greek philosophy, and whose opening storms go back to medieval theology and controversies over rationalism and natural philosophy at the University of Paris in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries [Pieper:1964]. At the centre of this story is the rise and fall of the social -- qua Humanity and Society -- as a sacred category and fixed point of ideological reference, and of sociology as the *logos* of that god. In its classically constructive moment, and with a neo-Kantian amendment\(^9\), the narrative runs from Saint-Simon’s *Nouveau Christianisme* and Comte’s *Religion positive*, to Durkheim’s civic religion. Its disintegration can be traced through the structuralist, phenomenological (and Bataillian) break-up of the Society-

\(^5\) Beginning with the Jacobin *culte de la Raison* in 1793, and *culte de l’Être suprême* in 1794. At the inauguration of the latter in the Champs de Mars, ‘Robespierre set fire, with a torch handed to him by David, to a huge cardboard figure of atheism, which went up in flames, exposing to view a rather smoky statue of Wisdom, after which the whole Convention, and delegates from the sections, ascended an artificial mountain where appropriate ceremonies were performed ’ [Cobban:232]. Gouhier, recalling a longstanding historical understanding that the French Revolution was itself, in its consciousness, a religious movement, assuming in the end the form of a new Church, suggests that Comte’s religion of Humanity can be understood as ‘*une survivance de l’époque révolutionnaire*’ [Gouhier, 19331:5-7]. This certainly would have made his religious project less bizarre a century and a half ago than it inevitably seems today.

\(^9\) Durkheim’s ‘neo-naturalist’ reconciliation of positivism and Kantian idealism is examined by Wallwork in *Durkheim: Morality and Milieu*. The immediate linking figure is Charles Renouvier [q.v. Lukes:1972:54-57]
subject, and thence to all the 'death of...' pronouncements which returned thought to a black hole in which reason and faith had both disappeared.

Comte offers an illuminating vantage point from which to examine both of these developments. His Positivism was fashioned both as a scientific systematization of science, and as a (scientifically based, non-mystical) religion. To be sure, Comte was not the only cross-over point. Bacon’s House of Salomon prefigured the Positivist priesthood. Appeals to ‘Natural religion’, as an alternative to the pre-scientific reliance on Authority and Revelation, were a common coin among freethinkers in the century preceding Comte. De Tracy’s Elément d’Idéologie, and Saint-Simon’s writings before he met Comte — indicating the need for a science of Man and a new synthesis of knowledge to complete the scientific revolution as the industrial-age basis for a moral renovation — show clearly enough that these themes were not original with him. But Comte was the first to think out, systematically and self-consciously, the integration of both projects. Hence, within the intellectual tradition of modernity, the significance of his thought both as a reference-point, and as an event with its own continuing effects.

Order of exposition

Against the background of these considerations, the intent of this study is to interrogate Comte’s project, with particular attention to the relationship between its religious and social-theoretical

60 The need for a philosophical synthesis of the sciences is laid out in Saint-Simon 1805 essay, Introduction aux Travaux Scientifiques de XIXème Siècle. His Mémoire sur la Science de l’Homme was written in 1810. See Fleming, 70-85.
elements. I focus on the religious side for two reasons. First, because this is crucial to understanding both the themes and structure of the Positivist System; secondly as a way to broach more contemporary issues concerning transcendence, politics and the social, particularly as these touch on the problem of re-thinking what Comte formulated as Humanist faith.

To that end, I propose to explore Comte’s religious and theoretical position -- in his terms, the doctrine of Positive Religion -- at four levels. The first (chapters 2 and 3) will consider the overall schematics of his attempt to produce a totalization of human knowledge and consciousness. The next (chapter 4), will consider his proto-sociological analysis of the contemporary 'religious crisis' to which that totalization, and its associated program of reforms, was conceived as a response. Chapters 5 and 6 examine his theory of social being, in both its 'static' and 'dynamic' aspects, highlighting that being’s complex dual status (as subject/object for both science and religion), and its transcending significance as the self-perfecting incarnation of Love. This, finally (chapter 7), will bring us to Comte’s reflection on the nature of the Positivist godhead, which figured l'Humanité as le Grand-Etre, and whose dedicated serviteurs he enjoined us all to be.

Comte’s totalization, I mean to show, was radically flawed, not only as science and as a socio-political programme, but at its fideistic core, that is, as a religious position that would sublate the old gods. At the same time, it opened up a complex of issues concerning what is theoretically, ideologically, and politically entailed by a thoroughly going 'social outlook' that cannot be lightly dismissed. In that spirit, the study will conclude (chapter 8) with a consideration of what might be retrieved from the ruins. After Durkheim, the secularising attempt to conceive, and institute, the human collectivity as a divine
ensemble irrevocably collapsed. Nevertheless, the work of Bataille, Althusser, Baudrillard and Nancy is adduced to show that drawing the non-catastrophic consequences of this collapse has enabled revised versions of ‘socio-theology’ to generate a new (or renewed) field of questions still pertinent to a politically charged manner of thinking about the social.

In explicating Comte himself, the order of enquiry could no doubt have been different. Comte’s system of systems, somewhat like Hegel’s ‘circle of circles’, is complexly interrelated, indeed to the point of a baffling self-referentiality. It can be entered anywhere or nowhere. But for the same reason, at whatever level we enter it, we cannot avoid encountering the totalizing systematicity which characterised every aspect of his thinking. To begin with a reflection on its abstract schematics at least has the advantage of underlining that point. Such a starting-point will also introduce us to that ‘mania for unity’ which John Stuart Mill [1961] and many others have found indigestible in the temper and movement of Comte’s thought. As we shall see, Comte’s synthesising zeal not only symptomatizes a horror for the hell of non-closure. It also self-consciously expressed what he took to be a divine impulse, l’amour universel — an impulse which lies at the heart of his religious project, and whose misrecognition, and implicit violence, can be diagnosed, religiously as well as conceptually, as its own original sin.
CHAPTER TWO

THE SYSTEM AND ITS LOGIC (1): FROM POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY TO SOCIAL SCIENCE

The two Comtes

Any attempt to think through the coherence (or non-coherence) of Comte's work as a whole is faced with a difficulty that has attended its reception from the outset. The world-religion he aimed to found, and whose Grand-prêtre he proclaimed himself to be, was never more than a marginal sect. The Positivist catechism, calendar, liturgy, sacraments etc., are of interest today only as an example of the kind of ideological exotica that flourished in the radical period that culminated, politically, in the upheavals of 1848. At the same time, Comte's entire œuvre consisted of tracts designed to establish the intellectual basis of that religion, to train its clergy, or evangelise on its behalf. To take Comte

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1 Besides the projects and social experiments associated with Manuel’s ‘prophets of Paris’ — Fourier, Proudhon, Saint-Simon, Enfantin and Comte himself— the period from the 1830s to the 1860s also saw the rise, throughout the ‘advanced’ regions of Europe and North America, of a multitude of movements, from Chartism, cooperativism, socialism, neo-Malthusianism, feminism, and abolitionism, to nationalism, folkloric and feudal-aristocratic revivals; to which must be added, in the New World, an apocalyptic frontier revivalism (for Harold Bloom [1993] the ‘Great disappointment’ of 1843 was the cradle of the ‘American religion’), and the flowering of a host of intentional communities.

22 The need for a new ‘spiritual power’, which would control education and whose overall function would be ‘le gouvernement de l’opinion, c’est à dire l’établissement et le maintien des principes qui doivent présider aux divers rapports sociaux’ [OAC(Xa):193], was already clear to Comte when he began his Cours de philosophie positive in April 1826. In its ‘live’ version, the cours was a cadre-training exercise, as well as a way to earn money. In 1826, though, he was still hazy about the positivist clergy’s specific form of organization. Considerations sur le pouvoir spirituel, concludes: ‘J’examinerai plus tard ..., sous ses aspects principaux, la nature de cette
seriously then, has always required some strategy for separating what Durkheim and others called ‘the absurdities’ into which Comte’s religious mission led him\(^3\) from those aspects of his work (conventionally, his philosophy of science, and the methodological reflections underpinning his premature founding of sociology) deemed to have a more enduring intellectual relevance\(^4\).

Among the eccentricities which found their way into his texts, and which, outside the coterie of true believers, have particularly held him up to ridicule, were a numerology (which dubbed the first three cardinal numerals sacred, held the number 7, and generally all primes, in high regard, and which provided classificatory principles for his profusion of systems and *tableaux générales*\(^5\)) and an extreme version of the Romantic *culte de la Femme*. Comte’s gynology was combined, moreover, with an almost parodic puritanism. This turned women into *anges gardiennes*, complete with an ideal of ‘chaste marriage’, a sub-cult of the *Vierge-Mère*, and a *utopie* of female parthenogenesis held out

\begin{quote}
organisation, que j’ai dû, par une abstraction nécessaire, laisser indéterminée afin de ne pas rendre impraticable une démonstration déjà si profondément compliquée’ [214-5]. Note also his comment in 1851, in the opening pages of *Politique positive*: ‘Dès 1826, mon travail décisif sur le pouvoir spirituel avait hautement voué l’ensemble de ma vie à fonder une autorité théorique vraiment digne de dérager l’entièrè régénération des opinions et les moeurs, en remplaçant définitivement le monothéisme épuisé’ [OAC(VII):2].
\end{quote}

\(^3\) Durkheim’s most extended discussion of the classical Positivists was in *Socialism* [1962]. With individualism/collectivism and science/utopia as the main organizing grid, Comte is assimilated into a discussion of ‘scientific socialists’.

\(^4\) The only serious and non-sectarian commentator who tried to relate Comte’s philosophy of science and attempted founding of sociology to his religious project was Lévy-Bruhl [1903]. See however my comment on Lévy-Bruhl’s understanding of Comte’s *foi démontrable* in Chap 7 below.

\(^5\) On primes and the number seven, see IX:130. Concerning the sacred symbolism of 1,2,3 (as in the triplet feeling, thinking, acting), Comte notes in *Politique positive*: ‘Enfin, la formule positiviste comporte numériquement une autre symbolisation, fondée sur les les propriétés des trois nombres sacrés, ordinaux ou cardinaux. On voit, en effet ... que le premier, symbole de synthèse, représente aussi la sympathie; tandis que le second indique l’ordre. Défini par
before biology as an inspiration to produce the technical means for making the sexual instincts physically obsolete [X:240-1]

Such motifs are particularly evident in the works of Comte's later years. On this basis, and following the lead of Littre [1845; 1864] and Mill⁶, the leading contemporaries through whom Comte was disseminated as a respectable figure, it became conventional to distinguish between these and his earlier writings. Chief among the latter, after the opuscules of Comte's formative but troubled period of employment, tutelage and collaboration with Saint-Simon (1817-24)⁷, was his first, and in his terms 'fundamental', synthesis: the six volume Cours de Philosophie positive, first presented in lecture form during the late 1820s⁸ and published between 1830 and 1842. It was this which gained Comte a position of intellectual prominence far beyond the circle of his immediate admirers, and indeed made him one of the nineteenth century's most influential thinkers. To the later, and more dubious corpus, belong the four volumes of Système de Politique positive; ou Traité de sociologie instituant la

l'arrangement, toujours binaire: le dernier, propre à tout évolution, exprime naturellement le progrès' [X:101]

⁶ "It is precisely because I consider M. Comte to have been a great thinker, that I regard it as a duty to balance the strong & deeply felt admiration which I express for what I deem the fundamental parts of his philosophy by an equally emphatic expression of the opposite feeling I entertain towards other parts. It is M. Comte himself, who, in my judgement, has thrown ridicule on his own philosophy by the extravagance of his later writings...", letter of Mill to Richard Congreve, Aug 8, 1865, cited in Pickering [1993:697].
⁷ These are appended to the fourth volume of Politique positive, under the grand rubric 'Appendice Général du Système de Politique Positive. They consist of: Séparation générale entre les opinions et les désirs (1819); Sommaire appréciation de l'ensemble du passé moderne (1820); and — 'l'opuscule fondamentale' — Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société (1822). The appendix is rounded out with three further essays written after 1824: Considérations philosophiques sur les sciences et les savants (1825); Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel (1826); and Examen du traité de Brossais sur l'irritation (1828).
religion de l'Humanité (1851-54), the Catéchisme Positiviste; ou sommaire exposition de la religion universelle (1852), and Le Synthèse Subjective, ou système universel des conceptions propres à l'état normal de l'Humanité, of whose projected four volumes Comte was only able to complete the first, Système de Logique Positive, before his death in 1857. If the Philosophie Positive, with its encyclopedic theory/history of the sciences and its sketch-plan for a science of society and history, was deemed worthy of serious attention, these subsequent works, with their dottily punctilious prescriptions for Positivist discipline and worship, were to be prudently set aside.

There is certainly biographical warrant for positing a break in Comte’s thought following his first major work, and, indeed, for suspecting what followed to be the ramblings of a ruined mind8. Between 1844 and 1846 came the extraordinary episode of Comte’s brief, passionate but ‘morally pure’ affair with the ineligible Clotilde de Vaux (both were unhappily separated from their former spouses). The experience converted him to the principle of the primacy of sentiment over intellect9. It was at that point too, immediately following Clotilde’s rapid descent into illness and death, and his memorialising transfiguration of her into ma sainte ange, that Comte explicitly assumed the role, and persona, of

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8 The initial attempt, held at his home in the spring of 1826, was interrupted by mental illness. After his recovery he gave an abridged but public version of the cours at the Athenée [Pickering, 365-371; 429-30].
9 Comte had suffered a full psychotic breakdown in 1826. For an account see Pickering [380-404] and Douhier [121-132].
10 In his Dédicace to Clotilde which preface Politique positive, he notes ‘Ceux qui savent que l'essor continu des instincts sympathétiques constitue la principale source de vrai bonheur, personnel ou social, respecteront ici ma solennelle gratitude pour l'ineffable félicité que tu m'as dévoilée, et qui devait exerciser une réaction durable sur mon amélioration morale... Toute ma philosophie m'avait déjà disposé à cette grande réaction dignement ressortir la juste prépondérance des affections domestiques dans l'ensemble du véritable essor morale’ [OAC(VII):iv-v].
Pope of Humanity\textsuperscript{11}. Those, including Comte's estranged wife Caroline Massin, who had morally and financially supported him in his losing battles to gain a permanent teaching post at the Ecole Polytechnique\textsuperscript{12}, were henceforth no longer seen as friends but backsliding congregants who had a duty to support \textit{le sacerdoce}. By the end of the decade, his disabling mood swings between depression and mania had been replaced by an impersonal calm. Overall, as Henri Gouhier pithily remarks [1965:175], '\textit{Le système avait devoré l'homme}'.

Psycho-biographical questions aside, however, it would be a mistake to overstate the extent of real theoretical rupture that attended these developments. Comte had been working on his \textit{Système de politique positive} throughout the period of writing and publishing the \textit{Cours}. They were always seen as complementary works, the one providing 'the base' and the other 'the goal' of the 'same universal system, where intelligence and sociability are intimately combined'\textsuperscript{13}. The fact that Comte saw fit to append his six early 'opuscles'—which already sketched out most of the major themes of Positive Religion, including its scientific humanist doctrine and its neo-medieval division of spiritual and temporal powers—to the final volume of the \textit{Politique positive}, further indicates his sense of continuity with regard to a project that had been developing over three decades. To be sure, between the preliminary account of 'social physics' given in the \textit{Philosophie positive} and the fuller treatise on 'sociology' provided in the \textit{Politique positive}, something new had been introduced. But the most

\textsuperscript{11} In the spring of 1849, according to Gouhier [1965, 211-3].

\textsuperscript{12} His \textit{Préface personelle} to Volume VI of the \textit{Cours}, published in 1842, details his side of the story and appeals for support against his 'persecuteurs'. The face page of the volume notes his part-time (and annually renewable) post at the \textit{École Polytechnique} as \textit{Répétiteur d'analyse} and \textit{examinateur}. For his battles with the \textit{École} see Pickering, 429-476.
overarching elements of this turn in Comte’s thinking — the ‘direct institution’ of la religion de l’Humanité, the refiguring of l’Humanité as le Grand-Être, and the ‘primacy of sentiment’ — are not simply reducible to manic symptoms. They are presented as necessary adjuncts to Comte’s first synthesis which seek to address what would otherwise be an insufficiency in the systematics of le système.

Philosophie positive had culminated in a discussion of the methodological prerequisites for establishing ‘social physics’ [Vol IV], and a general sketch of its findings [Vols V-VI]. What Politique Positive claimed to display, among other things, was the transformed condition of this science resulting from the impact back on to itself of the ‘subjective’ movement in thought which positive sociology’s own unveiling of l’Humanité as le Grand Être had necessarily provoked. It was a transformation destined to affect all the other positivized sciences in their turn. He makes this clear both in the conclusion to Politique positive [XI:529-540] and in the introduction to le Synthèse Subjective. Of the latter’s projected four volumes¹⁴, the one he completed, on mathematics (Système de logique positive), was itself conceived as belonging to a larger series dedicated to the ‘subjective synthesis’ of each of the fundamental branches making up l’échelle encyclopédique. (A new distinction drawn between sociology proper and the science de morale increased the number of these from six to seven). After his own subjective synthesis of mathematics/logic, that of the next four branches of knowledge, devoted to

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¹³ ‘Le positivisme est composé essentiellement d’une philosophie et d’une politique, qui sont nécessairement inséparables, comme constituant l’un la base et l’autre le but d’un même système universel, où l’intelligence et la sociabilité se trouvent intimement combinées’ [OAC(X):2].

¹⁴ Volume IV of Politique positive, published in 1854, specifies that Le Système de logique positive will appear in 1856, le Système de morale positive (two volumes) in 1859, and le Système de l’industrie positive in 1861. This plan, it should be noted, would correspond, in the tenth
an equivalent revamping of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology, would be left for his successors. The subjective synthesis of sociology, on the other hand, was to be regarded as effectively accomplished by the *Politique positive*. As for what was now the ‘final science’, *la morale*, which focussed on (the laws governing the socially inserted) human individual, this was to be expounded in volumes two and three. The fourth and final volume, *Système d’Industrie positive*, was projected to crown the ‘subjective synthesis’ with yet another. Moving from the synthesis of the intellect (in *Philosophie Positive*) and the synthesis of sentiment (in *Politique Positive* and beyond), to the synthesis of action, its aim would be to manifest the harmony among the differentiated practices of science-based production – material, political and moral – which, in the industrial stage of social development, would ‘normally’ prevail.

If we are to grasp the overall logic of Comte’s attempted totalization, then, his later work cannot be ignored. Neither completely continuous, nor completely discontinuous, with positions previously taken, its main interpretative, indeed substantive, challenge to the critical reader concerns neither the extravagant self-identification of the author nor the detail of his cultic prescriptions. These, at this distance, can be waved aside. The deeper problem concerns the necessity it claims for the project of ‘subjective synthesis’ itself – including the all-embracing worship of *l’Humanité* which underlies it –

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7-year period of his life, to his *retraite normale*, envisaged as *une dernière période septennaire de pleine activité théorique* [OC(X):542].
15 The full ground plan for the ‘subjective synthesis’, and how his own four volume series relates to it, is sketched out in XII:6-26.
in furthering that total harmonisation of thought, sentiment and action which Comte had aimed at all along\textsuperscript{16}.

To pursue that issue we must examine in more detail the movement of Comte’s thinking from the first synthesis to the second. The remainder of this chapter will be taken up with the initial systematics of Positive Philosophy, central to which was the notion of completing positivization through the establishment of social science. After that, we can consider what happened to his system when the effort was made to take full account of the implications of having made that would-be completing move.

**Positive philosophy and social science**

The order in which Comte’s first synthesis, the *Système* (or *Cours*) *de Philosophie positive*, presents its materials is deceptively linear. It unfolds a compendium of contemporary scientific knowledge, divided into what he determined to be its six fundamental branches: mathematics, astronomy, physics,

\textsuperscript{16} For Littré this was the nub of the matter. ‘*De la méthode objective, sur laquelle est fondée tout l’édifice de la philosophie positive, il passe à la méthode subjective, qui lui inspire la Politieue positive et la Synthèse subjective* [1864:517]. In upholding the former against the latter, he notes: ‘*Dans la méthode subjective, les conséquences sont métaphysiques comme le point de départ, n’ont besoin que de satisfaire à la condition d’être logiques, et ne trouvent ni ne requièrent les confirmations a priori de l’expérience...Dans la méthode déductive, les conséquences ne valent qu’après vérification experimentale*’ [532]. For contemporaries, the consistency between the two halves of Comte’s work was only evident to those like Pierre Lafitte who already accepted the religious standpoint presupposed and expounded in the second. Littré’s intellectual biography is especially valuable for its first-hand account of the sectarian atmosphere in which these initial controversies unfolded.
chemistry, biology and ‘social physics’\textsuperscript{17}. Each is treated historically, as a process of cumulative development, and arranged in an order which moves through the sciences according to the decreasing degree of generality, and increasing degrees of complexity and specificity, of the range of phenomena with which they deal\textsuperscript{18}. The sixth science is an innovation. Indeed, its founding as a science, through the establishment of an appropriate methodology and definition of the field, is the climax of the work, as of the larger cognitive transformation it recounts and reflects\textsuperscript{19}.

At first sight, the flow of the argument, and sociology’s place within it, seems clear enough. There are three steps: (1) from the history of the preceding sciences (including the histories of how they became sciences) is distilled a conception of scientificty (positivité) which (2) is then applied to the founding of a new, and in point of fact the only remaining, branch of science\textsuperscript{20}. This new science, sociology, in turn

\textsuperscript{17}The term ‘sociologie’, which replaces ‘physique sociale’ in later works, is first introduced in \textit{Leçon 47} of the \textit{Cours}, in the course of reviewing the formative contributions to it of Montesquieu and Condorcet [I:200-1]. About this coinage, to which he adds the terms sociocratie for the Positivised form of society and sociolatrie for its prevailing form of worship, he notes in \textit{Politique positive}: ‘J’ai d’abord regretté la composition hybride de ces trois termes indispensables, quoiqu’elle soit évidemment motivée par l’insuffisance spéciale des racines purement grecques. Mais j’ai ensuite reconnu que cette imperfection grammaticale trouve une heureux compensation dans l’aptitude directe d’une telle structure à rappeler toujours le concours historique des deux sources antiques, l’une sociale, l’autre mentale, de la civilisation moderne’ [VII:403N]. See also Pickering [615].

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{La hierarchie des sciences positives}, with the logic of development their interdependency implies, is elaborated in the second \textit{Leçon} of the \textit{Cours} [I:47-95].

\textsuperscript{19} ‘... la science sociale n’est pas seulement la plus importante de toutes; mais elle fournit surtout l’unique lien, à la fois logique et scientifique, que comporte désormais l’ensemble de nos réelles contemplations’ [VII:2].

\textsuperscript{20} For Comte there was another factor as well. The preparatory conditions for the positivisation of social science included both the development of the preceding five positive branches of knowledge and the development of society itself to the point where the law of social as well as intellectual progress (the cornerstone of \textit{Philosophie positive}) could be empirically derived. Without the latter, there would not have been sufficient factual material for social science to work
(3), forms the theoretical basis for a transformation of the practice corresponding to it: politics. Elaborating the results of this latter operation, Comte concludes by telling us [IV:842-3], will be the subject of a further opus, *Politique positive*, whose purpose will be to detail the program of reforms the *Cours* had only sketched out for resolving, definitively, the ‘great social crisis’ by which contemporary Europe is beset.

Each of these points deserves careful scrutiny. But two peculiarities of the linking argument should be noted.

The first concerns the movement from theory to practice. In the opening chapter of the *Cours*²¹ Comte tells us that the construction of Positivism as an all-embracing philosophy is intended not just as an intellectual contribution but as directly useful to the establishment of social order and the furtherance of progress. Indeed, Positive Philosophy is presented as the very cornerstone of social reconstruction. Yet by the end of the *Cours* that assertion is presented as a practical conclusion validly drawn from a sociological analysis produced by a new science which issues from the application of principles given by Positivism itself²². No doubt the second thesis, concerning the practical mission of Positivism,

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²¹ ‘...la philosophie positive...peu être considérée comme la seule base solide de l'organisation sociale qui doit terminer l'état de crise dans lequel se trouvent depuis si longtemps les nations les plus civilisées [I:339]. ‘Complétant la vaste opération intellectuelle commencée par Bacon, par Descartes et par Gallilée, construisons directement le système d'idées générales que cette philosophie est désormais destinée à faire indéfiniment prévaloir dans l'espèce humaine, et la crise révolutionnaire qui tourment les peuples civilisés sera essentiellement terminée [I:43].
²² In the fifty seventh Leçon, Comte summarizes the static and dynamic laws already by now established as a ‘détermination rationelle de la tendance finale des sociétés modernes, d'après l'ensemble du passé humain: état pleinement positif, ou âge de la généralité, caractérisé par
obeys the prescription concerning knowledge formation given in the first. If the advocacy of Positive Philosophy as a cure for the present crisis of post-Revolutionary French, and European, society is itself to be consistent with the spirit of that philosophy, that advocacy must itself have a positive basis. But there is a circularity. The programmatic necessity for the system is made to derive from the conclusions to which its crowning moment, the founding of sociology, leads 23. For the logic to cohere, the oracle of sociology must have been constructed in such a way that it is guaranteed, retroactively, to deliver the right message. We may suspect that the conceptual violence of ensuring this left detectable scars. As we move closer towards Comte’s sociology proper, that suspicion can be tested. For the moment I will observe just that the marks left by Comte’s operation of fashioning his science in light of its intended conclusions are well hidden because of the completeness with which the leaps of faith that constitute his ‘science’ of the ‘social’ are integrated, seamlessly, into the proliferating systematics of his system.

This begins to be apparent when we turn to the second peculiarity in the argument, which displays the same circularity between the philosophical system and its sociology at the level of the theoretical

23 Other commentators have noted the circularity. Pickering [564] comments that ‘In using universal sociological laws to verify sociology, Comte was making sociology legitimize itself [564]. Sylvain Pérignon, in the introduction to the edition of the complete works from which I have been citing, puts it this way: ‘La philosophie positive.... apparaît donc, d’une pointe de vue logique, comme le corollaire immédiat de la création de la physique sociale, qu’elle contribue cependant à réaliser. Autrement dit: la philosophie positive fonde méthodologiquement ce qui la fonde logiquement’ [I:XVI; emphasis in original]. To clarify the nature of this circle, which these
relations between them as it does at the level of their programmatic import. It is asserted that the founding of sociology comes about by applying principles of scientificity established through the system of Positive Philosophy. But it is also asserted that this system depends for its own conceptual existence on that same scientific advance. There is not a linear relation, then, between step one in his argument, establishing the principles of scientificity, and step two, applying them in the founding of a new science.

To appreciate the logic that flows the other way — i.e. the dependence of positive philosophy on positivized knowledge about the social — we have only to consider what, for Comte, is the nature of the scientific principles the former establishes, and whence they derive. They are not arrived at apriori, by rational intuition. They are induced from what at least purports to be the actual history of human knowledge. The epistemological, ontological and methodological generalisations of which these principles consist are themselves, accordingly, presented as empirical rather than purely ideational.

different formulations view as singular, I am suggesting that it be regarded as two intertwining circles, the one logical, the other practical and historical.

24 Neither theoretically or [practically indeed can Comte see any other way to proceed. To create sociology as a new science requires the positivist synthesis of knowledge as its starting point. ‘C'est surtout dans l'étude des phénomènes sociaux que la vraie notion fondamentale de la méthode de peut effectivement resulter aujourd'hui que d'une première conception rationelle de l'ensemble de la science, en sorte que les mêmes principes paraissent s'y rapporter alternativement ou à la méthode ou à la doctrine, suivant l'aspect sous lequel on les y considère’ [IV:230].

25 ‘En effet, la fondation de la physique sociale complétant enfin le système de sciences naturelles, il devient possible et même nécessaire de résumer les diverses connaissances acquises, parvenu alors à un état fixe et homogène, pour les coordonner en les présentant comme autant de branches d'un tronc unique, au lieu de continuer à les concevoir seulement comme autant de corps isolés’ [I:19].
statements. Together, these generalisations make up what Comte, following Francis Bacon's 'confused attempt' to provide the natural sciences with a unifying capstone, calls 'first philosophy' which, 'being destined to serve henceforth as a permanent basis for all human speculations, should be carefully reduced to the simplest possible expression' [I:61]. Comte later (in \textit{Politique positive} [X:176-180]\textsuperscript{27}) summarises them in fifteen rules. They divided into three subgroups\textsuperscript{28}. The first, 'equally objective and subjective', concerns the search for natural laws; the second, 'mainly subjective and relating to the understanding', gives the 'statical' and 'dynamical' laws of cognition; the third, 'mainly objective', summarises what the positive sciences have discovered to be the most general laws of motion and order in the material universe.

Needless to say, the Positivist version of 'first philosophy' was intended to displace rather than expand upon what Aristotle meant by that term, i.e. enquiry into 'the nature of being, as being'. The project of fundamental ontology had been re-launched by Descartes and the great metaphysicians of the

\textsuperscript{26} 'Regardant toutes les théories scientifiques comme autant de grands faits logiques, c'est uniquement par l'observation approfondie de ces faits qu'on peut s'élever à la connaissance des lois logiques' [I:18]. The same point recurs throughout the \textit{Politique positive}: 'C'est donc uniquement par l'étude positive de la grand évolution humaine que l'on peut découvrir les lois réelles de l'intelligence' [IX:46].

\textsuperscript{27} In \textit{Politique positive}, the same general definition of \textit{première philosophie} is retained, though the focus of the argument is much more on its subjectively unifying function: 'L'étude abstraite de l'ordre extérieure nous offre donc la seule synthèse qui soit vraiment indispensable à l'élaboration directe de l'unité totale. Elle constitue, en elle-même, un fondement suffisant de l'ensemble de notre sagesse, qui y trouve cette philosophie première, si confusément demandée par Bacon [VII:40]'. In its expanded version -- the encyclopedic scale of knowledge from the \textit{Philosophie positive}, plus the 15 rules, plus the theoretical part of the \textit{science de morale}, 'first philosophy' forms the \textit{préambule} for a systematized \textit{dogme positif}. 'Il suffit de le regarder comme inséparable de l'institution abstraite sur laquelle il repose et de la constitution hiérarchique dont il fournit la base' [X:186].
seventeenth century [Woolhouse, 1993]. Comte extracted from these thinkers a conception of the relation between mathematics and l'ordre universel — moving equilibrium as the key to understanding both motion and natural existence [X:178] — but he eschewed both their aprioristic approach and their starting-point in individual reason. Bacon's Novum Organum, on the other hand, had envisaged a non-metaphysical First Philosophy, dedicated rather to summarising what science induced to be the most general laws of Nature. While Comte rejected as chimerical any search for a single Law of Laws, opting instead for a methodological unification of the sciences, it was Bacon's lead he generally followed.

Thus, at the highest level of abstraction, the principles of correct understanding are those developed in the practice of science, whose own validity hinges on whatever testable knowledge that practice has produced. For Comte, at the same time, there is no science-in-general. In the real world of scientific practice the sciences are particular and plural, and their methods, like the hypothesised phenomenal regularities they seek to discover, are relative to distinct fields of knowledge. Thus the question of what it means to be scientific cannot be answered in the abstract, but only on the basis of the disparate methods which have actually been developed. That is, by considering scientific knowledge as a

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28 A 'Tableau des quinze grandes lois de philosophie première', putting the material of X:176-180 in point form, was appended by Pierre Lafitte to the second edition of the Catéchisme Positiviste [XI:388].

29 '[By] 'first philosophy'...what we mean is...to design some general science, for the reception of axioms, not peculiar to any one science, but common to a number of them' [Bacon, 1901:138].

30 'Isolément d'aucune application effective, les plus justes notions sur la méthode se réduisent nécessairement à quelques généralités incontestables mais très vague, profondément insuffisantes pour diriger avec un vrai succès les diverses recherches de notre intelligence... [I]l est donc sensible que, en sociologie comme ailleurs, et même plus qu'ailleurs, la méthode positive ne saurait être essentiellement appréciée que d'après la considération rationelle de ses principaux emplois, à mesure que de leur accomplissement graduel' [IV:229-230]. Astronomy developed the
developing ensemble of theoretical practices, differentiated into phenomenal domains, each with their own protocols and forms of legitimacy-by-results. To which must be added that the history of this complex occurrence comprises an order of factuality in itself. Hence, Philosophie Positive, whose content systematically reconstructs the history of the sciences, and which Comte's subsequent fifteen principles of First Philosophy aimed to summarise.

Comte's empirical and historical approach to the derivation of the principles of science could hardly be otherwise. At the widest level what he is attempting is not just the theorisation of positivity, but the positivization of theory. That is what Philosophie positive means. But we must then ask: upon which of the six fundamental branches of knowledge does this revamped philosophy — philosophy as the positive science of knowledge, having as its object the historically revealed laws of collective mentality — itself depend? To which the answer can only be, to the science of the social. Just as the development of each science is affected by the development of all the others, so too is the progress of the sciences interdependent with that of the practical arts, and this entire complex 'is strictly tied to the general development of human society' [I:66]. Indeed, it transpires that, in its 'dynamical part', the most important set of sociological laws concerns precisely the history of knowledge. These laws dictate both the cognitive stages through which every branch of knowledge is destined to pass (from

method of observation; the physical-chemical sciences that of experiment; biology the method of comparison; to which, as Comte explains in leçon 48, sociology is obliged by the nature of its subject matter to add la méthode historique.

31 Since 'l'analyse statique de notre organism social le montre reposant finalement, de toute nécessité, sur un certain système d'opinions fondamentales...[c]'est donc l'appréciation successive du système fondamental des opinions humaines relatives à l'ensemble des phénomènes quelconques, en un mot, l'histoire générale de la philosophie, quel que soit d'ailleurs son caractère effectif, théologique, métaphysique, ou positif, qui devra nécessairement présider à la coordination rationelle de notre analyse historique' [IV:518-20].

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'the theological' to the 'positive' by way of the 'metaphysical') and the chronological order (e.g. astronomy before physics, chemistry before biology), in which each successively less general, more complex, and more dependent science has gone through this epistemologically transformative process.

This, though, is not the only respect in which establishing a positive science of society is the pre-condition for establishing positive philosophy. Sociology also enters into the latter as part of its own knowledge domain. The laws of human knowledge can only be empirically derived from a consideration of the full range of phenomena to which they pertain. And that range is only available for study when the whole narrative of the positive sciences, with their distinct objects and approaches, can retrospectively be told. Only, that is, when the series made up of the fundamental branches of knowledge has already been completed by the actual emergence into positivity of its final term — sociology\(^2\).

The fact that it was necessary, however, to positivize the study of society in order to positivize philosophy does not negate the importance to Comte of the converse proposition. Grasping the general principles of positivity, by way of the synthesised history of knowledge, was also crucial for the founding of sociology. The reasons were not only methodological (first generate the principles, then apply them to the social domain). They were also, in the widest sense, practical. Positivizing philosophy brings about a revolution in that overarching branch of theory/knowledge which deals with theory/knowledge as such, while success in that revolution was itself necessary for establishing the institutional and cultural conditions in which sociology could firmly emerge as a science. To be sure,

\(^2\) Q.v. note 22 above.
other sciences were able to launch themselves and develop without any prior need for a wholesale transformation in the prevailing system of knowledge — albeit, for example in the controversies surrounding Galileo’s defence of Copernicus, that a sometimes furious epistemological resistance had to be overcome\textsuperscript{33}. But for Comte the case of sociology is exceptional, and for precisely the same reason: that it is, in every sense, \textit{la science finale}.

What distinguishes sociology from other sciences is that it brings the subject of knowledge itself, finally, into the scientific frame. Even the recognition that the social \textit{can} be constituted as an object for knowledge is difficult because of the inextricably subjective implication of human beings in it. A particularly strenuous effort is needed, then, to escape from the coils of the commonsensical, interest- and affect-laden, in short pre-scientific, ideas which cling to the sociological object. This is so, indeed, not only at the point of the new science’s founding, but long thereafter. Furthermore, as the Galileo episode attested [V:564], even sciences which deal with realities remote from the substance of human reality can find their advance blocked by social investments in the non-science they must displace\textsuperscript{34}. What exacerbates this, in the case of sociology, is that the very substance of the theological and metaphysical speculation getting in the way is uniquely and directly tied to the social itself. To study

\textsuperscript{33} Within physics, the primary opponent was the metaphysical \textit{‘théorie des entités’} [VI:240-2].

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{‘On voit par là comment l’admirable mouvement astronomique du seizième siècle dit nécessairement y conduire enfin la science à une opposition directe envers la métaphysique, succédant partout ... à la théologie proprement dite, dont elle tendait dès lors à construire, à son profit, l’antique domination, à la fois mentale et sociale... Tous les éléments principaux de la république européenne, sauf la seule Espagne..., prirent une part capitale à cet immense débat’} [VI:240-1].
the patterning of current beliefs and institutions with an eye to what they have been, could be, and are elsewhere, engages political issues and interests immediately. Controversy and conflict are inevitable. What raises the stakes all the way, however, is sociology’s pivotal and climactic position with respect to the progress of ‘the scientific series’. Not only is the shift that positivization implies in the mode of social theorising generally indexed to the long-term rise of a positivist outlook, in contest with the receding grip of the theologico-metaphysical. This entanglement in the broader politics of social belief it shares with the difficult births of all preceding sciences. What profoundly complicates the gestation of sociology is that, with its birth, the whole positivization of knowledge moves to completion. Science has no more worlds to conquer. The human subject itself is taken. Therewith was wrecked the uneasy dualism of natural and moral philosophy which, throughout the long period during which the physical sciences had struggled to emerge, had provided a compromise form in which the old ‘theological synthesis’ had been able, in league with a military-monarchical polity, to maintain its intellectual and social rule [IV:244-8]. To found sociology as a positive science, in other words, would necessarily bring to a head the crisis in thought that had been brewing since the revival of natural science in medieval Europe, a crisis that could only be resolved by positivizing, completely and coherently, the prevailing mode of theorising as such.

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35 This was doubtless the truth within Bacon’s deadpan remark that ‘Anticipations are a ground sufficiently firm for consent, for even if men went mad all after the same fashion, they might agree with one another well enough….whereas interpretations….cannot suddenly strike the understanding; and therefore….must needs, in respect of the opinions of the time, seem harsh and out of tune, much as the mysteries of faith do’ [1960:45].
Given the stakes, resistance was inevitable. Thus, at least, could Comte console himself during the cold silence that greeted the volume by volume publication of Positive Philosophy, until Littré's laudatory review in 1844.36 Establishing positivity in the social domain went to the heart, as he saw it, of what was most passionately at stake in the conflicts that were paralysing contemporary society.37

The feudal-Catholic hegemony had been destroyed in the great revolutions of the past two centuries. But completion of the intellectual reorganisation needed to establish a new order was blocked by the way in which these same conflicts interfered with the emergence of that science finale which held its key. In the absence of such re-organisation, the terrain of post-1789 social and political theory had come to be monopolised and fought over by rival partisans of equally pre-scientific philosophies. On the one side was the alliance of légistes et litterateurs who had triumphed in the first stages of the Revolution, and who subscribed to a metaphysical belief that individuals could spin workable utopias out of their individual brains [V:453 et seq]. On the other, was the 'retrograde party' of royalist counter-revolutionaries, attached to the illusory absolutisms of Catholic dogma. Divided by a one-sided attachment either to reason and progress, or to faith and order, both camps were equally doctrinaire and equally incapable of thinking the reconstruction of the shattered social order in line with

36 According to Gouhier [1965:177], ‘les six volumes du Cours parurent sans provoquer un seul article dans la presse française.’ Littré, an eminent translator and liberal journalist, wrote six articles on Comte in Le National at the end of 1844. It was these which first gave Comte a respectful hearing in France outside the circle of his immediate admirers.

37 ‘...le désordre actuel des intelligences tient, en dernière analyse, à l’emploi simultané des trois philosophies incompatibles: la philosophie théologique, la philosophie métaphysique et la philosophie positive. Il est clair que... si l’une quelconque de ces trois philosophies obtenait en réalité une prépondérance universelle et complète, il y aurait un ordre social déterminée, tandis que le mal consiste surtout dans l’absence de toute véritable organisation...Seule [la philosophie positive] a été... constamment en progrès... Cette révolution générale de l’esprit humain est aujourd’hui entièrement accomplie; il ne reste plus...qu’à compléter la philosophie positive en y comprenant l’étude des phénomènes sociaux, et ensuite à la résumer en un seul corps de
its actual laws and requirements [IV:8-9]. Clearing a theoretical path for a science of society, then, necessitated the establishment of a third camp, free from the sterile antagonism between metaphysicians of progress and theologians of order: a camp, Comte argued, which could only arise -- and in the Comtean project was actually doing so -- from the emerging episteme of science itself.

To situate the rise of sociology in such terms, of course, is already to be in its register. Indeed, to complete the circle, the diagnosis of ‘the crisis’ which Comte professes -- centering on the social instability produced by unresolved theoretico-ideological conflict -- is not only already sociological. It issues in a *politique positive* which prescribes the installation of sociology itself as a scientific guide for a self-correcting path of ‘normal’ social development. As a crucial component of that path sociology, in turn, prescribes the institution (via an elaborate and universal system of education) of *Philosophie positive*. For, sociology tells us, only through a shared belief system intellectually based on such a philosophy will it be possible to achieve social consensus in the emerging scientific-industrial order, and so end the strife.

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*doctrine homogène. Quand se double travail sera suffisamment avancé, le triomphe définitif de la philosophie positive...rétablira l’ordre dans la société* [I:41-2].

38 The forty sixth *Leçon* [IV:1-176], which opens the section of the *Cours* establishing ‘social physics’, provides beforehand, and in just such terms, a sociological account of its necessity and timeliness (*opportunité*). It should be added that Comte never considered that after the ‘positive state’ had been socially achieved that sociology would have any further theoretical development. In *Politique positive* it becomes fixed as a doctrine in the training of Positivist clergy, and its practical intervention is restricted to providing reasons for sustaining society in its now perfected form.

39 ‘*La principale propriété intellectuelle de l’état positif consistera certainement en son aptitude spontanée à déterminer et maintenir une entière cohérence mentale, qui n’a pu encore exister jamais à un pareil degré, même chez les esprits les mieux organisés et les plus avancés* [VI:789]. The unifying effects of this philosophy, indeed, will be more complete than ever before, promising not only to end the strife associated with *l’immense crise finale*, but to modify l’ensemble de l’existence humaine more profoundly than any *précédentes révolutions de l’humanité* [VI:788].
We can summarise by saying that if establishing a science of society is, *in theory*, essential for establishing a positive synthesis of human knowledge, the latter is also, *in practice*, essential for the former, while the conjoint establishment of both is conceived as *socio-historically* necessary by sociology itself. It is one tangle of roots. The complex inter-dependency of the perspectival shifts involved — the one launching sociology as a science, the other placing philosophy, as the unified/unifying theory of knowledge, on a positive basis — makes it impossible to completely separate them out. Nor, in reconstructing the logic of what Comte was trying to do, is there any need to. In effect, the theoretical *prise de position* which inaugurated Comte’s *positivisme* was understood by him as a single, if complex, event: an irruption (in the name) of positivity that occurs simultaneously, and with both theoretical and political effects, on two interlocking planes. To employ a concept which Althusser (via Bachelard) later applied to Marx, but which he surely modelled on the prior structure of the Comteian operation itself, Comte’s *Philosophie positive* aimed to effect a *double* ‘epistemological break’ ⁴⁰ — a *coupure* which would have brought into being, all at once, Positive Philosophy and a Positive science of society.

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⁴⁰ ‘I borrow ...the concept of ‘epistemological break’ from Gaston Bachelard to designate the mutation in the theoretical problematic contemporary with the foundation of a scientific discipline....There is an unequivocal ‘epistemological break’ in Marx’s work....[It] concerns conjointly two distinct theoretical disciplines. By founding the theory of history (historical materialism), Marx simultaneously broke with his erstwhile ideological philosophy and established a new philosophy (dialectical materialism)’ [Althusser, 1969: 32-3].
But what, as a mode of cognition, was *positivité*? And what happens to it when it is (re-)conceived from a sociological standpoint, i.e. when a positivist approach is taken towards understanding *positivité* itself? Pursuing these questions will lead us to see how, in trying to complete the objective synthesis of knowledge through establishing a science of society, Comte was led by the very movement of his thought to complete that completion through the subjective synthesis attempted in his later work.

**Positivity, from Bacon to Comte**

The eleventh month in the Positivist Calendar, ‘Descartes’, is devoted to the celebration of ‘modern philosophy’, beginning with the thirteenth century rise of neo-Aristotelianism and ending with Hume. Its second week, on the rise of the scientific outlook, ends by honouring Francis Bacon. It may be argued that Comte’s Calendar honoured Bacon too little. Through Saint-Simon, and before him the Encyclopedists, Bacon’s influence on the formation of Positivism was immense. The Elizabethan courtier’s vision, in *The New Atlantis*, of a society centred on science, presided over by a priestly caste

\[\text{\textsuperscript{41}}\text{ It need hardly be said that Comte’s ‘positivism’ should be confused neither with ‘logical positivism’ nor with various more general scientific or obectivist tendencies often referred to as ‘positivist’. Some of these tendencies were criticized by Comte himself, for their alienated sécheresse or disintegrative esprit de détail, or for a matérialisme that would reduce higher order phenomena to lower order ones. But the relation between Comte and these trends is complex. Comte’s positivisme shared such features of the (narrowly scientific) positivismus periodically debated in Germany as the epistemological privileging of scientific knowledge, the conception of the latter as empirically based and predictive, and the appropriateness of absorbing the human fully into the realm of the scientifically knowable. But as ‘positive’ and its derivatives acquired a general significance, as a label for the whole system, its meaning also considerably expanded. In *l’Esprit Positif* in 1844 Comte distinguishes at least six elements in its definition — realism, usefulness, certainty, precision, constructiveness and relativity [XIApp:41–44]. To obviate some of the confusion I have placed ‘positive’ in upper case wherever appropriate to indicate that it is Comte’s doctrinal or expanded meaning of the word that is intended.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{42}}\text{ Included in Catéchisme positiviste [XI:opp 334].}\]
of scientists and industrialists, and unified by a new religion dedicated to philanthropy and the
expansion of human power, was of great attraction to the post-Revolutionary reformers grouped
around *L'Industrie* and *Le Producteur*\(^{43}\), and was shared by Comte from the start.

The same can be said of Comte’s basic conception of scientific knowledge. While Descartes’ analytic
geometry is held to provide the better account of the nature of scientific reasoning (and showed how
mathematics itself could be synthesised), and Bacon’s ‘new organon’ of induction is criticised,
particularly as narrowly developed by his followers, for its depreciation of theory, it is Bacon’s at the
time revolutionary proposal for organising ‘natural philosophy’ that Comte, most proximately, takes
over, and reworks\(^{44}\). For both thinkers, science is an observationally based cognitive activity which

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\(^{43}\) According to Manuel, Condorcet’s commentary on *New Atlantis* was included in the 1804
edition of Condorcet’s *Esquisse*, and ‘exerted a profound influence on Saint-Simon and Comte’

\(^{44}\) In the fifty seventh *Leçon* of the *Cours*, Bacon, Galileo and Descartes are singled out as ‘*les
premiers fondateurs immédiats de la philosophie positive*. Galileo’s contribution was judged to
belong ‘*essentiellement à l’évolution scientifique*’ [VI:242]. As for the other two, Bacon ‘*n’a
qu’imparfaitement caractérisé le véritable esprit scientifique, qui, dans ses precepts, flotte si
souvent entre l’empirisme et la métaphysique, surtout envers l’étude du mode extérieur, base
immuable de toute la philosophie naturelle*’ whereas Descartes ‘*aussi grand géomètre que
profond philosophe, appréciant la positivité à sa vraie source initiale, en pose avec bien plus de
fermeté et de précision les conditions essentielles...*’ [VI:242-3] On the other hand, ‘*qu’ant à
l’étude de l’homme et de la société, Bacon présent...une incontestable supériorité sur Descartes.
The latter had been content to abandon the moral and social domain to the ‘ancient method’,
whereas Bacon ‘*a surtout en vue l’indispensable rénovation de cette seconde moitié du système
philosophique, qu’il ose même concevoir comme déjà finalement destinée à la régénération
totale de l’humanité*’ [VI:243]. Comte thus acknowledges Bacon as having made the greater
contribution to Positivism both as a system and as a socio-moral project. But it must be said that
Comte never discusses either Bacon or Descartes in any detail, and in developing his conception
of scientificity he simply takes it for granted that this involved a judicious blend of inductive with
deductive reason in line with the particularities of each specific domain. I nonetheless take Bacon
to have provided the *epistemological* base-line for Comte because it is science not reason that
Comte makes primary, and because in elaborating *l’esprit positif* he shared Bacon’s insistence on
realism, practicality, and the discovery of laws from facts as the hallmarks of science.
links a human subject, suitably purged of illusory preconceptions, and a natural object, commonsensically regarded as being 'out there', in the systematically conducted pursuit of useful knowledge. For both, too, that knowledge takes the form of the discovery and interconnecting of laws by which the invariant order of nature makes its ineluctable presence felt\textsuperscript{45}. Mastering the human environment depends, in fact, on recognising and utilising those laws, whose predictive power is at once the sign of their scientificity and of their utility as the basis for rational action. On such an account, what characterises scientific knowledge is that it is at once phenomenalist, nomothetic, predictive and instrumental, elements which are elegantly blended together in the third aphorism of Bacon's \textit{Novum Organum}: 'Human knowledge and power meet in one; for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced. Nature to be commanded must be obeyed; and that which in contemplation is as the cause is in operation as the rule [1960:39].'

The same formula guides Comte's attempt to launch a social science whose scientificity would guarantee its human usefulness. Here, though, Comte went beyond Bacon. For while Bacon certainly regarded the study of 'Man' as a branch of natural philosophy, and even divided it into 'human and civil philosophy, as it considers man separately or joined in society' [1901:176], the social part was purely practical — it consisted of prudential maxims\textsuperscript{46} — and the final ends of action were the subject not

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Nous voyons...que le caractère fondamental de la philosophie positive est de regarder tous les phénomènes comme assujettis à des lois naturelles invariables, dont la découverte prise et la réduction au moindre possible nombre sont le but de tous nos efforts.}’ [I:11-12; emphasis in original].

\textsuperscript{46} 'Civil knowledge has three parts, suitable to the three principal acts of society; viz., 1. Conversation; 2. Business; 3. Government. For there are three kinds of good that men desire to procure by civil society; viz., 1. Refuge from solitude; 2. Assistance in the affairs of life; 3. Protection against injuries. And thus there are three kinds of prudence... viz., 1. Prudence in conversation; 2. Prudence in business; 3. Prudence in government.
of natural but divine philosophy whose absolute character and revealed source in God were unquestioned. Knowledge of the human, moreover, whether *qua* individual or ‘as joined in society’, was of a less certain sort than that which pertained to external nature. The latter ‘strikes the human intellect with a direct ray’ while the former, as man ‘exhibited to himself’, does so ‘with a reflected ray’\(^4\). For Comte, on the other hand, society, including the ends it sets itself, was fully to be considered a scientifically cognisable domain of nature. In the social practice of politics, then, the same principle applied as in the industrial arts. Effective intervention to improve the human lot presupposed a scientific knowledge of the laws in operation. As the Comteian slogan puts it, *induire pour déduire, afin de construire*.

The transposition of the scientific idea from its home in what had traditionally been called ‘natural philosophy’ to ‘moral philosophy’ was not without its difficulties. Bacon’s point about the ‘reflected ray’ had to be taken into account. The social domain was not just given to the senses *de l’extérieur*. We are in society, just as it is within us, so that its phenomenal boundaries are indistinct. Even more than in other phenomenal domains, then, that of the social has to be conceptually defined before it can become the object of what Comte conceived to be a science. The inescapable need to thematise the social permitted Comte, with a sleight of hand, to ontologize it, which had important consequences for the way in which he conceived the entire epistemic shift to positivity. But before coming to this, the provisional formula I am suggesting, that Comte equals Bacon plus ‘sociology’, needs to be qualified. For if Comte’s ‘positivity’ built on Bacon’s conception of science, it also modified that conception in

\(^4\) Bacon 1910:137-8. With divine knowledge, the least clearly present to the mind, ‘God strikes [the human intellect] with a ‘refracted ray, from the inequality of the medium between the Creator and his creatures’ [*ibid*].
the light of what were taken to be gaps and inconsistencies; some of which indeed could only be addressed by positivizing the social domain itself, and revising the concept of scientific knowing in light of what that implied.

Comte’s corrective moves can be summarised under three heads. These concern the relation of positivité, respectively, to truth, to non-science, and to practice.

**Science and truth**

Regarding the first, Comte took as given that any positive science must rigorously proceed from sense-data. But whereas for Bacon, systematic observation and experiment were the royal road to epistemological certitude, and could get behind phenomena to their true nature and causes, Comte rejected as inconsistent with such phenomenalism any clinging to it of an epistemologically ‘absolute’ point of view. Thus, while scientific procedures were designed to engender knowledge about ‘objective’ reality, that reality could not be known or understood in its essence, but only from without, in the form of its phenomenal appearance. Similarly, the invariable ‘laws’ which the sciences sought to discover had the status of hypotheses. The principle that there are natural laws, i.e. regularities which are immutable, Comte’s second rule of ‘first philosophy’, is itself formulated as a hypothesis, albeit one which is the axiomatic precondition for all scientific enquiry⁴⁸. What scientific laws represented, in any case, were not real causes – which we could never know, even supposing that the very notion of

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⁴⁸ 'Malgré le caractère exclusivement objectif qu’on attribue à ce dogme, je n’ai plus besoin de démontrer sa subjectivité, moins contestable au fond que l’objectivité. Car, celle-ci résultera
'cause' was not itself metaphysical\(^49\) — but observable and predictable regularities. From Newton's celestial dynamics to Gall's phrenology, scientific laws were just \textit{faits générales} which connected, with maximum economy, all the known facts in a domain by relations of resemblance, concomitance or succession [I: 3-4; X:173-4]. Aristotle had distinguished between what could be known absolutely, and what could only be known 'to us'\(^50\). For Comte, similarly, the first was beyond us, and scientific knowledge could only be of the latter sort: \textit{relative}, therefore, to the limited standpoint of the human subject\(^51\) in the degree of its attainable truth.

\textit{toujours d'une induction purement empirique, quoique devenue, depuis longtemps, irresistible…'} [X:174].

\(^49\) In the \textit{politique positive}, Hume, Diderot and Kant are hailed as the trio who that made possible this break from the 'absolutist' notion of causality, though the Kantian outcome still failed to escape altogether form the metaphysical orbit. Of these, Hume's attack on causality was decisive. Kant instituted \textit{les formules les plus propres à caractériser le dualisme fondamental entre le spectateur et le spectacle}, entrevu par Hume et saisi par Diderot…Mais pour devenir décisive, \textit{cette substitution exigeait la découverte des véritables lois de l'évolution mentale, c'est-à-dire la fondation de la science sociale, laquelle devait reposer sur la biologie…'} [IX:588].

\(^50\) 'We must be careful not to overlook the difference that it makes whether we argue \textit{from} or \textit{to} first principles... Of course we must begin from what is known. But that is an ambiguous expression, for things are known in two ways. Some are known 'to us' and some are known absolutely. For members of the Lyceum there can be little doubt that we must start from what is known to us... For we begin with the \textit{fact}, and if there is sufficient reason for accepting it as such, there will be no need to ascertain also the \textit{why} of the fact' [Aristotle, 1970:29-30]. Compare Comte's statement in the first chapter of the \textit{Cours}: 'Enfin, dans l'état positif, l'esprit humain reconnaissant l'impossibilité d'obtenir des notions absolues, renonce à chercher l'origine et la destination de l'univers, et à connaître les causes intimes des phénomènes, pour s'attacher uniquement à découvrir, par l'usage bien combiné du raisonnement et de l'observation, leur lois effectives, c'est-à-dire leurs relations invariables de succession et similitude' [I:4].

\(^51\) Relative, he specifies pithily in \textit{l'Esprit Positif}, with regard to 'our organization and situation'[XI:13]. This is evidently a multiple relativity, a truth-for-ourselves that takes into
science and non-science

The risk of such a position, which repeated the Kantian distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena*, was that it might undercut the aim to use scientific verity as the basis for a ‘demonstrable faith’. But the strict subordination of *le dedans* to *le dehors*, of *impressions internelles* to *impressions externelles*\(^2\), still remained a rock for Comte on which to build at least a relatively true kind of knowledge. With that principle in place, he could still hold fast to Bacon’s insistence that a qualitative distinction could be drawn between those forms of knowing which were scientific, and those which were not.

For Comte as for Bacon such a distinction had implications for the practice as well as the theory of knowledge. Non-scientific modes of knowing were not nullities. In Bacon’s terms, ‘anticipations of nature’, instantiated in the ‘four idols’ (of the tribe, the cave, the marketplace and the theatre [1901:239:42]) actively obstructed the progress of knowledge. They had, then, to be actively overthrown, both in the preliminary ground-clearing needed before any major branch of science could get going, and continuously thereon through the discipline of scientific method. Embryonically, we could say, Bacon’s meta-theory of science contained a theory both of the epistemological difference as such between science and non-science, and of that difference as itself phenomenal, and liable in turn therefore to become the object of scientific, and non-scientific, knowledge. Comte was happy to take all of this over, but with two important modifications.

\(^2\) Rule 4 of ‘first philosophy’. See X:176.
First, the epistemological distinction itself needed to be clarified. For Bacon, it was sufficient to distinguish as sharply as possible between ‘anticipations’ and ‘interpretations’ of Nature — i.e. between deducing the nature of things from truths held apriori, and inducing causal laws a posteriori on the basis of controlled observation, and repeatable experiments [1901:21-2]. For Comte, however, the path of knowledge could never be purely inductive. To be sure, Baconian inductivism was not just the blind search for correspondences. It sought to firm up tentative generalisations by looking for ‘proper rejections and exclusions [1960:99]. This already implied that induction could not operate without some prior conception of what it sought to discover, including, fundamentally, that there were laws, or at least regularities, to find.\(^{53}\) Even for Bacon, then, it was not possible to eliminate ‘anticipatory’ theorising altogether. For Comte, this was it should be. Conjectures, he argued, including quite abstract ones about the general nature of the field, were necessary to mentally organise (however wrongly) what was known, and to stimulate research into what was not. There could, indeed, have

\(^{53}\)It is just in this sense that Heidegger affirms the essentially ‘mathematical’ character of modern science. ‘Ta mathemata means for the Greeks that which man knows in advance in his observation of whatever is and in his intercourse with things [1977:118]. ‘[P]hysical science does not first become research through experiment; rather, on the contrary, experiment first becomes possible when where and only where the knowledge of nature has become transformed into research. Only because modern physics is a physics that is essentially mathematical can it be experimental’ [120]. This pre-known includes not only that which is held to obtain universally (mathematics in the narrow sense) but also what is specific to the nature of any given field of research. Indeed, establishing this field together with its pre-known properties is what founds each particular science ‘Every science is, as research, grounded upon the projection of a circumscribed object-sphere’ [123]. In these terms, Comte’s whole approach to creating sociology could be characterized as an effort to specify its general and distinctive mathemata.
been no science in any field without a long preliminary period in which completely imaginary notions guided what empirical enquiry there was\textsuperscript{54}.

It followed therefore that for a science to mature, and retain its scientificity, what mattered was not the existence of theoretical presuppositions, but their type, and the status they were granted. The latter was straightforward. Such pre-theory was always to be regarded as heuristic and hypothetical. As for its content, the distinction to be drawn at the most fundamental level was between the kind of preconceptions which mystified things in advance, and those which pictured the object of knowledge as, and in the form of, something which could in principle be scientifically known. However, in clarifying this further, Bacon’s unalloyed empiricism, and his heteroclite list of ‘idols’ to be demolished, was of little help. Some ‘positive’ working conception of the knowledge domain in question was always needed; and in defining this we required criteria for distinguishing, even in the most general terms, between scientific and non-scientific modalities of picturing it.

Comte’s \textit{aperçu} was that the scientific revolution’s displacement of the heritage of Greek metaphysics as a tyrannical rule of abstractions could be connected to the Enlightenment critique of theistic religion as anthropomorphic myth\textsuperscript{55}. The shadowy categories of metaphysics — being, substance, quality, cause

\textsuperscript{54} The principle is stated at the outset of the \textit{Cours}. In all branches of knowledge, there is always the need ‘d’une théorie quelconque pour lier les faits...’ This aside from ‘l’impossibilité évidente, pour l’esprit humain à son origine, de se former des théories après les observations’ [I:6]. Indeed, ‘si, en contemplant les phénomènes, nous ne les attachions point immédiatement à quelques principes non-seulement il nous serait impossible de combiner ces observations isolées, et, par conséquent, d’en tirer aucun fruit, mais nous serions même entièrement incapables de les retenir; et, le plus souvent, les faits resteraient inaperçus sous nos yeux [I:7].’

\textsuperscript{55} An understanding that ‘Enlightenment has always taken the basic principle of myth to be anthropomorphism, the projection onto nature of the subjective’ and that ‘the disenchantment of
etc. — were but abstractly spiritual versions of the divine principle, just as the God of monotheism was an abstract synthesis of the ancient gods who once roamed the earth. The gods of polytheism could themselves be understood as concretely imagined embodiments of the spirits which our fetishistic ancestors imagined to inhabit all sensory beings. What was to be avoided, then, was not only, in the metaphysical mode of the scholastics, apriori conceptions of reality as deducible from an idea of what it essentially was, but, in all its guises, theologisme. Indeed, they were intimately related. To conceive the knowledge project as a search for the real nature and ultimate causes of being — which Comte called ontologie [VII:47] — could only lead to a mystical quest. It would be mystical, moreover, not just because it would be to imagine ‘fictive beings’ as the hidden truth of the phenomenal world [I:3]; but because to do so would be to confuse that world with misrecognized representations of ourselves. Such representations were at the core of all metaphysics, whether explicitly theistic or not. They arose through an unconscious process of identification and projection through which the knowing subject spontaneously closed the gap of the unknown by supplying causes, by analogy with what was very close at hand, for its otherwise inexplicable character.

The world is the extirpation of animism was a cornerstone of Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of (the) enlightenment. For them, the underlying program was ‘patriarchal: the human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature.’ See Dialectic of Enlightenment [1972:5-7]. I examine in Chapter 6 below whether Comte’s view of the man/nature relation can be properly described and criticized in such terms.

36 The notion that metaphysics, defined generally as explanation by essences, is an attenuated form of theism, and that the human mind passes through it on the way to a fully scientific attitude, was already to be found in Turgot’s 1750 discourse, Tableau philosophique des progrès successifs de l’esprit humain. For the possible influence of this on Comte see Pickering [1993:200n].

37 ‘Car le principe théologique consiste à tout explique par des volontés, ne peut être pleinement écarté que quand, ayant reconnu inaccessible toute recherche des causes, on se borne à connaître les lois....Quand on veut pénétrer le mystère inaccessible de la production essentielle des phénomènes, on ne peut plus rien supposer de plus satisfaisant que de les attribuer à des volontés intérieurs ou extérieurs, puis qu’on les assimile ainsi aux effets journaliers des affections qui nous animent [VII:47; emphasis in original]. Nietzsche shared this understanding,
Negatively, then, the emancipation and proper functioning of a science required that we eschew projective anthropomorphism, not just in its most obvious forms, but also in such still vaguely personified categories as 'Nature' [I:4]. Phenomena were only to be explained in terms of other phenomena. And explanation should confine itself to the search for laws expressing observable regularities. A modest procedure. Yet of course it rested on a crucial presupposition, namely that such regularities exist. Nature is orderly existence. This was indeed the ontological assumption made by any science whatever. Beginning in ignorance, the sciences were engaged in filling in the blanks, proper to each domain, of what they all projected to be l'ordre universel.

For Comte, be it noted, whether at the level of the totality or of the partial realities dealt with by the ‘fundamental sciences’, that order was itself always abstract. Indeed, while it was the source of data, concrete actuality was not per se the knowledge object of any 'fundamental' science. There were of course sciences of the concrete, which were descriptive, and mediated between theory and its real world application. But these should not be confused with the abstract sciences on which they were based, and with which alone positive philosophie was concerned [I:58]. Their boundaries were also quite different. The concrete is always a complex site wherein several quasi-distinct planes of existence (mechanical, chemical, organic etc.) intersect. Knowledge of these specific sites of intersection called

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but extended it into a consideration of the metaphysics built, as the deposit of ‘the oldest and longest lived psychology’, into language itself [Nietzsche, 1990:59].

58 ‘Il faut distinguer, par rapport à tous les ordres de phénomènes, deux genres de sciences naturelles: les unes abstraite, générales, ont pour objet la découverte des lois qui régissent les diverses classes de phénomènes, en considérant tous les cas qu’on peut concevoir; les autres, particulières, descriptives...consistent dans l’application de ces lois à la histoire effective des différents êtres existants. Les premières sont donc fondamentales...’ [57-58].
for a composite and interdisciplinary approach, as for example in the relation of mineralogy to physics, chemistry and even, via geology, astronomy [I:59]. In contrast, what les sciences fondamentales (mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology) aimed to produce was a purely theoretical map of each basic order of phenomenal reality, with its specific body of laws and logical place in the ‘chain of knowledge’.

Once these sciences were all established, a coherent hierarchy of basic knowledges would come into being, organising the ‘fundamental sciences’ according to the relative generality, complexity, and dependence of their respective domains. It was that prospect that for the first time made a positive classification of the sciences itself finally possible59. Positive indeed at two levels: for ‘it is according to the mutual dependence that has actually occurred among the various positive sciences that we ought to proceed when classifying them; and this dependence should result only from that of the corresponding phenomena’60. The resulting system might seem a purely specular construct61, in which the forms of knowledge and forms of the known endlessly reflect one another. And so it would be if the facts and laws that figured there were not disciplined by evidential rigor. In practical terms, besides, the developing corpus of abstract knowledge was not, for Positivism, any more than in

59 As against the vain attempts, ‘comme celles de Bacon et D'Alembert’ to classify the sciences ‘d'après une distinction quelconque des diverses facultés de l'esprit humain’, or against others which invent categories a priori, or which confuse theoretical and practical knowledge, Comte singles out cotemporary botanists and zoologists as those who have pointed the way to ‘une théorie générale de classifications’ [I:47-49].
60 ‘[C]’est donc d'après la dépendance mutuelle qui a lieu effectivement entre les diverses sciences positives que nous devons procéder à leur classification; et cette dépendance, pour être réal, ne peut résulter que de celle des phénomènes correspondants’ [I:59].
61 ‘Alors, on reconnaît directement que le but le plus difficile et le plus important de notre existence consiste à transformer le cerveau humain en un miroir exact de l’ordre extérieur.'
Bacon's *New Organon*, an end in itself. In relation to the organised work of modifying nature to meet human needs — *l'industrie* — the system of fundamental sciences was simply a theoretical instrument, produced at one remove from the plenum of the real; an instrument which, on the one hand would help humankind to make concrete interventions into its world, and on the other — the supreme point of the exercise — would provide the synthesising philosophy needed to restore, and perfect, social order.

But to ascend to this view of things a second limitation in Bacon's conception of the relation between science and non-science would have to be overcome. The theologico-metaphysical blockages to scientific understanding (Bacon's 'anticipations' and 'idols') had not arisen, a scientific mind would presume, arbitrarily. Nor was the progress of science just a matter of individual intelligence and will. Otherwise, why had it taken two millenia since Thales for a properly scientific astronomy and physics to arise? To pose such a question positively involved more than maxims about method, more indeed than a science of individual mind such as Bacon metaphysically and incoherently tried to sketch out in *The Advancement of Learning*. If the distinction between science and non-science was to be understood not just theoretically, as epistemological difference, but as a practical antagonism surrounding knowledge production on the plane of the actual, it must be grounded in a scientific understanding of all the orders of existence there in play. For Comte, this pointed across a boundary whose crossing Bacon was not able to contemplate. It meant completing *l'échelle encyclopédique* by bringing the knowing subject itself into full scientific purview, not only in terms of the intrinsic mechanisms of mental formation and development, but also of the contextual, i.e. social and historical, conditions in which these occurred.

*C'est seulement ainsi que qu'elle peut devenir la source directe de notre unité totale, en tenant la
A final set of problems Comte had to confront in appropriating the Baconian notion of positive science concerned its instrumentalism. For Bacon, 'experiments of fruit' were at once a verification principle and the point of the exercise⁶². Being able to predict the results of a deliberate manipulation of the tangible world was the mark of scientific knowledge. At the same time, knowledge in that form was the only knowledge that mattered; for only on its basis could we alter the world to human advantage. Thus far, again, Comte was with Bacon. But two questions arose.

The first concerned the picture of reality presupposed by a positivity conceived as the handmaiden of practice. The problem here was how to square the idea of a rule-bound universal order with that of its human modifiability. Bacon, repeating a line that goes back to the Greek atomists, asserted that: 'Towards the effecting of works, all that man can do is put together or put asunder natural bodies. The rest is done by nature working within' [Bacon, 1960 iv:39]. Thus it is bodies not laws that are modified. Bacon's purview was confined to the physico-chemical sciences. But Comte needed a formula wide enough to embrace the life sciences, including those of Man and society, as well. Living matter could not be taken apart and put back together without destroying it, so Bacon's rule for the scope and limits of technological power could not apply across the board. Comte found what he was looking for in the proto-structuralist principle of 'arrangement'. It is summarised in the third rule of

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⁶² 'Of all signs there is none more certain or more noble than that taken from fruits. For fruits and works are as it were sponsors and sureties for the truth of philosophies' [Bacon, 1969:71].
Comte’s ‘first philosophy’, which states that ‘All modifications of the universal order are limited to the degree of intensity of the phenomena, their arrangement not admitting of alteration’\textsuperscript{63}.

The principle of *arrangement* made it possible to present the issue that had played out in the absolutist and mechanistic thinking of the eighteenth century as determinism vs. free will in more tractable terms, for it implied a form of lawfulness which contains limited degrees of what structuralists would call free play. But what determines this *modifiableité*, and what prescribes its limits? Comte’s general answer was that the overall (‘cosmique’) *arrangement* was complex, with degrees of determinacy varying with the phenomenal order of reality where they occurred. Modifiability, in fact, was a matter of the relation between orders. Each order of existence had the limited power to modify the one on which it depended, and the more so the further up the scale we go\textsuperscript{64}. Thus each ‘successive order in the hierarchy is dependent on the one beneath it and is modified by the one succeeding [X:175]. Applied to life-forms and their conditions of existence, Comte’s principle implied, within limits fixed by the orders of being thus connected, an interactive relation between agent and object. By Comte’s time, biologists were beginning to thematize the latter through the category of *milieu*, and for Comte this notion belonged to ‘the first elementary basis of true biological philosophy’\textsuperscript{65}. The physiologist

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Les modifications quelconques de l’ordre universel s’y trouvent bornées à la intensité des phénomènes, dont l’arrangement demeure inaltérable’ [X:176].

\textsuperscript{64} These secondary modifications ‘deviennent plus profondes et plus multipliées à mesure que la complication croissante des phénomènes permet notre faible intervention de mieux alterer des résultats dus au concours diifikences plus diverses et plus accessibles’ [VII:79]

\textsuperscript{65} In his treatment of biology in *Philosophie positive*, Comte offers as an amendment to de Bainville’s philosophical definition of life as ‘composition et décomposition’ that ‘l’état vivant’ also entails, as ‘deux conditions fondamentales coratives... un organisme déterminé"
Bernard employed the same notion to account for the relations and dependencies between cells, tissues and organs within an individual organism. It could equally be extended outwards: the whole habitable planet as the human *milieu*. What the concept emphasised was the two-way relation (dependent-adaptive, appropriative-modifying) between life-forms and the environment in and from which they lived. If humanity depended on the totality of material conditions that constituted its biological and physical milieu, that order, and especially for it, was *une fatalité modifiable*.

Comte’s approach squared the immediate circle. However it raised further questions even more perplexing. If humanity is itself the highest, because most complex, level of being, how is the order of dependency and modification to be conceived there, at the top of the scale? How, furthermore, are we to understand the transformation wherein humanity, with the aid of positive science, has qualitatively changed and enhanced its own modifying power? And suppose, finally, that we begin to take scientific cognisance of the fact that the animals imperfectly banded together as humanity are *themselves* part of their — and our — own object world. How, then, are we to think Humanity’s capacity for self-modification? Such questions could only be pursued through scientific study of precisely that entity. If so, however, it would have to be recognised that such a science was like no other: not only because its theory and practice belongs to that science’s own field of enquiry, but because they belong to that...

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*et un milieu convenable* [III:230]. For Comte’s relation to contemporary biological theory see Pickering [1993:588-604], and Canguilhem [1994:237-260]. The latter notes: ‘Comte’s conception of the milieu justified his belief that biology could not be a separate science. And his conception of the organism justified his belief that biology must be an autonomous science. The originality and force of his position lies in the correlation — or some would say, dialectical relation — between these two concepts’ [1994:241].

66 For a discussion of Bernard’s notion of ‘*milieu intérieur*’ see Hirst [63:67].
feature of it which, as self-transformation, elevates Humanity above all other forms of being in the known universe.

The second problem raised by a positivity designed in its very essence to be practical concerns its axiological grounding. If the capacity to manipulate the phenomenal world so as to produce predictable results supplants the discovery of Truth as the validating criterion for knowledge, the epistemological question becomes mingled with a moral one. For the activity of science cannot be justified with reference to pure values of contemplation, or absorption in the Absolute, but only in relation to its performativity — and this immediately raises the question of what this performativity is for. Bacon’s answer would seem to be clear. What valorises science is its human utility. Hence New Atlantis as an inspiring picture of what the ‘great instauration’ could do to improve the human condition. Above the gates of its most august building, the temple of Salomon, our travellers find the motto: ‘The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and secret causes of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible’ [White, 1981: 240].

All around, the social application of this programme has led to a world where, helped by all manner of wonderful contrivances, the necessities of life are abundant, energy supplies are inexhaustible, and citizens are healthier and more comfortable than Bacon’s contemporaries could have imagined.

Examined more closely, Bacon’s orienting ideal for scientific advance in fact contained two linked features. The first was an assertion of human entitlement to dominion over nature. The second was a moral imperative to use the fruits of that dominion for the benefit of all. With the triumph of liberal technological values these principles would come to seem common-sensical. But given the ruling (still
Christian) discourse, for Bacon they required further justification; a justification that could only be supplied by the Biblical narrative read as, and in the light of, Christianity’s Revealed. Against those divines who ‘pretend that knowledge is to be received with great limitation, as the aspiring to it was the original sin and the cause of the fall’ and ‘that it has somewhat of the serpent, and puffeth up’, Bacon insists that dominion over nature derives from God’s commission to Adam; and that the rise of natural science would put Man finally in the way of realising the promise of that dominion [1901:40].

Harnessing the hidden powers of nature, in fact, represents an earthly way to regain at least the original abundance, if not the original innocence and felicity, of Paradise itself. For that to happen, however, would depend on the use to which knowledge-based power was put. Hence, to take the second principle, Bacon’s insistence on an ethic of philanthropy according to which those with control over the nature-dominating power were obligated to use that control for the common benefit. That ethic likewise had transcendental guarantees. The priests of Atlantis have daily services thanking ‘God for his marvellous works....and imploring his aid and blessing’ so that their labours could be turned to ‘good and holy uses’ [White, 1981:250]. ‘It is’ Bacon notes in the *Advancement of Learning* ‘merely from its quality when taken without the true corrective that knowledge has somewhat of venom or malignity. The corrective which renders it sovereign is charity, for according to St Paul, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity buildeth” ’ [1901:41].

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67 ‘Only let the human race recover that right over nature which belongs to it by divine bequest, and let power be given it; the exercise thereof will be governed by sound reason and true religion’ [1960:119]. For a discussion of Bacon’s relation to the Adamic commission see Leiss: 48-57.

68 Against the theological argument that aspiring to knowledge of the divine powers in Creation led to Adam’s fall, Bacon replies: ‘It was the pure knowledge of nature, by the light whereof man gave names to all the creatures in Paradise, agreeable to their natures, that occasioned the fall; but the proud knowledge of good and evil, with an intent in man to give law to himself, and depend no more upon God’ [1901:40]. For Bacon’s account of the progress of knowledge in relation to
Baconian science, then, was to obey the Gospel injunction to ‘love one another’. Given Man’s fallen state, conversely, without the redeeming commitment to Christian caritas dominion over nature would itself degenerate into vanity, pride, and the domination of men by men. There is no need to determine whether Bacon himself was pious or prudent ‘behind’ the Christian framework he invokes. The point is just that, if truly believed in, the Biblical myths, or those which substitute for them in The New Atlantis, place the instrumentalism of science — its telos as technology — within a fixed, cosmic and moral frame of reference. Without some such foundation, on the other hand, Bacon’s construction would become weightless. What raises the legitimacy problem — in the eighteenth century, explicitly — is the demythologising spirit of science itself. From Spinoza to La Mettrie, a fully atheist materialism had begun to raise its head. With the declining credibility of revealed religion, techno-progressive thinking faced a dilemma. Either the moral grounding of a world-mastering science would have to be left unsecured — letting the enterprise float, in principle and de facto, among the powers of the world. Or some non-supernatural way would have to be found to legitimate the philanthropic ethic which had been shored up, in the old religion, by the word of God. To take the first path would be to let the domination of nature become a master principle in itself. This though would contradict the ethical principle, especially if humanity became thematized as an object for science and thus also for domination. On the other hand, to take the second path raised questions about what human ends should direct scientific-technological advance, as well as how, if not in some sense scientifically, these could themselves be defined, and justified.

the growth and beneficent effect (‘in remedying the inconveniences arising from man to man’ and
Once more, but this time with respect to goal-setting and *la morale*, Comte's drive to secure positive science as a relative but *réaliste* form of knowing indicated the need to extend it to the human world. Suppose, the thought ran, that we turned a positivist eye towards what the metaphysical discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth century called the problem of 'human nature'.

Suppose, that is, that we reproblematised the issue of human goodness in terms of what scientific study tells us about the physical organism, its mental and moral faculties, and about its natural (but by the same token collective) history. Would it then be possible to locate the instinct for human self-improvement and, even more importantly, the unifying, orienting, and disciplining force of what Christianity called love, as law-bound features of the phenomenal world? If so, the implications would be as foundational as they could be from a positivist point of view. Reliers on fact would surely recognise such individual or collective mental or affective empiricities as tantamount to a real Authority; and beyond this the search for axiological grounds would have no need to go.

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69 An account of this development, and of Bichat and Gall's physiological researches into the relation between moral and intellectual faculties and the brain, see III:604 *et seq.*
CHAPTER THREE

THE SYSTEM AND ITS LOGIC (2): FROM SOCIOLOGY TO THE SUBJECTIVE SYNTHESIS

From every direction — epistemological, ontological, political, religio-moral — all roads along the path of securing the scientific outlook as an all-encompassing system of thought led Comte to what *Philosophie positive* announced as ‘social physics’, and the *Politique positive* as ‘sociology’. It was required not just to complete the scientific revolution by including all orders of phenomena in its range. It was also needed in order to positivize our understanding of that, and thus to complete the positivization of human thought about thought itself.

However, any such solution to the problems inhering in Bacon’s initial attempt to think through the implications of a world-view based on the principles of a phenomenalist and instrumentalist practice of science was bound to change the matrix. Foucault’s account of how ‘Man’ (that ‘strange being...whose nature is to know nature’) was ‘fabricated’ by the ‘demiurge of knowledge’ in nineteenth century thought makes a similar point [1970:308-310]. For him there never was, nor could have been, a *singular ‘science of Man’*. Nevertheless, the emergence of *les sciences humaines* into this giddily reflexive epistemic space was indeed transformative. It effected a decisive break from the ‘classical’ to the ‘modern episteme’, in the

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1 ‘At first glance, once could say that the domain of the human sciences is covered by three ‘sciences’ — or rather by three epistemological regions, all subdivided among themselves, and all interlocking with one another; these regions are defined by the triple
course of which the transparent representationalism which governed the former gave way to a
more complex and would-be self-grounding discursivity.

Foucault's account of this shift gives a pivotal role to Kant [1970:312 et seq]. He downplays,
at the same time, the line of development which led from Bacon, through Montesquieu and the
Encyclopédistes, to Comte — not to mention the tangled lineage which connects French
sociology and structural anthropology to Foucault himself. Comte appears only as an
exemplar of the attempt to develop a science of Man from the side of biology². His meta-
theory is effaced. It was Comte, however — and, in this, ‘sociologically’ critical of Kant³ —,
who had been the first to think through the implications of bringing Man collectively into the
episteme of modern science; and Comte, more particularly, who had reflected from that angle
on Man's peculiarly dual 'mode of being', as the one who is 'at the same time the foundation
of all positivities and present, in a way that cannot even be termed privileged in the element of
empirical things' [Foucault, 1970:344].

² In Foucault's tripartite scheme (the 'modern' science of Man apportioned between those
of life, labour and language), if Comte exemplifies the first, Marx exemplifies a 'science of
Man' founded in production, and Nietzsche — undermining the modern episteme from
within — exemplifies what happens when 'Man' is problematized from the side of language
[1970:359-69].

³ In his personal library Comte had two works of Kant, Idea for a Universal History of
Cosmopolitan intent, and translated extracts from Critique of Pure Reason. Comte's
absorption of, and socio-historically relativising critique of, the latter is discussed by
Pickering [1993:292-296]. The Bibliothèque Positiviste that prefaces the Catéchisme
Positiviste has, in its Synthèse section (thirty volumes) no German philosophy at all — the
French are represented by Descartes, Diderot, Condorcet and de Maistre, the British by
Bacon and Hume [XI:38].
How Comte did so, and why, for him, the full positivization of human thought entailed a subjective and indeed religious turn, are questions we must now take up.

Sociology and its object

For Comte, the prerequisite for generating scientific knowledge about anything was to determine to what class or classes of natural phenomena it belongs. Upon that depends what fundamental science or sciences must be relied on for its study. With regard to human phenomena, one such pertinent science was biology, and a great deal, Comte thought, was to be learnt from it. Especially valuable in pinning down 'human nature' were the contemporary advances being made in physiology by Cabanis, Gall, Broussais and others. As opposed to speculative and introspective approaches to what Cousin, leader of the 'eclectic' school, lauded as 'psychology' [XApp:217], these promised to correlate specific regions of the brain with specific instincts and faculties, including the higher order ones of reflective and calculative intelligence, moral conscience and philanthropic love [III:646-660].

However, the determinations of human reality were not exhausted thereby. There was a remainder which, although it might in a wider sense be regarded as biological, was not

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The decisive advance made by contemporary biology, for Comte, was in showing how moral sentiments had a corporeal basis. Though reductive (he had no sociology or milieu in his 'science of man'), Cabanis' Les Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme was 'le précurseur immédiat à la heureux révolution philosophique que nous devons à la génie de Gall' [III:668]. Franz Joseph Gall's 'cerebral physiology' (he was the leading proponent of 'phrenology') provided the basis for Comte's own mapping of faculties and instincts in relation to the brain. Broussais' De l'irritation -- which Comte hailed for its
reducible to, or intelligible in terms of, the individual organism. It consisted of phenomena like 'customs, languages....and monuments' [IV: 341], which arose from the way in which, however splendid their imagined isolation, individual human beings were always — as members of a species, and indeed a 'social species' — associated together as a group. For Comte, indeed, human beings were doubly associated together: first, through all the ties of mutual reliance, direct and indirect, which connect them as living contemporaries; secondly, by being implicated in a temporal process wherein each generation lives off, works on, and transmits to the next, the fund of wealth, knowledge and institutions it has inherited from the past. The human species was not the only one whose forms of life, in interchange with nature, are collective. To that extent, Comte thought, sociology could and should study the social patterns exhibited by other animals [IV:350-352]. However, in the case of les animales inférieurs such a study would be dimensionally reduced. For, in addition to the richer social forms developed by human primates in virtue of their capacity for symbolic communication, the human collectivity, uniquely, had the developmental capacity to transmit and accumulate knowledge from one generation to the next [VI:612-3].

The irreducibility to individual biology of what is social and historical in the human domain made it the proper object of a distinct branch of knowledge. To which there was an evident methodological correlate: eternal vigilance against all those positions (economic [IV:210-222],

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attack on introspectionist psychology in his review essay of 1828 [Xapp:216-228] 'psychology' -- for le système nutritif what Gall had done for le cerveau.

5 'Tous les êtres vivants présentent deux ordres de phénomènes essentiellement distincts, ceux relatifs à l'individu, et ceux qui concernent l'espèce, surtout quand elle est sociale. C'est principalement par rapport à l'homme que cette distinction est fondamentale' [I:77].
voluntarist [242-249], psychological [III:612 et seq] etc.\(^6\) which refused to accord collective phenomena such recognition. Here, indeed, the critique of metaphysics within the sociological field merged with that of metaphysics as such. It was the ‘vain belief’ that the truth of what is can be deduced from the ‘lucubrations of the individual mind’ which underpinned the abstract rationalism of the metaphysical viewpoint\(^7\). Metaphysics is sustained by égoïsme. On its critical side, it was reducible to the absolute ‘dogma of free enquiry’ [V:515]. Not only, therefore, would positivizing our understanding of the social make it possible to understand in positive terms the very opposition between science and non-science which the positive outlook must negotiate if it was to establish its dominance. As the case of sociology demonstrated, the full emancipation of positivity from ‘theology’ and ‘metaphysics’ implied a break altogether ‘from the individual to the social point of view’ [VI:810].

Comte’s second move was to project into the space of the sociological object not just a general level of meta-individual human reality, but a distinct and integral entity: l’organisme sociale [IV:280]\(^8\). It must immediately be said that Comte made no distinction

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\(^6\) For Comte’s earlier critique of Cabanis for reducing the social side of moral phenomena to individual physiology, see Xapp:124-5; also the correspondence cited in Pickering [1993:151-2].

\(^7\) For Comte, it should be said, an emphasis on the individual was an aspect of the larger problem of metaphysics. His main target was metaphysical approaches to the social in the tradition of political philosophy. Q.v. the forty seventh Leçon of the Cours [IV:179-228]. Durkheim takes up the same issues in The Rules for Sociological Method. There, though, theories of individual agency are squarely presented as the main obstacle for sociology. ‘If we begin with the individual, we shall be able to understand nothing of what takes place in the group....every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false’ [1964:104].

\(^8\) The steps in this reasoning seem to have been: 1) though social physics cannot be reduced to the study of (individual) physiology, it not only depends on this latter for an understanding of the elements of which la société are composed, but these orders of phenomena are ‘homogènes’ [IV:340]; 2) in social physics it is impossible to separate out
between the first move and the second. He did not even suspect that they were distinct. For him, the social was always to be understood in reference to ‘society’ as a kind of unified singularity, just as the latter, as une phénomène composée, was to be understood as ‘homogeneous’ with the entities treated in biology. Durkheim attempted to screen out Comte’s preconceptions, particularly with regard to progrès, by empirically linking a definition of ‘social facts’ to the indexical criterion of ‘constraint’ [1964:21-413]. He also separated rules for observation from explanatory ones [1964:4-46]. Even so, he manifested the same confusion as Comte when he similarly moved from a concept of les faits sociaux as ‘collective ways of thinking, acting and feeling’ to an assumption that this collective quality presupposed ‘une société’ – with, indeed, ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ forms. For sociology, whether, and how, the social is to be conceived as a distinct order of reality

observation from theorization, otherwise it would be impossible to connect together any of the relevant facts. ‘D’où l’on est ainsi obligé, en quelque sorte, de créer simultanément les observations et les lois, vu leur indispensable connexité...’ [IV:336]. Thus 3) observation should be subordinated continuously ‘à l’ensemble de des spéculations positives sur les lois réelles de la solidarité et succession; in deriving which it is further essential ‘de rendre prépondérant dans les études sociologiques, en y procédant surtout du système aux éléments’ [VI:341]. From the latter, we impute apriori to society the characteristics of organic life such as they obtain in ‘lower’ realms, and then seek to identify additional characteristics (primarily that of self-development) which distinguishes it as the highest life-form. It is the dubious analogy already made in step one which enables Comte to think it possible, on a ‘positive’ basis, to escape what he acknowledges would otherwise be ‘une sort de cercle vicieux’ [IV:336] between observation and explanatory theory.

9 The ontological priority of the social whole with respect to ‘collective phenomena’ is assumed, without reflection, from the outset of the Rules. A social phenomenon ‘is general because it is collective (that is, more or less obligatory), and certainly not collective because it is general. It is a group condition repeated in the individual because imposed on him. It is to be found in each part because it exists in the whole...’ [1964:9 My emphasis]. In this respect, Durkheim’s big difference with Comte is that whereas for Comte the group, at its furthest extension, is the whole human species as it evolves to perfection, for Durkheim ‘It is only the individual societies which are born, develop, and die that can be observed, and therefore have objective existence’ [1964:19].
have long been contested questions. Weber denied the premise through a concept of 'social action' which was itself inter-individual. The same, but in more polemical a register, may be said (of at least some pronouncements) of Marx. All that need be remarked here is that the existence of such amorphously collective phenomena as language, and such micronally operative ones as gift exchange and the rituals of civility, suggest that it would be possible to affirm the irreducibility of 'the social' without having to ontologize 'society'; but that Comte's leap from regarding l'homme as une espèce sociable to regarding l'humanité as un organisme social made such a mid-way position unthinkable.

In developing his own concept of the social, Comte declared himself indebted to Condorcet [IV:200-209] and De Maistre, whose radically opposed viewpoints — progress vs order — he set himself to reconcile. From the Catholic Counter-revolution came the notion of society with a capital 's': a reality embracing but transcending the individual whose imperious demand for

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10 These issues were freshly discussed, in an attempt to reconcile a hermeneutic, action-oriented approach, with a structualist orientation to the 'production and reproduction of social life' in Giddens' New Rules for Sociological Method [1993]. Giddens does not take up the question though of 'society' as a distinct macro-unit of analysis.

11 Whether in the setting of Gemeinschaft or Gesellschaft, as Weber's definitions make clear: 'Communal action refers to that action which is oriented to the feeling of the actors that they belong together. Societal action, on the other hand, is oriented to a rationally motivated adjustment of interests' [Gerth and Mills, 1958:183].

12 'The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals...They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence' [Marx and Engels, 1947:7].

13 For Comte's critical appreciation of De Maistre, 'le plus éminent penseur de l'école catholique actuelle', in the Cours, see e.g. IV:20-24. The praise for De Maistre's contribution to social statics is emphasised throughout Politique positive. In the Discours préliminaire Comte notes that 'l'energique réaction philosophique, par l'éminent De Maistre, a profondément concouru à préparer la vraie théorie du progrès. Malgré l'intention évidemment rétrograde qui anima cette école passagères, ses travaux
harmony, order and unity was not just a Heavenly ideal, but a natural law." Whatever the perturbations to which it was subject, self-equilibrating social mechanisms (e.g. sacrifice) ensured that this law continually asserted itself, even in the rebellion of sinful individuals.

From Condorcet's *L'Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain*, Comte derived a way to arrange the materials of human history so as to derive therefrom a picture of the laws which drove and regulated its 'continuous progress' [IV:201-209]. This picture, in turn, built on Pascal's image of Man [IV:186] as like an ever developing individual being, in which each successive generation begins its own efforts at the higher place where the one before left off.

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For the social theory of De Bonald and its influence on Comte, see Milbank [1993:54-61]. However if De Bonald is a key source for Comte's conception of société it is scarcely acknowledged by Comte himself. De Bonald appears in the Calendrier as a leap year alternate to De Maistre on the 27th day of Descartes.

'It cannot be too often repeated that men do not at all guide the Revolution; it is the Revolution that uses men. It is well said that it has its own impetus. This phrase shows that never has the Divinity revealed itself so clearly in any human event. If it employs the most vile instruments, it is to regenerate by punishment' [De Maistre, 1971:50].

Montesquieu is credited as the first to suppose that there were laws of the social, and that these connected the polity to the prevailing moral and intellectual ideas; but he had relied on ecological explanations to account for differences between overall social types and had no theory of development. See for example IV:193-202.

'Pour fixer plus convenablement les idées, il importe d'établir préalablement, par une indispensable abstraction scientifique, suivant l'heureux artifice judicieusement institué par Condorcet, l'hypothèse nécessaire d'un people unique auquel seraient idéalement rapportées toutes les modifications sociales consécutives effectivement observées chez les populations distinctes' [IV:291].
What Comte called l'humanité was the totality — at once solidary and continuous, cohesive and developmental — which combined and unified these two concepts and aspects of our collective being. The new science, he tells us, will consider the mass of the human species, whether in the present, past, or even in the future, as increasingly constituting in every respect, whether in the order of space or time, an immense and eternal social unity, whose diverse individual or national organs, ceaselessly united by an intimate and universal solidarity, inevitably co-operate, each according to a determined mode and degree, the fundamental evolution of humanity.

What made it possible to recognise in such a vast and well-nigh ungraspable figure the distinct object of a science was that sociology's placement 'above' and after biology in the 'scientific series' invited a convenient analogical move. If sociology was a life science, Humanity could be regarded as a kind of organism. This implied that methodological protocols could be applied in its positive study which derived (but also expanded on) those of the life sciences.

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18 For a discussion of the relation between the dimensions of 'solidarity' and 'continuity' in defining l'humanité as sociology's knowledge object, see IV: 291-311. In Politique positive Comte defines 'Humanity' — now identified as an object of worship, le Grand Étre — as 'l'ensemble des êtres, passés, futurs, et présents, qui concourent librement à perfectionner l'ordre universel' [X:30]. It is superfluous, he adds, to mention 'sa nature spécifique' since 'Toute espèce sociable tend naturellement vers une telle convergence. Mais l'unité collective ne peut se réaliser, sur chaque planète, que chez la race préponderante'.

19 'Cette nouvelle science...représente nécessairement d'une manière directe et continue la masse de l'espèce humaine, soit actuelle, soit passée, soit même future, comme constituant, à tout égards, et de plus en plus, ou dans l'ordre des lieux, ou dans celui des temps, une immense et éternelle unité sociale, dont les divers organes, individuels ou nationaux, unis sans cesse par une intime et universelle solidarité, concourent inévitablement, chacun suivant un mode et un degré déterminé, à l'évolution fondamentale de l'humanité... [I:326-7].
more generally. Thus conceived, sociology would have two departments. The ‘sttcal’ part, building on the biological theory of (an organism’s) ‘vital consensus’, would consider what integrates humanity at any moment as a self-reproducing form of collective life [IV:277-9]. Here, the procedure would be to classify and compare societies with respect to their institutional constants and variations (institutions being understood as the equivalents of organs, tissues, cells etc.) in order to derive the ‘laws of solidarity’. The ‘dynamic’ side of sociology would search for society’s ‘laws of movement’, understood as a process in which, as a result of the accretions of intellectual and moral progress, the collectivity shifts through successive, and relatively unified, phases of intellectual-religious, political and socio-technical development. Such study was again classificatory-comparative, but with the difference that it involved a time dimension. Building on the series of inductive methods developed by preceding sciences, sociology would extrapolate from biology the comparative search for covariance, and, in its dynamic part, would add the ‘historical’ method of filiation.

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20 ‘...la physique sociale doit être certainement conçue comme une science parfaitement distincte, directement fondée sur des bases qui lui sont propres, mais profondement rattachée, soit dans son point de départ, soit dans son développement continu, au système entier de la philosophie biologique’ [IV:391].

21 Comte credits Blainville, in his introduction to Principes Généraux d’anatomie comparée for having systematized that distinction for biology [I:27].

22 These methods -- observation, experiment, comparison -- are reviewed in relation to social physics in Leçon 48 of the Cours [IV:229 et seq].

23 Inter-species comparison was of secondary importance for sociology, especially given the unique capacity of the human species for development. Hence the crucial importance of the historical comparisons that formed the basis of le méthode historique: ‘La comparaison historique des divers états consécutifs de l’humanité ne constitue pas seulement le principe artifice scientifique de la nouvelle philosophie politique: son développement rationnel formera directement aussi le fond même de la science...En effet, le principe positif de cette indispensable séparation [entre la science biologique et la science sociologique] résulte de cette influence nécessaire des diverses générations humaines sur les générations suivantes, qui, graduellement accumulée d’une manière
Besides being comparative and historical, Comte’s sociology was macronic. Given his determination of the social as that which pertains to ‘society’, and his integral conception of the latter, it could hardly be otherwise. The procedure was to compare whole societies, both at the same and at different stages of development, regarding as the latter both the same (national) society observed at different historical points, and different societies which, though existing contemporaneously, exemplified those different stages among themselves. Following Condorcet, as modified by Leibnitz’s dictum that ‘the present is big with future’ [IV:292], the final scientific aim, abstracting from the myriad messy complexities of concrete history, would be to induce from both operations the laws of orderly progress as if they unfolded within one single society.

As a result of adopting this model, however, an ambiguity is introduced into what Comte’s macro-unit of analysis actually is. To be sure, it was always some kind of société, a strongly defined human group characterised by its boundedness and bondedness as a unified and unifying association. But this category included both les grands sociétés (especially those of Western Europe) and the smaller groupings (family, tribe, polis) into which Humanity was organised at an earlier phase. But what of the latter as sub-sociétés within the former? And

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24 Comte’s theory of ‘modificateurs sociaux’ was designed to explain the different rates of social development. The assumption that different contemporary societies exhibited different stages of social development permitted the Condorcet model of an unfolding humanity to be placed on a directly empirical basis. See IV:353.

25 Comte’s idea of la série sociale is developed in the 50th Leçon of the Cours. The series marks stages in social development from the family, regarded as ‘le véritable germe
what, more generally, of all those cases in which the various boundaries of language, religion, intellectual culture, kinship, production and exchange, and ‘political society’ did not coincide? Comte could pass over these questions because the paramount entity to be grasped was the grand totality comprised by l’humanité as a whole. But then is the sociological object a multiplicity (a comparative science of societies) or a singularity? And what in any case ‘is’ the latter? On the one hand, l’humanité was to be conceived as la masse de l’espèce humaine regarded in its entire geographical and historical extension, including into the future. On the other, and more narrowly, it named the concretely operative human community – but only and specifically at the globalized point at which its always expanding sociality had finally united the species within a single world society. Humanity in the second sense was the self-realisation of Humanity in the first. As such, indeed, it only came into existence during the ‘industrial’ stage of development, when it completed the series of partial social totalities that had begun with la Famille, la Cité, and la Patrie. As we shall see, the fuzziness surrounding Comte’s concepts of humanité and société was important to the working, and unworking, of his whole system, including at the religious level.

The final move in Comte’s positivization of the social field was the link it aimed to forge between predictive theory and prescriptive practice. Given the conceptual shape imparted to the sociological object, the step was made to seem like obviousness itself. If society is an organism, sociology provides a scientific understanding of the conditions for its health.

nécessaire des diverses dispositions essentielles qui caractérisent l’organisme social’ [IV:448], to ‘la société proprement dite, dont la notion, parvenu à son entière extension scientifique, tend à embrasser la totalité de l’espèce humaine, et principalement l’ensemble de la race blanche’ [IV:431].
'Positive politics', then, could follow a medical model of diagnosis and cure, modified by the relativity introduced into the criterion of healthy normality by the social organism's phase-shift path of growth and development. The laws of statics would provide functionalist rules for the 'normal' achievement of social unity; those of dynamics would specify the particular ordering requirements appropriate to the given level of social development. For Comte, the pressing issue was how to move the polity forward at a time of transitional crisis between one social stage and another. The party of order could only envisage 'social health' on a restored feudal model. It was just here that discovering the laws of dynamics was crucial. For, in conjunction with a knowledge of statics, they would make it possible to predict the 'normal' outcome of the present phase-shift - to industrial society - on the basis of tendential laws extrapolated from the 'encyclopaedic series' of human history [IV:249-250].

From the past to the future, and back to the present. Voilà, a scientific way to diagnose and, at least projectively, resolve health crises that arise in the social organism before they become disabling or worse. The current need was apparently chronic. But even under less turbulent conditions, social science would serve continually to clarify the necessary path of normal (because integrative and socially self-sustaining) progress. Either way, we should note, the crises to be obviated were endogenously generated. Natural disasters were outside the scope

26 Present 'political facts' would thus be considered in the same dispassionate scientific light as any other sociological phenomena: 'Sans admirer ni maudire les faits politiques, et en y voyant essentiellement, comme en toute autre science, la physique sociale considère donc chaque phénomène sous le double point de vue élémentaire de son harmonie avec l'état antérieur et l'état postérieur du développement humain' [I:V:326].

27 The 'previsions' concerning humanity's final état normal are destined, Comte says in Politique positive [X:6] 'à fonder une politique capable de systématiser la marche spontanée de chaque population vers l'état normal...'.

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of the sociological field. The possibility of endogenous crises, on the other hand, testified to the potential for imperfection in the unfolding of the complex\(^2\). Such potential was clearly at its maximum in the flux and conflicts which accompany modal changes in social form. By the same token, the solution presented by the diagnostics and programmatic of social science was endogenously produced too — part and parcel of the transition to industrialism and positivity whose disintegrative turmoil it providentially functioned to resolve.

What is clear, in the practical role Comte accords sociology, is the difference between its instrumentalism and that obtaining in the physical sciences. The utility of the latter was indeterminate, but Comte’s ‘sociology’ was not available for just any end. Nor, indeed, with its macronic focus, was it fine-tuned enough to be of much service to the multiplicity of particular interests who might benefit from a knowledge which promised for themselves enhanced mastery of the social. The supreme end which sociology took as ontically given — the durable well-being of human society as a whole — it also prescribed. This was hardly incidental, of course, to Comte’s purposes. Sociology needed to be goal determining, and not just means determining, if it was to provide \textit{a de jure}, as well as \textit{de facto}, anchor for all the sciences and technical practices that reached their summit in the social\(^2\). This was just the beauty of the

\(^2\)\textit{Dans l’organisme social, en vertu de sa complication supérieur, les maladies et les crises sont nécessairement encore plus inévitables, à beaucoup d’égards, que dans l’organisme individuel} [IV:325].

\(^2\) The paradox of Comte’s socio-historical relativization of moral and political values was that it could nevertheless prescribe. By treating norms and ideals as facts for a nomothetic science their ‘correct’ present form could be predicted according to empirically established \textit{invariables lois} [IV:249 et seq].
bio-medical model. In ‘health’, it provided a univocal criterion for helpful practice; one that was presumably compelling when the organism concerned included ourselves\(^{30}\).

Yet there is no disguising that in normatizing the ‘healthy’ state of society a questionable move was being made. Even if we accept the scientific credentials of Comte’s bio-social schematics, why should we actually care about social health, or, for that matter, about the future of ‘Humanity’? An answer in terms of the merely factual interconnectedness of individual and collective survival would take no account of the existential remoteness of the latter from the former. With a fictive ‘God’ out of the picture, who indeed was to say — for the group or the individual — that recklessness, even suicide, was wrong?

**The transcendence of the social**

The self-valorising character of Comte’s sociology lies in its being able to approach such religio-moral questions from within its own discourse by the way it constructs its knowledge object as a positivity with both the right and the power to morally command. The human collectivity, apprehended as *société* and *humanité*, confronts the knowing subject as that which is always, already, and inescapably the origin and terminus of his/her highest ends. In its towering moral authority over each individual member, it has the quality of the sacred, and objectively so.

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\(^{30}\) C.f. Durkheim: ‘One may say, if science foresees, it does not command. That is true. Science tells us simply what is necessary to life. But obviously *the supposition, man wishes to live*, a very simple speculation, immediately transforms the laws science establishes into imperative rules of conduct’ [1968:34-5].
That the transcendence of the social has the character, in Comte's sociology, not only of a fact but also of a moral fact, i.e. one that imposes a duty which can be wilfully disregarded\(^1\), arises from the relation between his super-organismic concept of society/humanity and his theory of the social tie. The latter, as the generalised affection and mental consensus which bind individuals together in a group, is the irreplaceable foundation for the former. This foundation, indeed, makes it the peculiar kind of being it is. A society is nothing outside the association of the individuals of which it is composed. The converse, however, is not necessarily so. It is biologically possible for disaggregated elements — hermits and parasites, for example — to live apart without being morally fused into the body of the host\(^2\). By the same token, the unity of the social has none of the automaticity to be found among lower life-forms. Humanity was not just 'a sort of giant polyp extending itself over the whole globe', for this would be to confuse 'a voluntary and optional association with a form of participation that was involuntary and indissoluble' [IV:351-2n].

Unlike in the symbiotic relation between cell and organism, then, Comte's 'social organism' has the contradictory character of being both a unity in itself, and what Aristotelians would call a unity *per accidens*. It was within the psychic tension generated by that difference that the

\(^1\) *Cet immense et éternel organisme se distingue surtout des autre être comme étant formés d'êtres séparables, dont chacun peut sentir sa propre coopération, et par suite la vouloir, ou même la refuser, du moins tant qu'elle demeure directe* [VIII:599-60]

\(^2\) That Humanity only includes morally participating individuals is made clear in the Introduction of the *Catéchisme positiviste*: '...vous devez définir...l'Humanité comme l'ensemble des être humains, passés, futurs, et présents. Ce mot ensemble vous indique assez qu'il n'y faut pas comprendre tous les hommes, ceux-là qui sont réellement
conversion of human collectivity into a moral authority took shape. In the finally realised stage of l'état positif, the whole human collectivity comes to present itself, in the self-conscious altruism of its members, as a transcendent Other with claims on obedience, loyalty and affection. In actively and lovingly responding to this claim, subjects become agents of society and Humanity in their turn, showing that the commanding presence of the Good Other is also within.

For society to be experienced as transcendent to the individual in the first place presupposes, of course, that it already exists — and in a strong sense, not just as an easily disassembled aggregate of self-interested egos. At this primordial level, for Comte, the bond which constituted individuals as a collectivity was an affective force, l'amour. It rested — physiologically, according to contemporary phrenology — on an instinctual base; though within the individual topography of the human brain, egoistic instincts were stronger than altruistic ones. That les penchants bienveillants were nevertheless able not only to prevail, but to stretch beyond the immediacy of the family to embrace the non-present others (geographically and temporally) of an entire society, was an effect of their own strengthening through the habits and ties of sociality itself. The wider and de-personalised extension of altruisme also involved assimilables, d'après une vraie coopération à l'existence commune' [XI:66 emphasis in original].

That is why, in generating the fundamental concepts of social statics, Comte begins, in a move that would otherwise violate his methodological precepts, with 'les conditions générales d'existence sociale relatives d'abord à l'individu' [IV:431]. This starting-point, he immediately specifies, concerns 'la sociabilité essentiellement spontanée de l'espèce humaine, en vertu d'un penchant instinctif à la vie commune, indépendamment de tout calcul personnel, et souvent malgré les intérêts individuels les plus énergiques [IV:433]. Love is biologically innate, then, and its existence in the mental/moral make-up of the
a transfer, and re-focussing, of affect. Its object becomes the generalised Other in whose singular image, as family, city, homeland, nation-state or Humanity, a given société offers itself to be cherished or revered. Within the theatre of Comtean sociology, then, it is love — expressed in the supreme principle of Vivre pour autrui — which finally has the starring role. Altruistic affection not only glues individuals together in a collectivity but also effects a seam between the ontologically distinct planes of bio-individual and social reality. Without it there would be no properly social existence. Positivistically translated, St Paul’s ‘God is Love’ expressed no more nor less than this exultant, but fragile, moral-instinctual truth at the heart of the social.

The sacral quality that inhered in human society by virtue of both its immanent/transcendent relation to each of us, and the loving sentiments it incarnates, was reinforced by a further feature on its dynamic side. The law of three stages recapitulates in grand historical terms what everyone ‘at the level of their epoch’ could verify for themselves: that we are theologians in our childhood, metaphysicians in adolescence, and ‘scientific or positive’ in adulthood [I:III]. Comte’s matter-of-fact presumption that the mental/moral development of the individual provides a model for that of the ‘collective individual’ comprising Humanity as a whole, enabled him to smuggle in a telos of self-realisation which further enhanced its transcending majesty. Maturity, which potentiates the individual being, brings realism, integration,
self-possession and insight. It also brings the subordination of egoistic to social instincts [IV:502-3; 532-5]. It was the same with l'Humanité. Completion of the long revolution which was bringing science and industry love to power in the most advanced regions would break down national borders, establish international peace, and usher in a (confederally) unified world society. At which point, too, the collective achievement of a fully co-operative order would bring collective knowledge of itself. The coming into being of Humanity as a social, cultural and political fact would enable it be recognised, universally, as the finally unveiled 'Grand-Être', the truth behind the fiction of all the false divinities that came before35.

In the giddy utopianism engendered by the great bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such humanist eschatologies were hardly uncommon36. In Comte’s case, however, the combination of this with an ostensibly inductive scientism is so strikingly

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35 ‘Si l’existence du Grand-Être restait sérieusement contestable son règne ne serait prochain. Ainsi son développement actuel dispense de démontrer sa réalité, profondément surgie dans toutes les productions, morales, intellectuelles, et mêmes matérielles, dont l’analyse positive indique toujours le concours universel des temps et des lieux’ [X:27]. For the objective and subjective formation of l’Humanité as Grand Être, see X:24-33.

36 Carl Becker’s Heavenly City of Eighteenth Century Philosophy examines this strain in French thought; Manuel’s Prophets of Paris continues the story into the nineteenth. The translation of French revolutionary theory into Germany idealist philosophy was extensively criticized by Marx (e.g. in the Communist Manifesto, and the German Ideology), though the humanist consummation associated with communism in his early writings clearly spring from the same soil. In recent years, however, Christopher Lasch has joined Blumenberg in querying the importance of the eschatological element in enlightenment progressivism, a tradition he wishes to resuscitate: ‘Once we recognize the profound difference between the Christian view of history, prophetic or millenarian, and the modern conception of progress, we can understand what was so original about the
inconsistent that the suturing manoeuvre needs to be highlighted. To do so we must recall an aspect of Comte’s intended improvement on Baconian inductivism. In Comte’s refined conception, the phenomenal object-world confronting the knowing subject merely provided data from which, in the synthetic space of the ‘fundamental’ sciences, the laws that constitute scientific theory proper are derived. It was that theory itself, conversely, which made possible the scientific understanding of the concrete. Comte’s approach — which might be described as a theoretician instrumentalism — had the intended merit of avoiding empiricism on the one side, and mysticism on the other^37. But when it came to investigating the social he simplified the issue, and effectively fell into both. By switching back and forth between l’humanité as the highest level of rule-bound order within l’ordre universel and the particular societies confronting the sociological observer, he confounded the distinction he otherwise insisted upon in fundamental sciences between their abstract knowledge object and its ‘real’ referent. The merger was hidden in the ‘rational fiction’ [IV: 291] that pre-arranged the mosaic of ever existing societies into a developmental series. The abstract universal that resulted — l’humanité — served to designate at once an unfolding actuality, a higher reality to be served, and the conceptual object of his new science.

latter: not the promise of a secular utopia that would bring history to a happy ending but the promise of steady improvement with no foreseeable ending at all’ [Lasch, 1991:47]. 37 ‘La vraie culture positive évite également les deux écueils opposés, le mysticisme et l’empirisme, entre lesquels flotte nécessairement toute étude où la déduction et l’induction ne sont pas sagement combinées’ [VII:518]. Althusser was to make great play with Comte’s distinction between the theoretical object of knowledge and its ‘real’ referent in his own critique of the twin errors of ‘idealism’ and ‘empiricism’. He attributed the distinction to Spinoza, however, who ‘warned us that the object of knowledge or essence was in itself absolutely distinct from the real object [Althusser, 1970:40].
Besides its circularity — the ‘facts’ are pre-organised by the theory they are meant to validate — the appeal to historical data which legitimised this construction\(^{38}\) glossed over the conceptually constructed character of *les faits* in any domain. In the case of sociology, the difficulty of pinning down phenomena was radical — and not only for the reasons of complexity Comte advanced [IV:335-6]. Positive sociology posited as its largest *concretum* the socio-historical totality comprised by the species, in all its actual spatio-temporal reach. Such an object exceeded presence, and could only ever be captured abstractly, through being imagined, reconstructed, and conceptually condensed. The same, indeed, applied to sub-totalities within it, such as the national societies of Western Europe that allegedly represented the vanguard of the whole. No wonder, then, that Comte’s discussion of sociological method insists that in this domain more than in all others ‘one is obliged ... to observe and create laws simultaneously’ [IV:335]. But even this formulation did not recognise the independent role of conceptualisation in constructing macro-sociological facts. Nor, did it recognise the difficulty which the entanglement of the ideographic with the nomothetic placed in the way of sociology becoming, in his sense, ‘positive’ at all\(^{39}\). All along the line, Comte could square the *idea* of Humanity’s transcendence with that of its *actual* transcendence only in a figure which

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\(^{38}\) This is the ‘scientific’ intent within the *appréciations* of the fetishistic/familial, polytheistic/civic, monotheistic/theological/military, and metaphysical/transitional stages that occupy the four chapters of Book V of the *Cours*.

\(^{39}\) Comte recognized that *la morale*, as the concrete, composite and practical science of (individual) human nature, could not be included in the *encyclopédie abstraite*; but sociology itself, while being the science of the ‘most specialized’ phenomena, could achieve this status because a general field of the social could be constituted out of the comparisons afforded between animal and human societies, different human societies, or different stages of social development. It remained the case that *l’Humanité* was the sole observable member of its scientific set. For a discussion of the relation between the abstract and concrete in the context of Comte’s ‘revolutionary’ substitution of sociology for mathematics as a unifying foundation for the sciences see Marietti [1982:17-26].
systematically blurred the difference between the abstract and concrete totalities it purported, ‘scientifically’, to grasp.

This blurring is most evident with regard to time. Sociology could not have positivized sooner, Comte argued, because it would have lacked the requisite historical data. [X:139]. But what of the future? As a concretum, the ‘development’ of Humanity extends forward into the unknown. To assume, even in principle, that the relevant facts of sociology were now all before us was precisely an assumption. Only at dusk — but then how would we know it was dusk? — could sociology’s owl of Minerva takes flight. That being so, both the ‘laws of statics’, based on such forms of society as had existed hitherto, and the ‘laws of dynamics’, induced from time-series data, could only ever be regarded as provisional. Comte covers himself in an extraordinary way. The blank of the unknowable future is filled in by deducing industrial’s society’s perfected état normale, a feat which takes up the entire 600 pages of Politique positive’s fourth volume. In the immediately following first volume of Synthèse Subjective the speculative status of this deduction is underlined by a literary conceit. The ‘normal future’ which Comte constructs for industrial society is projected, a life-time forward, into the year 1927. Comte’s acknowledgement of the ideal-imaginary character of his

40 ‘L’impossibilité d’y recourir à l’observation directe se trouve compensée pas la prépondérance plus complète des conceptions statiques et la succession plus étendue des appréciations dynamiques’ [X:4-5].

41 ‘…l’artifice général qui préside [à ce traité]…consiste à supposer que je l’écris dans l’année 1927, qui doit, en mes yeux, constituer la septante-troisième année de l’état normal, d’après l’opinion établie par mon principale ouvrage sur la nature et la marche de la transition finale’ [XI:vii]. By writing as if in the future, Comte also writes as if already dead, citing the testament he had written the year before (1855): ‘Habitant une tombe anticipée, je dois désormais tenir aux vivants un langage posthume, qui sera mieux
deduced projection did not prevent him from incorporating it into sociology's knowledge domain as a kind of fact. Not only, moreover, was this incorporation illicit. It had the added convenience of positing a developmental limit. Once the great transformation to industrial-Positivist order had been achieved, the whole progressive metamorphosis wrought by History would have come to an end. And after that? Perfect tranquillity and no more story.

On the side of abstract social knowledge, accepting the destiny of this closure excised the indeterminacy which would otherwise have marked its domain. On the side of the concrete, the predicted future merged with the program being urgently advanced. Programmatically, it served both as a tendential guide for assessing and analysing the contradictions and fluidities of the present, and as a practical ideal to be realised. Just as with Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, practice, in fact, is what closes the gap. In actually being realised, which Positivism as a movement aimed to speed up, the Positive Polity's hypothetical status (as what would happen if/when the 'present crisis' were resolved) would be superseded. The shakiness (for a positivism that wants empirical certitude) of this whole manoeuvre — whose truth depends on bringing it about — is presumably why Comte ensconced himself safely in the future. From there, the laws governing collective human development from start to finish could be imagined as having already been empirically confirmed.

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affranchi des divers préjugés, surtout théoriques, dont nos descendants se trouveront préservées' [XII:ix].

42 Comte's analysis of the future, in its very words indeed, aimed to be performative:
‘...cette détermination décisif...d'après sa nature, inaugure déjà l'état qu'elle décrit [X:6]...
As Comte recognised, however, construing the sociological object as transcendent to the individual did not automatically convert the care for its welfare into an over-riding moral imperative. The historically evolving relation between a self-transcending Humanity and the altruistic love of the sociated individual may be graspable as a general fact. Yet to be regarded as a principle, indeed as the finally grounding principle, for human theory and practice, something more was required. The elevated ontological status of *l'humanité* relative to individual members must be also be embraced and affirmed. Such an affirmation is made emotionally possible by the individual altruism sociation presupposes and elicits. As an epistemic and axiological resting point for the Positivist worldview, though, feelings alone are not enough. To fix ends so as to discipline practice it was necessary that love for the higher organism that englobes us, together with the very positing of such a category, be completed, and hardened, by an act of will. In the language of Christianity, from which Comte explicitly drew, it required *faith*.

In *Philosophie positive*, the assumption is that such a faith, together with *le pouvoir spirituel* which fosters it [VI:483 *et seq*], will spontaneously arise. With ‘the direct institution of Positive religion’, however, it ceases to be secondary and its propagation becomes an urgent concern. A year before Comte’s death, the frontispiece of *Synthese Subjective* adds to previous Positivist mottoes an extract from *De Imitatio Christi*: ‘*Omnis ratio et naturalis investigatio fidem sequare debet, non praecedere, nec infringere*’. (Every exercise of reason,

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43 ‘…l’évolution fondamentale de l’humanité devra être ainsi conçue comme seulement modifiable, à certains degrés déterminés, quant à sa simple vitesse’ [IV:316].
and natural inquiry, should follow faith, not precede or infringe upon it.) In the works of the 1850s, in fact, faith in and towards Humanity becomes the indispensable attitudinal decision at the centre of the system. It was given primacy not only as a general moral rule (the basis for morality itself), but as a rule for thinking. It was especially a rule for that thinking which was Positivism itself. Upon it depended, within Comte’s totalization, the entire union of theory and practice. Only thus could thought be directed to complete the positivization of knowledge by linking that process, through the reflexive diagnostics of sociology, to the social reconstruction which it both provoked and made possible.

At the end of the road, then, it would seem that Comte had just regressed to the arbitrary fideism his entire effort was aiming to surpass. Yet this would be too simple. The faith which Comte explicitly, after 1847, took to be at the irreducible core of his project, was by no means conceived as the kind of blind leap it represented, say, for Pascal or certain of the patristics. The sacred being with which Positivist faith aligned the individual was not, from a sociological perspective, immaterial, but a real dehors. Unlike the ineffable God of theology, moreover, le Grand-Être was neither outside the laws of nature nor able to suspend them. The fact that Humanity was elevated above us not just objectively, for the intellect, but subjectively, for our ‘highest’ sentiments, was itself scientifically graspable in terms of the ‘normal’ individual/group relation posited by social statics, and perfected according to les lois du progrès. Faith in

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44 The dictum is first introduced in Book III of Politique positive [IX:439].
45 ‘Dirigée par l’amour et réglée par la foi, l’activité consolide leur concours en développant l’industrie collective’ [X:361]
Humanity, then, could take itself to be *une foi démontrable*: one that was both really religious, in the socially and individually effective sense, yet positive, demystified and entirely rational\(^{46}\).

There was, in addition, an equally consequential difference between the faiths of Christianity and Positivism on the side of the believing subject. Approaching religion sociologically enabled Comte to grasp his own lonely but ‘inaugurating’ process of Positivist conversion as more than an individual act\(^{47}\). In historical terms, while the innovative labour of synthesising the scientific-industrial *episteme* was inevitably accomplished in an individual brain, the Positivist embrace of Humanity\(^{48}\) with which it was bound up could be scientifically comprehended as a determinate moment in a larger social shift. Combining the laws of progress with the laws of

\(^{46}\) *La foi théologique, toujours liée à une révélation quelconque, à laquelle le croyant ne saurait participer, est assurément d’une tout autre espèce que la foi positive, toujours subordonnée à une véritable démonstration, dont l’examen est permis à chaque un sous des conditions déterminées, quoique l’une et l’autre résultent également de cette universelle aptitude à la confiance, sans laquelle aucune société réelle ne saurait jamais subsister* [VI:504].

\(^{47}\) The *Preface personelle* to the last volume of *Philosophie positive* [VI:vi-xl] was at pains to show *la correlation nécessaire qui lie aujourd’hui ma position privée à la situation fondamentale du monde intellectuel*. Besides elaborating on the contingencies of family and educational background which marked him out to be the philosopher of *la doctrine régénératrice*, he explains the persistent opposition he faced trying to get a permanent academic position at l’*École Polytechnique* as having ‘nothing essentially personal or fortuitous’ about it. It represented simply the ‘spontaneous resistance’ of an intellectual milieu still suffering the effects of ‘the artificially prolonged interregnum’ of the metaphysical spirit [VI:xxxiv]. Its targets found him rancorous and argumentative and the preface itself — which appealed to ‘public opinion’ throughout Europe — only stiffened the resolve to keep Comte out. It was also the last straw in Comte’s relationship with Caroline Massin [Pickering:547-551].

\(^{48}\) *Il suffit alors qu’une angélique impulsion vint oralement régénérer le fondateur de la sociologie....Alors surgit, au centre de l’anarchie occidentale, le type systématique de l’existence normale, personifiée chez le penseur que son initiation dispose de plus à l’essor révolutionnaire, dont sa jeunesse ne fut préservée que par la vénération* [XII:44-45].
statics, we could further infer that this new faith, like its predecessor, would have to be consolidated institutionally, so as to become a continuing social fact.

And so to the final step. After putting faith in charge of a sociologized reason, Positivism's religious prise de position secured itself the only way it ultimately could: in a system of ongoing practices designed to reproduce both the moral subjectivity in question and the mental categories requisite for conceiving this whole self-confirming complex as a naturally produced socio-historical necessity. Therewith, Comte's synthesising ardor, speaking through a positivism become sociological, is able at last to find a stable home. It takes its bearings, at first in imagination but increasingly as an instituted reality⁴⁹, not just from Humanity as a consciously affirmed transcendental reality, but from within the prayerful and liturgical round of a newly organised religion, whose function it would be to perpetuate and extend the sociolatric faith. The basis and necessity for such an ecclesiastical and ritual institution is a discovery of sociology itself. But in accepting responsibility for the consequences, by instituting (discursively and extra-discursively) the sacral quality it binds itself to in its object, positive sociology becomes part of the religion whose social and intellectual rationale it bespeaks⁵⁰.

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⁴⁹ Some landmarks: in 1828 Comte begins to train cadres for the new Spiritual Power; in 1838 he begins his regimen of 'cerebral hygience'; in 1846 he begins the cult of Clotilde; in 1850, by now self-proclaimed as Grand-prêtre de l'Humanité, he initiates the three most important of his seven sacraments, regarding birth, marriage and death [VII:19]. He later [IX:618] defines 1847 as the pivotal year, marking 'l'irrévocable avénement du positivisme religieux en condensant nos sentiments, nos pensées et nos actions autour de l'Humanité définitivement substituée à Dieu'.

⁵⁰ 'Si donc la théocratie et la théolatrie reposèrent sur la théologie, la sociologie constitue certaineent la base systématique de la sociocratie et la sociolatrie' [VII:403 emphasis in original].
The Subjective Synthesis

Whatever its political implications, the theoretical consequences, for Comte, of normatizing sociology by sacralizing its object in a faith ramified by a new would-be world religion were profound. Sociology's double register, as science and socio-theology, at the top of the encyclopaedic scale of abstract knowledge, introduced a crucial complication into the system. A subjective supplement — the sentiments of love, altruism, veneration, attachment, etc. associated with the shift 'from an individual to a social point of view' — had been precipitated within the science dealing with the highest object. By asserting the (practically necessary) 'primacy of feeling over intellect' within theory itself, Comte's religious turn could not, then, but reverberate back down the system of sciences sociology capped51. Hence the impetus and necessity for initiating what he called in the conclusion to Politique Positive [X:542-3] the third, and final, part of his system: le synthèse subjective.

That project was never completed, but the sketch-plan for it in Politique Positive [197-233]52 together with the one extant volume (on mathematics and logic), make clear the general features of its design. To be emphasised first is its appellation as 'subjective'. It was to be subjective in a double sense. On the one hand, what was to be systematically unified was

51 The basic notion was already outlined in the concluding chapter of Philosophie positive. Speaking of the social science now initiated he remarks: 'La nature du sujet, où la solidarité est beaucoup plus complète que partout ailleurs, lui assure spontanément, dès sa naissance, en compensation nécessaire de sa complication plus grande, une rationalité supérieure à celle de toutes les sciences préliminaires...en y établissant aussitôt l'ascendant normal de l'esprit d'ensemble, qui, d'une telle source, doit bientôt se répandre sur toutes les parties antérieures de la philosophie abstraite...' [VI:783].
human subjectivity itself. In this regard, it continued the process begun, but only at the level of the intellect, in the synthesis of objective knowledge which Comte claimed to have accomplished in the *Philosophie positive*. On the other hand, 'subjective' also qualified the mode of synthesis. What was to be understood about the subject was to be understood as occurring within the subject, in harmony therefore with all its faculties, including, especially, the affects. Overall, by adopting the standpoint of 'subjective synthesis' Comte repudiated the thought, still lingering in *Philosophie positive*, that for society as well as the individual a) subjective harmony depended primarily on systematising the intellect, and b) that in the epoch of science and industry the intellect could be systematised on the basis of 'objective' knowledge.

To discover the 'most general axioms' [Bacon, 1960:43], had been the ultimate ambition of Baconian science. This aim was given renewed impetus by post-Newtonian advances in mathematical physics, and in more primitive form was seized on by Saint-Simon in his postulation of Gravity itself as the 'sole cause of all physical and moral phenomena' [cited in Pickering, 1993:72] Comte's point of departure in *Philosophie politique* had been to break from this 'algebraic' mode, by socio-historically relativising the phenomenon of science yet, in

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52 Embodied in an *Encyclopédie abstraite* which comprised (naturally) seven volumes of seven chapters each [X:197].

53 'Devenant à la fois plus sympathétique, plus synergiqûes, et plsu sympathiques, la nature humaine tend ainsi vers la systématisation résulte de l'ascendant croissant de l'altruisme sur l'égoïsme' [X:177].

54 In the Preface to the first volume of *Politique positive* Comte summarizes the shift, and the complementary relation between his two syntheses, as follows: 'malgré leur intime connexité, ces deux grands traités doivent donc différent essentiellement. L'esprit prévalu dans l'un, pour mieux caractériser la superiorité du positivisme sur un
this very relativity, finding, in the formation of science itself, a principle of mental unity. By displaying the linkage between the sciences from the vantage point of sociology (with its law of three stages, and deduction of the sciences' 'normal' co-ordination), Comte had been able to disavow any 'metaphysical' pretensions to epistemological absolutism, while retaining an anchor in scientific objectivity.

With that same move, however, the project of positivist synthesis became entangled with the need to demonstrate — and in so doing, to enact — the grounds of its own underpinning by a committedly social point if view. Once over this brink, Comte was brought to recognise that scientificity alone, even at the once removed level of method, could not provide a unifying principle for consciousness unless complemented by that same commitment 35. In a phrase which recalls Aquinas on grace (gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit — grace does not abolish nature, but perfects it) Comte affirmed that 'to complete the laws there must be wills ....Commanding must assist arrangement, so that order may be complete' 36. From which it followed, too, that the task of intellectual co-ordination positive philosophy had set itself was

35 Comenting for example on astronomy, Comte notes: 'Des événements où l'homme ne figure directement que comme spectateur, comporteront toujours les divagations des théoriciens effrayés des efforts continus qu'exige l'universelle prépondérance de la méthode subjective. Mais l'inanité des synthèse objectives est assez sentie maintenant pour que les vrais penseurs puissent accepter, en cosmologie, l'irrévocabile présidence du point de vue humain, seul apte à tout lier' [X:199]
36 'Pour compléter les lois, il faut des volontés. Apprécie subectivement, un tel complément convient autant à la vie spéculative qu'à la vie active, vu la commune insuffisance des motifs légaux. Ce qui manque de précision aux lois sociales pour guider la pratique humaine trouve son équivalent dans l'impuissance des explications théoriques envers le spectacle concret: il faut, de part et d'autre, que le commandement assiste l'arrangement' [XII:25 emphasis in original].

théologisme quelconque. Ici, le coeur domine, afin de manifester assez la la prééminence morale de la vraie religion [VII:3-4].
not a purely intellectual matter. Such co-ordination engaged the whole personality, including the sentiments. It was also purposive, implying a moral orientation of the knowing subject towards altruistic practice. From this angle, Comte concluded, the 'objective' synthesis attempted in *Philosophie Positive* had been necessary but insufficient [VII:443-4]. Its insufficiency was both performative, as appealing only to the head and not the heart, and theoretical, as not reflecting on the relationship between the intellectual and the other faculties in its systematisation of the laws of the individual and collective mind.

The explicit introduction of sentiments into the Positivist totalisation, together with the importance of thematizing these in terms of individual moral psychology, was linked to a second distinguishing feature of the *synthèse subjective*. While the first synthesis was inscribed within the master-science of society, the second derived its organising principles from the science of *la morale* [X:195]. Unlike sociology, this new *science finale* was not, strictly, a branch of science in its own right. It was a composite of two others: human biology (as this bore on a physiological theory of affects and faculties) and sociology. Moreover, as the domain 'where we study our nature in order to rule our existence' [X:181], it combined theory and practice — indeed, it was the pre-eminent site of their union. As both practical and concrete, then, *la Morale* had no place in the initial scientific series. For just these reasons, however, its independent articulation in the second, 'subjective', series was essential. *La Morale* treated the constitution of the human being whose subjective condition was to be actually, and 'healthily', synthesised. Indeed, it provided the organising principle for the entire subjective synthesis, because in *la science de Morale* the knowing subject ascends to itself; as
both the resumé of the totality (all sciences meet in Man\textsuperscript{57}) and as the being whose mental/moral framework is embodied in that totality’s conceptual construction.

According to the outline we have\textsuperscript{58}, \textit{la Morale} was to consist of two parts. The first, ‘instituting the knowledge of human nature’, would provide a synthesised theory of bio-psychological and socially mediated psychic integration; the second, ‘instituting the improvement of human nature’, a system of education which aimed to perfect the inner harmony of the individual soul.\textsuperscript{59}. As with sociology and social unity, functional integration at the individual level was made normative by its linkage to an ideal of health — an ideal rendered complex at both levels by their inextricable inter-relation [X:233-236]. A society of complete egoists was impossible; but the ‘normal’ state of individual subjective harmony was also unthinkable outside the moralising effects of the group. If the first was a sociological law the second was biological, and followed from Gall and Bastiat’s mapping of the brain and its functions [X:222]. For the isolated individual the psychic preponderance of sentiments over intellective functions, and the ‘dispersive’ tendencies of the former, implied both the absence of, and the need for, a controlling psychic centre. This could only be provided by an ‘external’

\textsuperscript{57} ‘\textit{Il ne peut, en effet, exister aucun phénomène appréciable qui ne soit vraiment humain, non-seulement d’après son examen subjectif, mais aussi dans sa nature objectif; car l’homme résume en lui toutes les lois du monde, comme les anciens l’avaient dignement senti}’ [X:181].

\textsuperscript{58} Besides the outline in \textit{Politique positive} [X:230-8], see the chapter by chapter plan of the two planned volumes of \textit{la Morale} appended to the English edition of \textit{Catéchisme Positiviste} [Comte, 1973].

\textsuperscript{59} The theoretical first part was to be the seventh and culminating part of \textit{l’encyclopédie abstraite}. The second part, on moral education, was reserved for educating the priesthood. The first and second parts of \textit{la Morale} were intended to be volumes three and four of the work \textit{Synthèse subjective}, described in the last pages of \textit{Politique positive} [X:532; X:230-1].
mental force capable of disciplining the lower drives, and rallying the weaker but nobler ones to an orienting Good outside the organism. La science de morale had, of course, an historical dimension as well. The more Humanity developed its forms and powers, the more the social tie was pacific, voluntary, and founded on the socialised preponderance of altruisme; and the more, correspondingly, was the inner harmony of the individual itself perfected. At both levels, in the 'final' state of a fully positivized industrial society a fully equilibrated condition of mental and emotional organisation would have been achieved. In that happy condition, love would provide the motive for activity, while the intellect — highly developed but knowing its proper station — would supply knowledge for its means. The result, indeed, would be a unity of unities. For besides resting on the proper relation between sentiment, intellect and action, each of these general faculties was itself the site of a special co-ordination, respectively termed synthèse, sympathie and synergie.

It is from this vantage-point that the re-systematisation of knowledge projected for the synthèse subjective unfolds. Its intent was to provide a 'universal system of conceptions proper to the

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60 For an account of the interplay between evolution of the 'social organism' and the rise of instinctual sociability see VII:91 et seq.
61 "...moralement envisagée...[1]e sentiment s'y montre plus propre à régler l'intelligence, et même l'activité...Toute les spéculations y tendent à consolider l'amour universel, seul capable de les systématiser, de les consacrer, et de les discipliner. De la même source y dérive également l'institution générale de l'existence pratique, dont les moindres actes acquièrent autant de noblesse que de consistance d'après leur influence affective' [X:525].
62 'Écartant tous les préjugés théoriques, tant scientifique que théologique ou métaphysique, propres à l'initiation humaine, la sagesse finale institue la synergie d'après une synthèse fondée sur la sympathie, en concevant toute activité dirigée par l'amour vers l'harmonie universelle [XII:9]. See also X:162-4.
normal [i.e. perfected] state of Humanity". The sciences, now deemed complete, were to be co-ordinated not only among themselves, but also with the sentiments and actions to which, in the ‘normal state’ of sociocracy and sociolatry, the intellect whose evolution they represented was intrinsically linked. The resulting *encyclopédie*, organised into courses, was to provide the basis for the school curriculum for all 14-21 year olds [X:251]. It would also provide the religion of Humanity with its central body of doctrine — complemented on the methodological side by ‘first philosophy’ and the initial system of *philosophie positive*, and on the side of synergising action by the second part of *la Morale* (on moral education), together with the still more ‘final’ theory of social practice contained in the never written *Système de l’Industrie Positive* [X:246].

To fulfil this office, and with the grandly synthetic addition of *la Morale*, each branch of scientific knowledge was to be systematically summarised so as to show its inner coherence, its integration within the ascending scientific series, and its role in building up an attitude of service and worship towards the Great Being of Humanity. With *l’amour pour principe*, altruistic sentiments would, indeed, be given a triple field of play. First, love of Humanity would orient and valorise the practices which the sciences make possible. More abstractly, that same love animates the will-to-unity underlying the whole synthesising movement itself. This is partly because humanity is served by the practical results; but also because, when freed of *les instincts*

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63 The subtitle given *Synthèse subjective* on the face page of its first and only published volume in 1856.

64 The cult *fondée sur l’amour de l’Humanité...peut seul systématiser à la fois toute nos constructions spéculatives, tant esthétiques que scientifiques, en instituant l’unique lien durable que comportent nos pensées et nos sentiments* [II:352].
grosiers, the impulse to join things together in perfect harmony is precisely what love is\(^\text{65}\). As against the dissociated sécheresse of modern scientific culture, finally, the love which courses through subjectively synthesised knowledge is encouraged to flow towards the object to be known. That is: towards the world we are in, and of which we are intrinsically a part\(^\text{66}\).

Within a positivized self-understanding, the subjective synthesis would thus draw together worship and knowledge, and so replicate the affect-laden register of Christian theology itself. Indeed, by transposing what is to be venerated from the supra-sensible realm of ‘God’ to the phenomenal one apprehended by the various branches of science, the subjective synthesis went one better. The medieval ‘God’, already an abstraction from the nature spirits which preceded it, had become ever more hidden behind, and beyond, the world investigated by secular knowledge\(^\text{67}\). That withdrawal of affect from the realm of the senses was what the subjective synthesis would be able to correct. Radiating with the altruisme, bienveillance, and vénération which it receives from, and directs towards, a positively apprehended Humanité, the subjectively synthesised knowledge would re-invest the exterior human milieu with love. As a result, all the sciences, even those that do not deal with Humanity as such, would be drawn —

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\(^{65}\) It was realising this, Comte underlines, that marked the difference between his second synthesis and his first. ‘Le sentiment s’y montre plus propre à régler l’intelligence, et même l’activité, que ne l’avait annoncé le discours préliminaire de la construction religieuse ainsi terminée. Toutes les spéculations y tendent à consolider l’amour universel. Seul capable de les systématiser, de les consacrer, et de les discipliner...Ainsi devenu le régulateur général, non-seulement du culte, mais aussi du dogme et du régime, l’instinct sympathique à pleinement constaté son aptitude synthétique.

\(^{66}\) In the subjective synthesis, ‘l’idée relative du monde’ would substitute for ‘l’idée absolu de univers’ [VII:438]. In amplifying, he refers to ‘notre monde proprement dit, cest-à-dire l’ensemble des existences inorganiques qui intéressent l’Humanité’ [VII:457].

\(^{67}\) Comte often comments that Paul, regarded as Christianity real founder, ‘opposed grace to nature’. See for example, IX:429.
through a mechanism which replicated the effects of a much more archaic *félichisme* — into the spirit of the Positivist cult [VII: 438-442].

Comte’s treatise on mathematics — *Système de Logique Positive ou Traité de Philosophie Mathematique* — exemplified this makeover, as well as setting it on its way. Taking his lead from Descartes and Leibnitz68, it displays *la science fondamentale* as covering the most general attributes of phenomenal existence: number (*calcul*), extension (*géométrie*) and motion (*méchanique*) [XII:70]. So conceived, mathematical laws are rooted in comprehension of *le dehors*. At the same time, however, their mental co-ordination was a subjective matter. The logic in which mathematical philosophy expressed itself, therefore, had to be shaped with both material and psycho-social realities in mind. Hence, not only is the progression from number to spatiality to movement narrated as the general logic of the complexification of substance. This abstract cosmogenesis also serves as a mirror in which to reflect the human progression, through higher and higher states of order, towards the self-perfection of its own ‘total equilibrium’. From the side of that same equilibrated subject, meanwhile, the harmonious and altruistic mode of thinking required to grasp mathematics in terms of this religiously convenient teleology is self-reflected, with reference to sociology and the *science de la morale*, as subjectively necessary for that equilibrium itself69. Put in such terms, Comte’s philosophy of

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68 These two were considered to have already laid the basis for a positive philosophy of mathematics through establishing a general geometry translatable into algebraic terms: ‘Après que le principe cartésien eut institué la géométrie générale, la conception leibnitzienne devint bientôt nécessaire pour la constituer’ [XII:417].

69 Hence the need for a subjective law that, via the principle of inertia, subordinates the laws of dynamics to those of statics. As the subjective basis for the theory of general mechanics, the principle is propounded that: *Graduellement neutralisés sous les conditions convenables de direction et intensité, les divers moteurs peuvent se combiner*
mathematics can be described as an attempt to combine, at the most abstract level of thought and most sublimated level of feeling, a *cognitively* driven logic of the object with a *passionally* driven logic of the subject. Hence its suitability to furnish the subjective synthesis with a basis of what he called ‘Positive Logic’. This first volume, with its subtitle’s promise to furnish the ‘normal’ principles of human understanding, would provide the mental principles for all the rest.

The dual status of *logique positive* — which both analyses and exemplifies, for the active intelligence, the mental harmony that will/should ‘normally’ prevail — is evident enough. It is offered, in the usual Comteian manner, as a scientific prescription. More striking is the way in which this harmony was conceived through a reflection on the relation between feeling, thought and language, a model then applied to the ordering of mathematics itself. Much as in Romantic language philosophy\(^7\), Comte was troubled by the abstract quality of (conventional) signs\(^8\). In contrast with the direct (and musical) affectivity developed under the aegis of *fétichisme* and the (poetic) language of *images* developed by polytheism, the rise of signs (and

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\(^7\) Comte’s theory of language combined a biological understanding of natural language with a Rousseau-esque picture of how that natural language evolved, in the human case, out of the sonic and mimetic expression of affective body-states. Hence the close relation between Comte’s conception of the aesthetic arts, and the need to re-emphasise and re-integrate the into the positive state. ‘*Nos facultés quelconques d’expression sont toujours d’origine esthétique....La biologie explique aisément cette loi, en rappelant que la réaction musculaire, vocale ou mimique, d’où résulte l’expression, est surtout commandée par la partie affective du cerveau*’ [VII:290].

\(^8\) Comte’s ‘*Théorie positive du langage humain*’ is outlined in chapter 40 of *Politique positive*. After distinguishing between ‘involuntary’ (gestural) and ‘voluntary’ or ‘artificial’ signs (*toujours de véritables institutions sociales* [VIII:221], Comte there
'prosaic' discursivity), attributed to the monotheistic phase, permitted ideas to be directly attached to signifiers without the intermediary of sentiments [VIII:233-4]. This enabled thought to become analytic and deductive, and was indispensable both for the rise of positive science and for the work of intellectual synthesis, which monotheism was the first to undertake. As valuable as this was, however, the 'healthy' and 'normal' integration of the human soul required that the head not be severed from the heart. It required, therefore, both a recovery of the primal language of sentiments (the effusions which always accompanied Positivist prayers [X:114-5]), and a linguistic way to bridge the gap between such expressive immediacy and the affectless employment of signes. Hence the great mental — and religious — importance of images, a category which we can take to include the entire class of iconic and indexical signs. The crucial intermediary role of these, and more generally of the poetic and visual arts, flowed from their dual role in psychic life. Images are the stuff both of dreams and fantasy, and of storable experience from le dehors. Instantly apprehensible through the way they mime inner and outer reality, they were thus much better suited than purely abstract or verbal signs to invest a charge of feeling in the meanings they convey. They were also sufficiently objectifiable and repeatable that they could become conventionally coded with associated ideas. Images, defines the sign as 'la liaison constante entre une influence objective et une impression subjective' [VIII:222].

72 'Ni le 'esprit ni le coeur de peuvent développer une paisible activité sans ce concours continu, instinctif ou systématique, entre la logique du sentiment et celle de la raison' [VII:450].

73 Vigorously defending himself against the charge that Positivism is 'anti-aesthetic' — which was a vice only of the sciences during their dispersively overspecialized period — Comte notes in Politique positive: 'Parvenu jusqu'aux spéculations sociales, qui constituent sa vraie destination finale, sa réalité caractéristique l'oblige d'embrasser les conceptions esthétiques, commes les considérations affectives, afin de représenter le véritable ensemble des phénomènes humains, même individuels, et surtout collectifs' [VII:275].
then, were apt for attaching sentiments to signs and vice versa. 'Just as the image, recalled under the sign, will strengthen thought through the awakening of sentiment, so, conversely, an outpouring of sentiment will give rise to the image in order to clarify the notion'\(^{74}\).

In the 'final' form of language, wherein 'signs properly speaking would combine with the power of sentiments helped by images' [XII:29], all three modes would be harmonised. From that vantage point, Positive Logic would adduce the principles of mental unity, both internally, and with regard to the 'healthy' interchange between 'movement and sensation', of l'image intérieure and l'image extérieure. Overall, then, it would comprise a kind of practical logic of logic, centred on language\(^{75}\), whose aim would be to theorise 'the normal concurrence of feelings, images and signs, in order to inspire us with the conceptions suited to our moral, intellectual and physical needs'\(^{76}\).

The specific problem for mathematics concerned the establishment of happy and integrated relations between sub-regions of its own field. In its presently disorganised condition, Comte argued, order was continually threatened by their rival imperializing claims, especially by those of the algèbristes [VII:471]. Yet, correctly understood, the historical divisions within the field

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\(^{74}\) 'Tantôt l'image, rappelée sous le signe, fortifiera las pensée par le reveil du sentiment, tantôt, au contraire, l'effusion suscitera l'image pour éclaircir la notion' [VII:451-2].

\(^{75}\) The privileged role of language in Comte's overall synthesis is that it provides the subjective condition for the human organism's linkage to le dehors. For a detailed analysis of Comte's theory of language, and its relation to Logique positive see Marietti, 1982: 210-251. Marietti is particularly concerned to show the points of contact between Comte's theory of language and Freud's unconscious, Nietzsche's understanding of art, and Saussure's notion of the sign.
itself provided the answer. The key bridging role (which it must modestly learn to see itself as having) was played by geometry [XII:72]. Its capacity, since Descartes, to spatialize even non-spatial dimensions of material existence facilitated the requisite interplay between images (with their attendant sentiments) and signs (with their abstract meanings). It did so, moreover, not only in geometry proper, where physical extension provided a material point of reference, but everywhere a metaphors of quantifiable space could be employed. The very rise of geometry in this role made mathematics a first-order paradigm for the three logics model of mental order, provided only that it be combined, subjectively, with that world of sentiment which les images opened the mind to receive77.

Hence, indeed, a further aspect of Positive Logic’s foundational role in inducting trainee priests into Positivist doctrine. Besides processing mental materials in a form most able to connect ideas with feelings, geometry provided an image of the reality mathematics deals with which enabled even this most abstract of object-fields to receive and focus our highest affects. In so doing, it was able to awaken a form of fétilchisme that would strengthen Positive religion itself. The subjectively synthesised philosophy of mathematics enjoins us, in effect, to make a deliberately ‘fictive’ move. We are to imagine as the source of everything, as that which makes

76 ‘...le concours normale des sentiments, des images, et des signes, pour nous inspirer les conceptions qui conviennent à nos besoins, moraux, intellectuels, et physiques’ [XII:27].
77 The subjective appreciation of mathematics would convert all of its signifying materials into images, including number. Hence the symbolic schema in which, for example, 1 stood for l’harmonie sympathique, 2 for l’ordre synthétique, 3 for le progrès synergique [XII:108], and 7 for two of the third plus one of the first. This symbolic logic of numbers provided the organizing frame for all his writing and planned cours, including the organization of paragraphs.
both thought and reality possible, the blank ground against which geometrical figures, and whatever they represent, are pictorially inscribed: L’Espace 78.

L’Espace differs from the object of primitive fetishism in not being a material thing, but a way to represent ‘la siège’ of phenomenal reality as such. It is the subjective representation of that which makes possible both externally and internally originating impressions 79. A further difference is that L’Espace is not imagined to have the full attributes of life. It fictively represents only sentiment – l’amour universel – without having the capacity for willed action or thought 80. The attitude towards L’Espace which Positive Logic proposes is fétichiste, nonetheless, by virtue of the way in which it lives out a directly emotive and identificatory relation between subject and object; a relation that is enjoined not only religiously, but cognitively in that it allows us to fill the inevitable gap between the concrete plenitude of phenomenal reality, and our capacity to apply even a complete body of abstract science to the complete and previsionary understanding of any specific case [XII:7].

78 Comte realized of course that the ‘space’ of Cartesian geometry and Newtonian astrophysics had a long history, antecedent indeed to all science. In his definition of l’espace (here lower case, and unfetishized) in Politique positive, he notes: ‘on n’y doit voir qu’un fluide universel, spontanément imaginé, dans l’enfance du génie humain, pour permettre de concevoir l’étendu, et même le mouvement, indépendamment des corps réels. Faute d’un tel milieu, des signes sans images deviendraient notre unique ressource envers l’essor abstrait des spéculations géométriques et mécaniques extension’ [X:53–4]. 79 In general, Comte insists that positive religion is distinguished from previous forms of religion in apprehending consciously the imaginary register of its sacred or divine categories. ‘La synthèse relative peut seule consolider et développer l’essor directe de la ie subjective, en y dissipant tout scrupule et toute illusion. Un régime où nous devons habituellement vivre davantage avec nos ancêtres et nos descendants qu’avec nos contemporains exige que la religion soit radicalement empreinte de subjectivité’ [XII:52] 80 ‘Il faut donc conserver à l’Espace l’existence purement passive, où le type humain se trouve réduit au sentiment, dont la suprématie constitue ainsi le seul attribut pleinement universel’ [XII:51].
Overall, indeed, there was a greater degree of continuity between fetishism and positivism than between the latter and more ‘mature’ forms of theoligism [VIII:84-5]. Primitive fetishism confounded the orders of the living and the dead; but at least it did not retire agency from the phenomenal world entirely, to the greater glory of God. In the context of overcoming the intellectual crisis perpetuated by the persistence of metaphysics, Comte's proposed fetishization of space also had a strategic significance. As he was at pains to point out, it pre-empted the older, and anarchic, ‘consecration of chaos’ [XII:51]. Unlike Chaos, the image of l’Espace projects into the originary process of becoming not strife and the dissolution of all order, but l’amour universel, figured as the condition (pre-formal and pre-conceptual) for order of any kind.\textsuperscript{81}

Comte intended that a similar fetishism would envelop the middle portions of the synthèse subjective devoted to the physical sciences. Here, though, the fetish-object -- la Terre -- was one stage less abstract. To the Earth we could impute not just sentiments, but activity; and we could imagine it as being driven along a path of self-perfection by something akin to a good will [XII:50]. By worshipping, venerating and serving the planet as the material source, support, and abode for human life, biology, chemistry, physics and even astronomy, would be inhibited from wandering into ‘puerile and incoherent research’ [VII:456]. With such an

\textsuperscript{81} In effect, by this means we are emotionally drawn to submit voluntarily to the most general laws of existence, la suprême fatalité, because these are imagined to be identical with both the source and destination of our highest impulses. Fate, love, and order are condensed together in the symbol of Space. ‘Faute d’un tel joug, le problème humain resterait insoluble, parce que l’altruisme ne pourrait jamais surmonter l’égoïsme.'
orientation, a practical eye would be kept turned toward what it was useful to know about our terrestrial milieu; not just to satisfy material needs, but the better to perfect ourselves as its noblest product.

Hence, to complete the model, the Comteian trinity which fills out the sociolatric godhead: l'Espace as le Grand-Milieu; la Terre as le Grand-Fetiche; and both sanctified as the cosmic foundation from which arises l'Humanité as le Grand-Etre [XII:51-2]. It is precisely for worshippers being inducted through these holy, because Humanistically embraced, aspects of the real, that the seven sciences of the subjective synthesis are arranged in their ascending scale [XII:63-4]. At the base, mathematics cognitively inducts us into to the worship of Space. In the middle ranges, astronomy, physics, chemistry and non-human biology prepare worship of the Earth. At the top, human biology, sociology and la morale comprise la science sacrée. Here, finally, le Grand-Etre, through its scientifically educated agents, comes worshipfully and caringly, to study itself.42

The Logic of the System

From Philosophie Positive and Politique positive to the final system of systems inaugurated by the Synthèse subjective, we see the same figure continually repeated: a politically and religiously engaged totalization of scientifically transformed knowledge which seeks to ground,

Assisté par la suprême fatalité, l'amour universel peut habituellement obtenir que la personnalité se surbordonne à la sociabilité' [XII:16].
scientifically, its own engagement. That such grounding could not be apodictic, or absolute, was acknowledged from the start. The system could only be systematised on a 'relative' basis, i.e. from the self-centred and self-interested side of a humanity which had recognised that its self-placement at the centre of things was, in an infinite Newtonian universe, a pure, if humanly necessary, fiction.

Such a vantage-point, by being rooted in a pervasive sense of each human being’s belonging in, and dependency on, the collective being of society and, ultimately, of Humanity as a whole, was less arbitrary than that of the isolated individual. But only relatively. Between the ‘ought’ of (Humanist) commitment and the ‘is’ of (Positivist) reason there is always a gap which is only closeable by an act of theoretical or emotional force. The positive philosophy of science could only be systematised through the invention of sociology. The objective (but non-absolute) unification of the sciences required a subjective synthesis of the knowing mind. The whole system required and pre-supposed re-socialisation through educational reform and the establishment of a religion. In face of this, Comte’s continual drive nevertheless to complete his totalization in a final synthesis that would fully ground his faith in Humanity in the ‘positive’ truths it led us to discover betrayed, not so much bad faith, as the personal and political anxiety that was pushing him to resolve the contemporary ‘crisis’. Whatever the motive, the results were bound to remain unsatisfactory. Whether in the medium of an intellectualist sociologism, a religio-sentimental sociologism, or a bio-sociologically composite science de morale, a leap

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[82] Tant que le culte positif s'adresse directement à l'Humanité, nul artifice n'y devient obligé, puisque le sujet y coïncide avec l'objet, d'après une saine appréciation de l'homme comme serviteur actuel et futur organe du Grand-Être’ [XII:18].
of faith -- finally to a mode of consciousness conceived as 'normal', and itself ramified by a self-instituted religious pressure to conform -- was always needed to make the system cohere.

Against this background, the history of Comte's systematising efforts from the *Philosophie positive* and *Politique positive* to the *Synthese subjective* and the further systems of *la Morale* and *L'industrie* which he never lived to begin, can be read as the history of his system's attempted closures. I have noted several dubious manoeuvres through which these attempts were made: the conflation of the abstract and the concrete, the collapse of 'the social' into 'society', the bio-medical model of the latter, according evidential status to a predictive teleology, proof-by-future-actualisation and, buttressed by the hyper-organised practices of a new religion, the 'normal preponderance' of altruism and Humanist faith. The last two, by frankly placing the issue of validation outside the realm of scientific reason, are less objectionable, perhaps, than the others. But this did not prevent Comte from continuing his ultimately futile effort of closure by referring, in the one case, practice, and in the other, faith, to a criterion of normality given by his crowning 'moral science'. The same problem of grounding the ungroundable is thus reproduced at every stage of his unfolding totalization, and in an ever more elaborate fashion. Its consequence is legible in the Comteian trail of false or dogmatic endings which, at every crucial stage in the argument, stop further reflection -- be it sociological, religious or metatheoretical -- by occlusion or decree.

There is, though, a more sympathetic way to understand Comte's dilemma. We can look at it, so to speak, in reverse. Not, that is, as a scientific, or meta-scientific, discourse whose necessary open-endedness is thwarted and foreclosed by the specious effort to demonstrate
what is already fervently believed; but as a *fides quaerens intellectum*, i.e. as a faith *seeking* (the term to be emphasised) an understanding. To do so admittedly breaks with Comte's own formula from the *Imitatio* about the need to *subordinate* reason to faith. It reaches instead to the more supple and dialectical formulation of the faith-reason problem given in a less brittle and defensive stage of medieval theology. This is the one proposed in the Boethian slogan of *fidem si poteris rationemque conjunge* [join faith, if you can, and reason] which was advanced by Anselm and others in the moderate (i.e. anti-Abelardian) scholastic party of the late twelfth century.\(^3\) To be sure, went the argument, faith is primary. *Credo ut intelligo* — I believe in order to understand. At the same time, my efforts at understanding are guided by the desire, at the end of the journey, to have rationally illuminated the mysteries of faith. In this two-way relationship of faith to reason there is always a tension. I have faith that reason can grasp the grounds of what I believe, just as I also believe that believing will illuminate the understanding so that the world as it really is can be lucidly grasped. But all that faith — in reason, in the intelligibility of the world, in God, in faith itself — is needed precisely because the unity of knowledge and self-knowledge escapes me. It gives the intellectual project the strength to proceed; and to do so without the stress of having to imagine that the faith-reason gap is already closed, or that the religious *mysterium* is yet — or could ever be — fully cleared up.\(^4\)

\(^3\) Boethius' principle was enunciated as the last line of a letter from him to Pope John I. For an account of this, and its subsequent influence on scholastic theology, see Pieper, 1964: 37-38.

\(^4\) Or, as Anselm put it: 'I do not attempt, O Lord, to penetrate Thy profundity, for I deem my intellect in no way sufficient thereto, but I desire to understand in some degree Thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand, in order that I may believe; but I believe, that I may understand. For I believe this too, that unless I believed, I could not understand' [cited in Coppleston, 1962: 177].
To re-frame Comte’s project in such terms would make it possible to re-open, from within, issues surrounding his intellectum that are dogmatically suppressed; and to do this, not by bracketing his faith as — of course, and despite his best efforts — undemonstrable, but by making it focal, and bracketing instead the pretensions to scientificity that achieve the false, and self-deluded, closures of his system. The point of such a procedure — the opposite approach to that taken by those like Simpson [1969] who primarily stress Comte’s role in the ancestry of academic sociology — is not only, it should be made clear, to save Comte, as a religious thinker, from a reduced, i.e. non-religious, interpretation. Still less is it to save Comteian religion itself from criticism. To the contrary, by taking his faith seriously as the basis, impulse and horizon of his thought, it can be subjected to critical scrutiny in its own terms, together with his related construction of the modern ‘religious crisis’, and its Positive resolution.

85 It should be emphasized that Comte’s foi démontrable was not une foi démontrée, though the assumption was that it always could be demonstrated. This corresponded ‘à la maturité de la raison humaine, destinée à développer les conséquences sans délibérer sur les principes’ [X:267]. Comte’s formula opens the intellectum of his faith only immediately to close it, hiding the faith sustaining its demonstrability in the trope of a morally pragmatist aversion to idle speculation.
CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGION AND THE CRISIS OF INDUSTRIALISM

As his every page proclaims, Comte's effort to re-synthesize contemporary thought by (simultaneously) securing the moorings for his Humanist faith was practically intended. It was driven, indeed, by a pressing sense of urgency -- an urgency proportional to the scale and gravity of the historical problem he took himself to have been called upon to address. With monarchical absolutism swept away, the conditions existed for a decisive advance. But for two centuries the old order had shielded society from a growing spiritual anarchy which threatened 'modern societies' with 'universal dismemberment'. Unless the requisite new fundamental consensus could be established, the 'great moral and political crisis of present societies' [I:40] would be insurmountable.

Of course, for the correct solution to be prescribed, and for the Positivist system to legitimize itself as intrinsic to that solution, it was necessary that the problem itself be properly diagnosed. And properly, in this context, could only mean in accord with the findings of the human-social science that completed the positivizing of knowledge. It is not hard to show, at the least, that this 'science' is prematurely deployed. Not just its data, but its categorical framework, produce an all-too-convenient fit between what its author already experienced as the problem, and believed to be the solution. Nevertheless Comte's analysis of (early)
industrialism's travails need not be dismissed out of hand. To say that he misperceived the social, or religious, problems posed by the rise of industrial capitalism, is not necessarily to say that his anxieties, and hopes, lack any historical reference. The hundred years of industrialism in Europe after Comte were even more turbulent, sanguinary, and, at times, disintegrative than the century before. What reasonable analysis of 'modern Western society' could deny that its history of prodigious techno-economic development has been punctuated by an unresolved (perhaps unresolvable) stability problem? Or that an element of this instability has been cultural, or even, in a diffuse sense, 'religious' -- sometimes, as in the totalitarian catastrophes of the 1930s and 40s, with dramatically regressive results?

The form of Comte's analysis also deserves attention. At first sight, its scientistic insistence exhibits the one-sidedness of that objectivizing rationalism which Hegel criticized in the (non-protestant) enlightenment. Without recourse to any phenomenology or philosophy of the subject, Comte certainly had no developed metalanguage with which to reflect on the structure

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1 'On ne peut douter que cette longue dictature, royale ou nobiliaire, ne fût à la fois la suite inévitable et l'indispensable correctif de la désorganisation spirituelle, qui, sans cela, eût certaine poussé au démembrement universel des sociétés modernes' [V:485]

2 At a time of globally triumphant capitalism when conventional wisdom (again) has it that history is over [Fukuyama, 1992], or that the fundamental sources of socio-economic and socio-cultural conflict have been structurally pacified (on the left, Baudrillard is the postmodern Marcuse), or that henceforth the explosive issues are now largely exterior to Western societies in the form of inter-civilizational conflicts [Huntington, 1996], it may be salutary to recall the prevalence of 'convergence theory', structural-functionalism, and 'end of ideology' thinking in the late fifties and early sixties.

3 Such scientism, for Hegel, was exhibited by a form of knowledge that restricted itself to a merely external 'understanding': 'Instead of making its way into the inherent content of the matter at hand, understanding always takes a survey of the whole, assumes a position above the particular existence where it is speaking, i.e. it does not see it at all' [Hegel, 1967: 112].
of a reflexive rationality. Indeed, he was averse to the very notion of reflexivity not only because of his phenomenalism — thought could only be known through its exterior manifestations in the body or in its social objectifications — but also in principle. ‘The thinking individual cannot divide himself in two, the one reasoning while the other watches him do so’. Which meant that if the self could come to know itself at all, it certainly could not do so directly, in the form of observation intérieure.

Yet a reflexive rationality is just what he was trying to develop — not to be sure through abandoning objectivism, but by pushing it all the way. The arrival of sociological thinking, particularly of a holistic and historicizing kind, in any case forced the issue. To take full account of social mediations expands and complicates any project of self-understanding. It

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4 This is not to deny that Comte has a host of classificatory categories, from the unicities of amour, sympathie, synthèse, etc, the binaries of l'ensemble/individu, théorie/pratique, dedans/dehors, intérieur/exterieu, subjective/objective, etc, to the trinaries of sentir/agir/penser, sentiments/images/signes etc. His conceptualization is indeed conceptually framed. But unlike Kant (from whom he borrows subject/object [XIApp:24-5]) and Hegel (whom he scarcely mentions) Comte has no terminology with which to reflect on the structure of reflection as such. Whether, beyond his explicit system of categories, there is an implicit meta-theory that would be able to meet German idealist philosophy on its own ground is a different issue. Pickering’s archival research turned up references to lost translations of extracts from Kant, Fichte and Hegel that Comte apparently kept in his private files. This contradicts his claim never to have read any of them ‘in any language’ [Pickering, 1993:278]. It also suggests, if not a disavowed influence, at least a competitive awareness that his was not the only serious contemporary attempt to develop a ‘subjective synthesis’. A trace of acknowledgment is perhaps to be found in the reference to the ‘superior spirit’ of German philosophy at the end of the 57th leçon of the Cours. This spirit, ‘malgré son caractère essentiellement métaphysique, entretient en Allemagne une précieuse disposition aux méditations générales, maintenant propre à y compenser plus qu'ailleurs les tendances dispersives de nos spécialités scientifiques.

5 ‘L'individu pensant ne saurait se partager en deux, dont l'un raisonnerait, tandis que l'autre regarderait raisonner. L'organe observé et l'organe observateur étant, dans ce cas, identiques, comment l'observation pourrait-elle avoir lieu?’ [1:29-30].
does so not only by relating the subject of knowledge to his/her socio-historical circumstances, themselves understood as socio-historically conditioned, but by inviting reflection on this viewpoint as itself determined by a form of understanding which needs to be socio-historically explained. Comte’s analysis of his historical situation -- wherein not only the Positivist faith and synthesis, but his own Positivist intervention, were part of the Positivist demonstrandum -- was indeed not just reflexive, but multidimensionally so.

One sociological feature of this complexity should be underlined straight away. This is Comte’s recognition that, by virtue of the thinking, feeling and acting, subject’s inherence in the object of sociological knowledge, that object has, and objectively speaking, a dual character. To grasp the social as belonging to the order of the dehors is to grasp it as having an irreducibly subjective dimension. In the case of la société — as too in the case of the individual within it — le dehors includes le dedans. That same duality, moreover, of inside and outside, of subjective and objective, applies to that element of social reality which is sociology itself. Whence the rationale for combining an objective investigation of the social with a subjective engagement with it, which the Politique positive exemplifies as the inauguration of a more general movement to rethink positivized knowledge from the perspective of its ‘subjective synthesis’.

If we follow Comte in taking the intrusion of the subjective into the objective within the social domain to be one of its defining characteristics, we may well, and for precisely that reason, deny his claim that ‘the collective development of the human species’ can become, in theory or
in practice, the object of a science at all. But the idea, in some form or another, of developing a perceptive on the social, and of our place in it, which combines an understanding ‘from within’ with one ‘from without’, remains fundamental. It points indeed to what might be a more appropriate way to conceive a (humanly useful) sociology: not as a ‘positive science’, but as a critically reflexive discourse that at every level combines, and oscillates between, the viewpoints of subject and object, in all the ways in which this dichotomy might be conceived.

A totalizing reflexivity, however, such as Comte attempted, runs risks. One arises from the temptation of socio-historical reduction. This would be to think of all thinking as no more than expressing a particular constellation of social and historical circumstances. Late enlightenment tendencies in that direction were denounced by Husserl not only for their relativization of all validity claims, but also as not allowing for the *epoche* which theory in the Greek sense requires [1965:122 *et seq*]. Nietzsche’s critique of the ‘mania for history’ [U&AH] and Benjamin’s [1969:261-3] critique of Social-Democracy’s ‘historicism’ made similar points with regard to action. If the first danger runs along the track of relativism, solipsism, and submergence in the historical flow, a second danger is of pretending to integrate the ‘within’ of the social with its ‘without’, but effecting a false closure which actually structures itself around an experience and a wish. Here, both the subjective and objective sides of analysis become

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6 'There is ...no theory of society, even that of the sociologists concerned with general laws, that does not contain political motivations, and the truth of these must be decided not in supposedly neutral reflection but in personal thought and action, in concrete historical activity' [Horkheimer, 1972: 222]. Comte, we may note, would disagree with this statement in only one small respect: for him, the truth of the political motivation underlying his sociology could itself be scientifically validated — though (the endless circle) only from the perspective of a science which had already adopted the ‘social point of view’. Horkheimer’s ‘critical theory’ is more straightforward in acknowledging the non-apodictic nature of its founding socio-political assumptions.
absorbed into a vast rationalization, and the attempt at reflexive socio-historical understanding relapses, misrecognised, into ideologizing pure and simple. This danger, too, was high with Comte -- both because of his too close analogy between la société and the individual subject, and because, in reflecting on the foundations of his thinking, he made little distinction between himself and his publicly assumed role. He imagined himself to be just a functionary of Humanity whom accidents of birth and biography had uniquely fitted for an already prepared world-historical task. As with Hegel, and given what his mind had worked over, and become, the ratiocination of finite being could thus take itself to have an immediately universal significance.

The self-confirming character of an ideological circle may certainly be suspected in the relation Comte draws between his faith, his religious program, and his sociological diagnosis. Ostensibly, the conceptual and evidential link between his analysis of the 'current crisis' and his proposed solution, is provided, independently of both, by an inductive-predictive science. However, the organic-functional categories of the latter, which naturalize Comte's own subjectivity as paradigmatic of what was besetting (and could save) industrial society at large, themselves arise through what is given to us as a merely analogical intuition -- that the social crisis is like an individual one, and that both are to be understood as the désorganisation of an

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7 This is evident throughout the Préface personelle to Politique positive. Even the isolation and lack of support he suffered in the 1830s and 1840s is given a world-historical significance. 'Pendant ma longue évolution, je n'ai jamais obtenu le moindre assistance réelle d'aucune personne indifférente à mes principes. Ce phénomène, sans exemple dans toute l'histoire humaine, me semble propre à mieux caractériser la parfaite cohérence qui distingue le positivisme des diverses synthèses antérieures' [VI:24].
organism." Thus his understanding of that crisis, and his religious solution to it, endlessly reflect one another, blinding him to what is contingent -- and unconsciously projective-- in the subjectivity in play. In which case, and if the pain came first, could we not say that Comte's solution, and the entire philanthropic will-to-unity it incarnates, is to be read symptomatically, even as a reactive response?

To entertain this possibility would seem to negate Comte's analysis before we have begun. Such a flaw would not be fatal, though, to its interest-value. Indeed, it carries an interpretative suggestion. If the Positivist program simply presents in reverse image what Comte already apprehended as a crisis (his own, generalized as our own), then examining his sociological account of that crisis would provide an illuminating point of entry for critically exploring his faith. What, then, was le crise moderne? How had it arisen? And what, as signalled by Comte's understanding of it as, ultimately, 'religious', did he take to be socially and humanly at stake?

The troubles of industrialism

Comte was born, four years after Thermidor, into a petit-bourgeois provincial, Catholic royalist family, against which, in all respects, he rebelled. He continued to be a rebel at the

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8 For Comte's discussion of la manie as an example of Broussais's principle that l'état pathologique must always be considered as 'un simple prolongement des phénomènes de l'état normal, exagérés ou atténués au delà leurs limites ordinaires de variations', see III:658-9.
9 He was already a Republican anti-clerical in lycée. As a student, besides his public activism, he adopted Auguste instead of Isidore as his first name, refused his family-
elite Ecole Polytechnique, a hot-bed of Republicanism, where, in 1815-16, he was prominently involved in protests against an "insolent" teacher which led to the Restoration authorities de-licensing the school. Comte's refusal of the school's offer (to take the higher civil service exams in return for good behaviour [Pickering, 1993:40]) prevented resumption of his formal studies, and career prospects, when it re-opened a year later. This began a pattern of self-righteous quarrelsomeness which was always to block his never abandoned ambitions for an academic career in that same institution. The product of a dysfunctional family, and chronically incapable of sustaining intimate friendships, the same self-defeating-dynamic marked his private existence. It no doubt exacerbated the psycho-somatic ailments that were to afflict him all his approved and supported career future as an engineer, and defiantly married the socially unsuitable Caroline Massin (her marriage enabled her to get off the local prefecture's health registry of prostitutes). For a detailed account of Comte's family in Montpellier, and his relations with them, see Gouhier, [1933:32-61]

10 Pickering [1993, 29-30] attributes a somewhat more leading role to Comte in these events than Gouhier [1933:116-122]. Comte was though one of the fifteen in his class to be formally expelled. The agitation against the instructor, a répétiteur named Lefebvre, was a pretext for the closing of the school by the Restoration Government. It was an open centre of support for Republicanism.

11 The family drama would be worthy of a full scale study. It seems that Comte, the eldest son, despised his father, disliked, but was emotionally dependent on his religiously devout mother (older by 12 years and effectively head of the household), and had quarrelsome relations with Alix, his devotedly self-sacrificing stay-at-home sister, whom he blamed for their bother Adolphe's death (in Martinique at the age of 19, pursued by scandal and bad debts). All nursed chronic ill health, and all (except the devotedly indolent Adolphe, but perhaps, in this, him too), oriented their lives voluntarily assumed through forms of faith and duty that involved personal sacrifice. Under the circumstances, Comte's later account of himself as not, until Clotilde, being capable of love is unsurprising -- nor his idealization of an impersonal amour désintéressé. See [Pickering:9-17], and [Gouhier,1993:50-61]. Comte's twenty year relationship with Caroline Massin, by all accounts a free spirit with a mind of her own, was always beset with the problem that he thought he was 'saving' her, and that this mission, and its social cost to him, were unappreciated.
life. But through it all the precocious and rebellious first son thirsted to be an intellectual and moral leader — the fondateur no less, of the post-Absolutist, post-Christian world struggling chaotically to be born.

It was from this crucible of contradictions Comte's life-project took shape. Trained in mathematics and biology, and self-taught in everything else, the remoteness of a highly specialized scientific culture from the burning political and social issues of his day repelled him; yet he found in its rising intellectual prestige a potential authority substitute for the older one that he, in microcosm, and France as a whole had overthrown. Here might the basis for a healing regeneration, and a post-Revolutionary new order.

After abandoning the radical Republicanism of his student days for this more reconstructionist perspective, what became Comte’s firm understanding of the historical

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12 Gouhier [1933:60] observes: 'Dès 1820, Comte se plaint de son estomac et c'est d'une tumeur de l'estomac qui l'enlèvera en 1857. Ses crises nerveuses coïncident toujours avec les troubles digestifs et l'unité de sa vie physiologique paraît aussi remarquable que l'unité de sa vie intellectuelle.'

13 For one term at l'École de Médecine in his home town of Montpellier, following his expulsion from L'École Polytechnique [Pickering:33]. The school was 'vitalist' in outlook. For Comte's relation to the Montpellier scool of biology, see Canguilhem 237-261.

14 Comte’s notion that the scientific intelligentsia could be forged into a new pouvoir politique -- provided that it complete its internal differentiation through the establishment of a division of social physics on the one hand, and a corps of philosophical generalists on the other, was already well-established before he began work on the Cours in 1826. See his essays 'Considérations philosophiques sur les sciences et les savants' (1825), and Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituelle (1826), appended to the last volume of Politique Positive [X:137-215].

15 For Comte’s political perspective during his lycée and École Polytechnique period, see Pickering [20-30]. His early guides were Rousseau and Voltaire, and he then fixed on Danton and the Convention as more contemporary reference points for his allegiances.
situation crystallized firmly in his early to mid twenties, during his years with Saint-Simon. Drawing at once from Condorcet's progressivist vision in *Esquisse d'un tableau générale de la croissance de connaissance humaine*, and from de Maistre's denunciatory critique of the negative forces unleashed in the Revolution, it was first sketched out in the *opuscule fondamentale* of 1822 [Xapp:47-81] , and elaborated in the last two volumes of *Philosophie positive*. While it was not until after 1847 that Comte's account of the contemporary 'crisis' acquired a fully religious cast, in basic outline it remained the same throughout his career.

Comte's point of departure was the ongoing and extreme political turbulence of post-Revolutionary France, with its dizzying parade of republican, monarchical, and dictatorial regimes, and its intense antagonisms between partisans of restoration and of the ideals of 1789. For Comte, what all this turmoil manifested, at root, was the failure of a newly emergent form of civilization to establish, as yet, the requisite social framework for its stable development, particularly in the ideational sphere. This was exacerbated by the way in which the process of dissolving the old form of social organization to make way for the new had autonomized.

Thus the crisis had a two-fold character:

16 Comte signals his realignment by defining the strategic problem as the 'popular' camp's need to move forward from a purely critical mode of thinking. 'Cette doctrine, purement critique... a eu le plus grande importance pour seconder la marche naturelle de la civilisation, tant que l'action principale a dû être la lutte contre l'ancien système; ainsi conçue comme devant présider à la réorganisation sociale, elle est d'une insuffisance absolue. Elle place forcément la société dans un état d'anarchie constituée, au temporel et au spirituel [Xapp:54]. And more pointedly: 'La seule manière de mettre un terme à cette orageuse situation...c'est de déterminer les nations civilisées à quitter la direction critique pour la direction organique, à porter tous leurs efforts vers la formation du nouveau système social' [Xapp:48].
Two, naturally different, movements disturb contemporary society: one is a movement of disorganization, the other one of re-organization. By the first, society is led towards a deep moral and political anarchy which seems to threaten its incipient and inevitable dissolution. By the second it is led to the definitive social state of the species, the most suited to its nature... The great crisis undergone by the most civilized nations consists in the co-existence of these two opposed tendencies17.

Of course, the conflicts involved particular social interests. In the Bourbon restoration, and in the continual intrigue after it was again overthrown, defeated remnants of the Court, the Church, and the aristocracy sought a restoration of their own wealth and power. Champions of liberty and reason, for their part, were drawn from rising social forces which had benefited from destroying the old regime18. But foregrounded, for Comte, was the conflict over ideas in which the conflict between classes, to use Marx’s words, was ‘lived and fought out’ [Feuer:44]. Here, over the whole range of issues from property law and state form, to

17 ‘...deux mouvements de nature différente agitent aujourd'hui la société: l'un de désorganisation, l'autre de réorganisation. Par le premier...elle est entraînée vers une profonde anarchie morale et politique qui semble la menacer d'une prochaine et inéitable dissolution. Par le second, elle est conduite vers l'état social définitif de l'espèce humaine, le plus convenable à sa nature...C'est dans la coexistence de ces deux tendances opposées que consiste la grande crise éprouvée par les nations les plus civilisées' [Xapp:46].
18 However, the two key forces in the ‘critical’ movement of struggle, the légistes and métaphysiciens scolastiques (succeeded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the philosophes and littérateurs), were of transitional importance only, since scientists and industrialists, not they, were destined to build and direct the ruling ‘organs’ of the new industrial order [446-452]. The disjuncture Comte perceived between the political and ideological leadership of the Revolution and that of industrialism itself enabled him to think of himself as ideally positioned to begin organizing that new leadership, particularly its intellectual wing. This partly explains his obsessive pursuit, despite all the rebuffs, of a professorship at l'École Polytechnique. He no doubt imagined himself leading this leading school for science and engineering, transformed into the cadre-building centre for the new pouvoir spirituel.
education, the principles of morality and the true nature of Man, raged a war between incompatible philosophies\(^{19}\), one basing itself on Reason, the other on Faith, both seeking ascendancy within society as a whole.

Besides the immediate difficulty this presented for establishing any stable political regime, the continued dissensus symptomatized, in something like a medical sense, a deep disorder in the social organism. Since life-forms only existed by virtue of their 'vital consensus' \([IV:439]\), and since it was an axiom of social physics that ‘the whole social mechanism depends on opinions’, it followed that a fixed agreement ‘relative to all the fundamental maxims ... is the first condition for real social order’. Underlying the ‘great political and moral crisis of contemporary societies’, then, was an ‘intellectual anarchy’ which presented -- ‘first intellectually, then morally’ -- a potentially dissolvent social threat\(^{20}\).

Neither of the two warring theoretico-ideological camps, however, held the key to how the problem might be overcome. One represented an otherworldly religious viewpoint which had become obsolete; the other embodied an abstract and critical rationalism that had become obsolete.

\(^{19}\) Comte clarifies his use of the term philosophy in the opening preface of *Philosophie positive*, distinguishing it from the professional and disciplinary meaning that was beginning to come in vogue. ‘Je regrette ... d'avoir été obligée d'adopter, à défaut de tout autre, un terme comme philosophe, qui a été si abusivement employé dans une multiplicité d'acceptations diverses...Je ne bornerai donc, dans cet avertissement, à déclarer que j'emploie le mot philosophie, dans l'acceptation qui lui donnaient les Anciens, et particulièrement Aristote, comme désignant le système général des conceptions humaines’ \([I:XII]\).

\(^{20}\) ‘Ce n'est pas aux lecteurs de cet ouvrage que je croirai jamais devoir prouver que les idées gouvernent et bouleversent le monde, ou, en d'autres termes, que tout le mécanisme social repose finalement sur des opinions. Ils savent que le grande crise politique et
entirely anarchic and 'did not know how to construct' [Xapp:45-56]. The chronic conflict between 'theological' partisans of the ancien regime and 'metaphysical' partisans of liberty, fraternity, equality and progress could only be resolved through the triumph of a synthesizing third camp. This would be oriented to progress and order, and it would negotiate the split between faith and reason by basing itself on the unified philosophical spirit of the scientific revolution allied to a purely 'terrestrial' morality.

Both the possibility, and the necessity, of a 'really organic new doctrine' flowed from the very conditions that had undermined feudalism and begun to shape the emergence of something new. Considered in the sweep of history, what was coming to an end was a military form of society, ultimately based on conquest and plunder as the dominant mode of collective wealth acquisition, of which European feudalism was the 'defensive' second phase [V:395-6]. What had rendered it obsolete, and displaced its leading classes and institutions, was the rise, and

\[ \textit{morale des sociétés actuelles tient, en dernière analyse, à l'anarchie intellectuelle'} \] [I:40].

The conflict between them made the moral crisis worse as well as exacerbating the conflict itself: '...L'\'une a tendue à dissoudre la morale, l'autre n'a pu la préserver, et sa vaine intervention même aboutit qu'à rendre cette dissolution plus active, en faisant rejaillir sur la morale l'irrévocable discrédit mental de la théologie...' [V:621].

Besides their inexorable slide into obsolescence and displacement, Comte argued, the temporal and spiritual powers of feudalism also decayed, partly because of their mutual contradictions [V:416-7], from within. The rise of the monarchical state absorbed a decadent feudal nobility, just as it also, after the twelfth century, undermined the headship of the papacy and paved the way for the Reformation. The ('provisional') synthesis of the Church was in any case only ever an incoherent mix of metaphysics and theology, of égoïsme and altruisme. As its morale degenerated a rogue rationalism was generated from out of theology itself. [V:454-462]. The dialectical character of Comte's analysis of feudalism, in which a contradictory complex of dominant but declining forces engenders, through the civilizational advance it facilitates, a contradictory complex of rising forces, with which it comes into increasing conflict, is striking. Comte and Marx and many others participated in a common discourse. In its terms, the disagreement in nineteenth century
increasing productivity, of organized work — \textit{l'industrie}. The 'modifying power' of the latter expanded with modern science, as applied within an increasingly efficient division of labour. Industry, in turn, provided stimulus and support for scientific research. From the Renaissance onwards, the scientific and industrial revolutions had gone hand in hand, first helped then hindered by the various \textit{dictatures temporelles} whose development out of the medieval state was the political complement of the Reformation [VI:117].

The process was furthest advanced in northwest Europe, though not, as a fashionable anglophilia\textsuperscript{23} would have it, in England but in France. In the former, a 'dictatorship of the nobility' had preserved retrograde elements from the feudal polity which the French monarchy had overwhelmed [V:487]. English Protestantism also made 'the metaphysical philosophy' dominant, whereas in France there was no middle ground, the altruistic element of the Catholic \textit{morale} was less disrupted, and isolated Versaille had been powerless to control the surging forces that eventually swept it away. In France uniquely [V:583-4], the historical way was open, after six centuries of turmoil, for the new order finally and fully to emerge. All that was required, in the aftermath of 1789-94, was a reconstructive reform in which, with parasites and agitators pushed aside, \textit{l'industrie} would move from the political margins to the centre, while, progressivism would come to be between those for whom industrial society, the free market and the liberal state, were susceptible to the same dialectical treatment as feudalism, and those, like Comte and Hegel, who saw the great transformation to modernity out of post-feudal absolutism as now essentially accomplished (save for stabilization), so that no further radical upheavals need be contemplated.

\textsuperscript{23} The picture of England as the vanguard of modernity was of long standing among French reformers and went back at least to Montesquieu. It was strongly maintained by Saint-Simon [Manuel:108], whose \textit{Lettre d'un inhabitant de Genève} made great play with a contrast between the proud beef-eating English workers and their miserable French counterparts who starve and 'are beaten with sticks'.
on the spiritual-intellectual side, the same revamped knowledge which had transformed productive *practice* would become the consensual basis for social, moral and philosophical *thinking* as well. As a result, the ‘moral anarchy’ of production itself -- whose ‘material antagonism’ pitted the contempt of the bosses against the envy of the workers in a spreading field of pure force -- would also come to an end [V:549-550].

Thus far and in broad outline, we may say, Comte was still with Saint-Simon. Where he began to depart from his mentor was in his insistence, against the latter’s speculative rush to solutions, that both the emergence of the new order and the crisis itself be analyzed scientifically. Hence the need to establish, and not just call for, ‘social physics’²⁴. Indeed, as we have seen, not only was a science of society necessary to supply action with its reality-principle, it was also necessary in order to complete the positivization of knowledge and so make possible the philosophical synthesis required for the restoration of a stable, because epistemologically updated, consensus.

²⁴ While Saint-Simon’s conception of ‘social physics’ was inchoate, and he was shifting in an ‘organic’ direction at the same time as Comte, it can be argued that Comte’s break with St Simon over the constitution of social physics also involved a theoretical divergence. Gouhier [1941, III: 393-4] argues that Comte initially absorbed from Saint-Simon the supreme importance of political economy to forming a real science of man. While Comte’s writings from 1822-24 continue to identify the new temporal power with the industrial economy, and to see in the Smithian ‘division of labour’ a key concept, there are two new elements in his thinking. First that *les retrogrades* were right to denounce the ravages of egoism in modern society [ibid:333], and second the ‘law of three stages’ (whatever its pedigree [ibid: 395 et seq]) which enabled Comte to put in scientific order the entire *tableau historique*. They combined in Comte’s determination of social physics as a life science, and of society as the perfection of the organism. It is easy to understand the personal importance to Comte of the 1822 *opusculum fondamentale*, over which he and
Up to a point, the schema for the new science which Comte announces in *les travaux scientifiques* and elaborates in the last three volumes of *Philosophie positive* just fills in the Saint-Simonian blanks. Its 'statics' and 'dynamics', applied to the encyclopedic tableau of human history from earliest times, comprise social physics as a kind of knowledge machine which would enable us to predict both the theoretical-ideological basis of the new order, and the ‘normal’ form that its institutional physiognomy would assume. But Comte was driven to go deeper. How, he asked, if a new order was destined to emerge, could the present disorder be accounted for? And how, if society was, like the rest of nature, a determinately lawful domain, could the intervention of a ‘positive politics’ even be conceived? Why, indeed, was it necessary?

For Saint-Simon, at the turn of the century, the situation facing even the most ambitious reformers was fluid, and everything seemed possible. His analysis of industrialism’s incomplete transition was sketchy, and he was more interested in immediate schemes and solutions. Comte was of a different generation. He came of age after the revolutionary glow, chastened by life-experiences under Napoleon, Louis XVIII, and Louis Phillippe. For him, the unfolding situation was more akin to Greek *stasis*. The impasse seemed to be not passing but prolonged, especially measured against that longer arc of ‘revolutionary transition’ that went back at least to the late middle ages. Bazard and Enfantin, rival carriers of the Saint-Simonian torch,

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Saint-Simon broke. This was Comte’s *Grundrisse* and manifesto rolled into one, in which he was announcing his breakthrough establishment of social physics to the world.

25 On Saint-Simon’s ‘picaresque’ and ‘mercurial’ character, see Manuel [1962:106-7].

26 Comte’s account of ‘L’époque critique ou âge de transition révolutionnaire’ is traced out in *leçon 55* of the *Cours*. Against those who considered the 16th century to mark the beginnings of modernity, Comte insisted that it began at the end of the thirteenth century,
carried forward Saint-Simon's notion of social development as an ascending spiral, alternating on the way up between 'critical' and 'organic' periods\textsuperscript{27}. But this was too general a model in which to identify the specific features of the 'critical' period now, one hoped, unfolding towards its climax. Besides, not only did the necessity for this latter have to be explained. It was also important to know why, and with what consequences, there had been 'a vicious prolongation of the negative transition essentially accomplished in the eighteenth century' [V:623].

Comte's explanation was ingenious. The general necessity for transitional crises at key turning points in social development he derived from the law of three stages itself\textsuperscript{28}. The co-presence of contradictory philosophical schools, which had similarly marked the transition to feudalism a millenium and a half before, reflected not only the clash of emerging with obsolete social forces, as tied to the visions animating the successive forms of society to which, structurally, they belonged. It also reflected the 'necessarily uneven (inégal) progress' of the whole positivizing process [IV:21]. Each domain of knowledge, starting with astronomy, had to undergo the shift from the theological to the positive [I:14-15]. But their speeds of transition varied according to the relations of dependence between knowledge domains, as well as

\textsuperscript{27} The motto of Saint-Simon's projected \textit{nouvelle encyclopédie} had been 'The philosophy of the eighteenth century was critical and revolutionary, that of the nineteenth century will be inventive and organizational' [Manuel 1962:118].

\textsuperscript{28} Canguilem [1994:250] detects behind this aspect of the law of three stages an even more general law of biological motion, inspired by Richerand and Barthez's theory of the zig-zag or wave like nature of all animal movements. For Comte, in this light, 'the progress of
according to the relative complexity and specificity (or inverse generality) of each. The chronological order in which they had positivized — from astronomy to physics, chemistry, biology and now sociology — followed their logical order in ‘the encyclopedic scale’ [1:68-69]. Throughout the whole development, accordingly, relatively backward and relatively advanced sectors of knowledge always had to co-exist, creating the basis both for local, intra-knowledge, conflicts and for global conflicts between rivally based syntheses of general principle.

This same line of reasoning could also account for the particular virulence which such conflict had assumed in Comte’s own day. Precisely because the whole process of intellectual development had a beginning (fetishism) and an end (positivity), transition points were not wholly symmetrical. In fact, the final transition involved the deepest conflicts, particularly at the intellectual level. Unlike previous shifts from one theological form to another, the move from to positivity from theology as such involved a complete epistemological break. For that same reason it could not occur in one sudden leap29. Not just for each branch of knowledge but in the progress of ‘philosophy’ overall, there was an intermediary phase in which the spirit world withdrew to the abstraction of essences, while the absolutism of the theological viewpoint combined with a deductivism based on the would-be sovereign power of human reason.

civilisation does not march in one straight line’ but through ‘a series of oscillations, not unlike the oscillations we see in the mechanism of locomotion’ [cited in ibid:249].

29 ‘La théologie et la physique sont si profondément incompatibles, leurs conceptions ont un caractère si radicalement opposé, qu’avant de renoncer aux unes pour employer exclusivement les autres, l’intelligence humaine a dû se servir de conceptions
In late medieval Europe, the hybrid ‘metaphysical stage’ had restored the Aristotelian division between moral and natural philosophy, with the former ruled by theology and the latter (the world of ‘the inert’) incubating the sciences, themselves still invested with a largely metaphysical spirit [V:281-3]. This provided a compromise in which the growing theoretico-ideological contradictions could be contained. But as the sciences advanced and as reason extended its claims in the moral and political realm, open conflict broke out. On the one side, beginning with Innocent III’s establishment of the Inquisition, the Church became repressive. On the other, beginning with the controversies over dialectic and natural philosophy, rationalism became rebellious. From Averroist querying of Revelation to the virtual atheism of Hobbes and Spinoza, the anti-clerical assault of Voltaire and the outright materialism of d’Holbach and other ‘freethinkers’, a human reason taken as its own foundation took increasingly polemical aim, indeed, at the whole monotheistic synthesis -- a system of thought which had governed mentalities in the West since Constantine. But this was just the problem. Without an anchor in le dehors, the intermediary philosophy could only clear the ground. Its intellectual and political speculations built on sand, while its ‘anarchic’ and ‘negative’ spirit -- incarnate in the Enlightenment principle of free individual enquiry\(^\text{30}\) -- increasingly became a blockage in the development of both constructive reform, and a fully scientific understanding of the world.

\(^\text{30}\) ‘On conçoit... que cette liberté intellectuelle constitue, pas sa nature, une disposition purement négative, et ne peut se rapporter réellement qu’à la consécration systématique de l’état de non-gouvernement, spontané résultat, pour les esprits modernes, de la...
Compounding the situation, knowledge of the social, as the most specific, complex, and dependent order of reality, was the last to positivize. This meant that theological and metaphysical modes of thought continued to dominate the social field, even after the positivization of every other. But the dominance of that field by theism and metaphysics not only inhibited the development of sociology itself, and thus, too, the development of a fully positive philosophy. The rivalry between them was also a source of disturbance in its own right. And the contradictions could condense. In France, during the culminating stage of the positivist transformation, that is exactly what had happened: the ideological friction generated by the clash of theological and metaphysical viewpoints had combined with the political friction generated by the same clash occurring directly on the plane of social ideas.

The historical results were revealing. Against the dogmatic obduracy of the ancien régime, what had taken to the field was a metaphysical social theory pushing for arbitrarily contrived programs of radical reform. For Comte, as for De Maistre whose critique of the philosophes he took over, Rousseau’s Social Contract typified the worst of the genre. At once individualist and voluntarist — as if an ideal political order could be simply legislated into existence — the metaphysicians of the Revolution failed to appreciate that the social had its own laws and modalities, and that these signally included the need for a co-ordinating centre.

dissolution croissante de l’ancienne discipline mentale, jusqu’à l’avénement ultérieur de nouveaux liens spirituels’ [V:515].
31 For Comte’s critique of Rousseau’s (and Robespierre’s) reductive solution to the whole social question through ‘mesures purement politiques, d’où une aveugle imitation de l’ antiquité l’ entraînait à faire violemment dépendre jusqu’à la discipline morale’, see V:617 et seq. Blinded by an egoistic and hostile misunderstanding of ‘society’, the cardinal error of l’école de Rousseau had been its failure to see the necessity for an autonomous spiritual power within the reorganized social organism.
In the disastrous results, the only benefit of the endless constitution-making\textsuperscript{32} was the instructive value of a disconfirming experiment.

At the same time, the fact that these experiments occurred at all indicated that the macronic laws of the social were not those of an iron and mechanical determinism. De Maistre had seen in the Jacobin uprising a satanic force which had issued, through the inscrutable workings of Providence, in the punishment of the wicked in a Terror of their own devising\textsuperscript{33}. In that vein, and since he took God to be working through, not against, the laws of nature, he sketched a whole social theory of sacrifice to account for both the scandal of the Cross and the sanguinary dynamics of the revolutionary episode [De Maistre:292-4]\textsuperscript{34}. For Comte, on the other hand, the experiments and excesses of the period also indicated that there was a certain freedom to err. In so far, indeed, as the Revolution and its aftershocks were objectively making the transition to the new regime more difficult, and, at the least, slowing it down, it appeared that in-built tendencies towards order could be thwarted and that the progress of progress itself had an in-built margin of indeterminacy.

\textsuperscript{32} The exception for Comte was the Convention and Danton's ten months of revolutionary government 'entre l'expulsion nécessaire des discuteurs et le sanguinaire triomphe des fanatiques'. This alone provided a suitable governmental model, because, eschewing the myths of popular sovereignty and legislated virtue, it had wisely transferred responsibility for 'la défense nationale...[aux] chefs d'élite' [IX:599].

\textsuperscript{33} See note 15 in Chapter 3 above.

\textsuperscript{34} De Maistre held the necessity of sacrifice to derive from original sin; but upon that premise he develops a theory of the socially regenerative power of blood, of the sacrifices' necessary innocence, of sacrificial substitution, and of the reversion to slaughter pure and simple (as in the Terror and in the 'enlightened' Europeans treatment of the northern Amerindians) when the sublimated sacrificial mechanism of Christianity is suspended and the 'holy laws of humanity' disavowed [De Maistre:296]. The twentieth century adventures of that idea can be traced through Mauss and Hubert [1964] to Bataille [1985] and Girard [1972; 1987].
This indeterminacy was itself a special case of a more general principle. The regularities of succession and concomitance specified in laws were to be understood only as the limits within which variance was possible. The more complex an order of phenomena, the greater the range of its possible variance, and the greater its susceptibility, therefore, both to pathology and to human intervention. The political implications were evident. First, and against all voluntarist illusion, there were strict limits to what such intervention could achieve. The social forces actually in play were determined by the developmental conjuncture, not by political actors, who could affect only their relative intensité [IV:316]. Nor could the general line of march be changed. It was inconceivable that industrial society could establish order and harmony on the basis of a restored Catholicism and idle land-owning aristocracy. However, what was modifiable, in the ‘fundamental evolution of humanity’, was its ‘simple speed’, and thus, more particularly, the speed with which the final stages of positivization itself could be accomplished [ibid]. On the one hand, then, even more than in the case of a lower biological organism, the developmental process of l’humanité was vulnerable to disturbance. On the other hand, with intelligent self-doctoring, and reinforcement of les forces régénératrices, pathologies could be

35 'On doit prédablement concevoir les phénomènes sociaux comme étant, de toute nécessité, en vertu même de leur complication supérieure, les plus modifiables de tous...Ainsi, l'ensemble des lois sociologiques comporte naturellement des limites de variations plus étenus que ne le permet même le système des lois biologiques proprement dites, et, à plus forte raison, celui des lois chimiques, ou physiques, ou surtout astronomiques [IV:314]. Affirming, in the extreme instance, 'le droit d'insurrection', Comte also notes in the Politique positive that 'Au point de vue scientifique, on y doit voir une crise réparatrice, encore plus nécessaire à la vie collective qu'à la vie individuelle, suivant cette loi biologique évidente que l'état pathologique devient plus fréquent et plus grave à mesure que l'organisme est plus compliqué et plus éminent' [VII:135].
treated, obstacles to development could be overcome, and the metamorphosis to a higher, more complex, stage of sociality could even be accelerated\textsuperscript{36}.

That same consideration, moreover, gave Comte a more englobing way to define the whole problem. The gradual advance of \textit{l'industrie}\textsuperscript{37} implied, both intellectually and in the sphere of production, an increasing division of labour. Such differentiation, including the wise separation of temporal and spiritual powers', was itself a developmental law of life\textsuperscript{38}. However, growing differentiation would ‘contradict existence if it were not always accompanied by a perfecting of general unity’\textsuperscript{39}. And so to the contemporary issue: as tasks had became more specialized, and

\textsuperscript{36}The observation of pathology, by revealing the limits within which the ‘vital laws’ operate, enables both biology and sociology to find a methodological alternative to experiment [III:260-3]. However this presupposes a (pre-observational) normative definition of pathology that dominates Comte’s sociology and its ‘scientific politics’. After noting the methodological deficiencies in Comte’s attempt to appropriate ‘Brossais’s principle’, Canguilhem observes: ‘By stating in a general way that diseases do not change vital phenomena, Comte is justified in stating that the cure for political crises consists in bringing society back to its essential and permanent structure, and tolerating progress only within limits of variation of natural order defined by social statics’ [64].

\textsuperscript{37}Comte follows the account of the Scottish economists, particularly Robertson and Smith, in tracing the rise of \textit{l'industrie} back to the growth of towns and the rise of ‘free’ labour in the middle ages in Europe from the eleventh century onwards [VI:29 et seq].

\textsuperscript{38}Already, in the 1822 \textit{Travaux scientifiques}, the economists’ division of labour -- but only of course if perfected by hierarchy and the institution of a complementary dyad of temporal and spiritual power -- is identified with a more general developmental tendency of organic life towards complexity through functional specialization. The division of labour is even ‘\textit{la cause générale du perfectionnement et du développement de l'état social}’ [Xapp:198]. The principle is flatly stated in \textit{leçon 50} of the \textit{Cours}: ‘Bien loin que la simplicité constitue la mesure principale de la perfection réelle, le système entier des études biologiques concourt à montrer, au contraire, que la perfection croissante de l’organisme animal consiste surtout dans la spécialité de plus en plus prononcée des diverses fonctions accomplies par les organes de plus en plus distincts, et néanmoins toujours exactement solidaires’ [I:469].

\textsuperscript{39}‘\textit{[L]a série sociale devient un simple prolongement de la vraie hiérarchie animale. Car les termes successifs de l’une, comme les degrés simultanés de l’autre, présentent un continuEL accroissement de complication, qui renrendrait contradictoire l’existence, s’il
as experience-based knowledge and reflective intelligence had supplanted the fixity of false (but useful) beliefs, both behaviour and consensus had become less instinctual, and society had became less automatic — and military — in its functioning. This, though, was double edged. From slavery to serfdom to free labour growing individual liberty had been essential for the emergence of a higher, more flexible, form of social unity. But liberty became anarchic if undirected, and egoistic if not imbued with a social outlook. At the climax of the process, then, a fully positivized will was required both to complete the metamorphosis and, once instituted, to sustain industrialism's 'normal' form of social organization. Viewed like this, the sociology which provided intelligence for that will was itself a 'normal' development. Nevertheless, the stakes were high. For the same consideration raised the troubling thought that without a supreme effort to develop that will, the conflict laden impasse of unresolved transition might persist, or even — the greatest danger — that the whole locomotive of progress might go off the rails.

If we take stock of where Comte’s analysis was taking him, one thing is apparent. The more Comte elaborated his theory of the ‘crisis’ the deeper and more dangerous it seemed to be.

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n’était pas toujours accompagné d’un perfectionnement de l’unité générale [IX:9]. For Comte, this principle had been discovered by Aristotle, in his principle that the essential nature of collective organisation consisted in ‘la séparation des offices et la combinaison des efforts’ [VIII:281]. Aristotle’s Politics, for Comte, was the founding text of sociological statics.

40 Politically, this implied the need for a revolutionary government, which would exercise a temporary dictatorship in order to implement the necessary reforms. The call for a revolutionary triumvirate to direct the final transition was part of the political program of the Positivist Society from its founding in February 1848. See Gouhier [1965:218–9].

41 The rise of Positive philosophy and politics to fulfill this completing mission, beginning with its recommended (re)establishment of the spiritual power, is sketched out in X:518 et seq.
Because of the power and energy of the 'negative forces' that had (necessarily) presided over the Revolution, the Positivist reconstruction now needed to complete the industrial transformation of society had not appeared on cue. Thus a 'normal intermediary crisis' had become abnormally 'prolonged'. This prolongation, in turn, both worsened the dissolvent effects of a metaphysics become purely anarchical, and perpetuated a wider 'philosophical' conflict which was itself a deep cause of intellectual and moral disorder. Whence, in fact, a tension that marked Comte's whole account. On the one hand, he wanted to argue that the troubles of early industrialism were strictly passagères -- a friction of movement, tied to the emergence of a final form of civilization that had already arrived -- and not, as more radical thinkers were beginning to argue, endemic in the system of private property and commodity production within which the dynamic of industrialization was unfolding. On the other hand, it seemed that the current problems of transition risked becoming so severe that they jeopardized both order and progress as such.

What Comte had done was to explain the 'crisis' as arising primarily from a contradiction between the base (the differentiated, machinic and market-mediated practices of l'industrie).

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42 'Quant aux aberrations morales proprement dites, il serait assurément superflu de s'arrêter ici à caractériser expressément les ravages qu’a dû une métaphysique qui, détruisant toutes les bases antérieures de la morale publique et même privée, sans leur substituer directement aucun équivalent rationnel, livrait désormais toutes les règles de conduite à l’appréciation superficielle et partiales des consciences individuelles' [V:617]. Comte's reference further on to 'aberrations morales fort analogues à celles de l’école d’Épicure' makes clear that this final unravelling entails the unbridled resurgence of fleshly desires [V:620].

43 The medieval (spontaneous), early modern (politically utilized) and modern (goal-defining) evolution of industry as a temporal power is outlined and 'appreciated' in leçon 57 of the Cours [VI:29-122]. In the final stage: 'son l’essor social, de plus en plus
and the political-ideological superstructure (not yet updatedly rebuilt), exacerbated by (developmental) contradictions within the latter. Not just in Marxist terms but in Comte’s, this would be to define the crisis as merely transitional. Except for two crucial riders: first, one element of that superstructure -- human knowledge, its development and applications -- was taken to be also part of the base; secondly, because of the importance of vital ‘consensus’ to the maintenance of (social) life, the contradictions provoked by ideational conflict, across the whole range of social relations, were taken as having the limit capacity to menace society as such.

The assumption governing the latter can be questioned, as can the wider explanatory frame. If the autonomizing power of capital were introduced into Comte’s picture of industrialism, we would have to say that he both underestimated the structural intractability of the social problems he was seeking to understand and overestimated the place of consciousness within them. Whence the growing desperation that accompanied what Comte insisted, despite the profundity of the ‘crisis’, was a project not for industrial society’s radical transformation, but for corrective reform. At the same time, if Comte had been able to define the latter as not the end of the civilizational line, and as contradictory in itself, there might have been a better balance between his *explanans* (a problem of consciousness) and his *explanandum* (incipient total breakdown). He would also not have had to place so much weight on the positivized faith and will of a lonely vanguard as the heroically indispensable means for further human advance.

*prépondérant, a été ainsi conduit graduellement à ne pouvoir plus avancer autrement que par l’avénement du système politique correspondant* ['VI:122]
That the task, nonetheless, was not wholly chimerical was indicated to Comte by the fact that the twin pillars of the new order were already, almost, in place. On the spiritual side, the way was prepared for a replacement faith and church by the positivization of knowledge and the rising authority of science. On the temporal side, an accumulation of developments from the emancipation of *les communs*, the dissolution of serfdom and hereditary castes, and the spread of meritocratic values in a culture of thrift and work, to the rise of workshops, machine production, and banks, had enriched social specialization and created the practical and experiential basis for an industrial form of organization to prevail. To be sure, in *un âge de spécialité*, what was lacking, throughout, was ‘*l’esprit d’ensemble*’. However, such a spirit could be secured, and the morphological development of industrialism completed, by pushing the division of labour one last step. This would be to establish a dual elite of scientific and industrial specialists in the general, with a division of labour between them [VI:462 *et seq*]. The latter would executively manage the (minimal) state, while the former, as coordinators of knowledge, would be responsible for education, as well as for the overall supervision of industrial society’s moral well-being. To which, too, would correspond a hierarchical completion of the division of labour in theoretical practice. Here, at the apex of the sciences, there would be a distinctly organized coordinating philosophy, which, as transmitted by its cadres, would ‘make *l’esprit d’ensemble* directly prevail’ 45.

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44 The civilizational shift from *la vie militaire* to *la vie industrielle* is set forth in the 56th *leçon* of the *Cours*.

45 "*Faisant directement prévaloir enfin l’esprit d’ensemble sur l’esprit de détail, et, par suite, le sentiment du devoir sur le sentiment du droit, elle [la nouvelle philosophie] démontre la nature essentiellement morale des principales difficultés sociales, et par cela..."
But why priests? Why, after first advancing this program, did Comte feel the need to supplement the ‘normal’ institutional framework of industrialism with a full-scale religion?

The question of religion

The abstract answer we already know. What converts, via the projected final science of *la Morale*, the problematization of the ‘crisis’ in the *Philosophie positive* into the explicitly religious one presented in the *Politique positive* is the opening of the binary schema — theory/intellect and practice/action — into a trinary one. This occurs through the introduction of les sentiments, objectively grasped through a physiological science of individual needs and instincts, as an irreducible third category. To move into a religious register was to adopt a mode of thinking in which the highest sentiments — *le coeur, l'amour* — were actively, and

seul, elle tend à dissiper partout...une cause féconde d’illusions, de désappointements et même de perturbations* [VI:557].

* In the first volume of *Politique positive* the change of position is described in just these terms. His initial *théorie de l’âme* had combined in the same category of ‘*le coeur*...tantôt l’affection qui dispose à agir et tantôt la force qui dirige l’action réelle’ [VII:684]. This distinction was manifest ‘*surtout dans la comparaison moral des deux sexes où le mot coeur désigne alternativement tendresse et l’énergie*’ [ibid]. ‘*Composée d’abord de coeur et d’esprit, elle nous offre maintenant la succession normale du coeur proprement dit, de l’esprit et du caractère....La conception demeure binaire tant qu’on n’y considère que l’économie totale, qui constitue alors une combinaison irréductible. Mais elle devient ternaire quand on veut s’y représenter la marche générale d’un tel ensemble*’ [VII:684; my emphasis]. Comte’s attempt to show the logical consistency of his first position with his second relies here, we may note, on the Positivist theory of numbers which assigns two to combination/arrangement and three to progress/development. However since the new trinary model applies as well to his (static) theory of the ‘soul’ and it harmony, this gloss seems stretched.
self-consciously, in command. 'The continuous preponderance of the sentiments over the intellect and activity becomes thus the fundamental law of human harmony'[^4].

To be sure, the sentiments had not previously been ignored. Besides the biological basis claimed in the *Cours* for the innateness of *altruisme* [III:634-41], for the efficacy of moral habit [III:644], and for the 'everyday experience' that 'the affections, inclinations, passions, constitute the principal motives in human life'[^48], Comte's analysis of *l'évolution esthétique* [VI:123-179] highlighted the coordination of affective life as a prominent element of the emerging 'positive state'[^49]. As for the religious buttressing of *les penchants bienveillants*, we

[^4]: *La prépondérance continu des sentiments sur l'intelligence et l'activité devient ainsi la loi fondamentale de l'harmonie humain* [X:45]. It should be noted, however, that the binary schema of theory/practice continues to obtain in the laws of social dynamics, because *la région affective du cerveau n'a pas de relation directe avec le monde extérieur...Ainsi, l'influence mutuelle des familles et des générations ne peut point modifier directement nos penchants. Ele ne les affecte que par suite des changements qu'elle apporte dans nos pensées et nos actes* [IX:11]. Sentiments, then, do not have their own history of development in the same sense as do theory and activity, which themselves co-develop in the human interchange with the external milieu. The progressive preponderance of sentiments -- summarized in the law that 'l'homme devient de plus en plus religieux' [X:10] -- is thus determined by an external dialectic. This is pursued further in chapter 7 below.

[^48]: *Car l'expérience journalière montre...que les affections, les penchants, les passions, constituent les principaux mobiles de la vie humaine; et que, loin de résulter de l'intelligence, leur impulsion spontanée et indépendante est indispensable au premier éveil et au développement continu des diverses facultés intellectuelles en leur assignant un but permanent, sans lequel, outre le vague nécessaire de leur général direction, elles resteraient essentiellement engourdies chez la plupart des hommes* [III:618-9].

[^49]: In the *Cours*, poetry and the fine arts were always to be regarded as secondary to science/philosophy in stamping the mental character of an age. But their expressive role -- as a zone for the cultivation of higher needs, and *destinées à l'idéal représentation sympathique des divers sentiments qui caractérisent la nature humaine, personelle, ou domestique, ou sociale* [VI:124] -- made the arts a crucial intermediary between *la vie active* and *la vie contemplative* [VI:142]. Stimulated by the rise of *la vie industrielle*, their scope and social role had decisively grown. In the fully positive state, the arts would serve as a vital supplement to scientific and philosophical education. They would also fill
may also take at face value Comte's claim that he had always intended a two part work. First he would establish the 'last domain of positive rationality'; 'on this unshakable base', he would then 'build the new occidental faith, and institute its priesthood'. In this way, reversing the bad order of Christianity, a 'healthy philosophy' would be 'be able at last to found the true religion'. Be that as it may, there is no suggestion of cult or liturgy attached to the pouvoir spirituelle outlined in his 1928 essay nor in the last volume of Philosophie philosophie. The full subjective, and consequently sociological, force of acknowledging the place of the sentiments in sociality only came to him in his rénovation morale of 1847.

What marks the caesura is that it was then, under the deeply affecting auspices of ma sainte ange, that le fondateur du philosophie positive personally, and in the sublimest sense,
discovered love\textsuperscript{52}. With that, the realization dawned -- with all its cultic and liturgical consequences -- that the heart and not only the head had to be engaged if the saving grace of the spirit of the whole was to unite the scattered elements of a divided and fragmented society. For le dehors to anchor the mental and active life of each individual, and to supply the motive force for the subordination of each to a common purpose, that dehors had to be loved, and not just cognitively known. Borrowing from the best insights of the previous monotheism, but suitably relativized and humanized, what was needed was not merely une nouvelle foi, as he had previously proclaimed, but a form of faith which combined the doctrinal moment of belief with a sublimely disinterested love for its object [VIII:46-49].

However, the one could not just grow out of the other. The forces pushing for a positivization of the intellect were quite distinct from those -- for example the moral and domestic elevation of women -- which socially fostered the growth of love. Hence, for Comte, both 'the difficulty and the importance of combining' these 'two religious conditions', 'whether naturally or

\textit{sentiments, agrandissant mes pensées, et ennoblissant ma conduite.... Ton salutaire ascendant ne peut plus être apprécié qu’en me disposant toujours à mieux remplir ma grande mission. Comme principale récompense personelle des nobles travaux qui me restent à accomplir sous ta puissante invocation, j’obtiendrai peut-être que ton nom devienne enfin inseparable du mien dans les plus lointains souvenirs de l’humanité reconnaissante [VII:xx-xxi].}

\textsuperscript{52} Gouhier emphasises the experiential side of this discovery. Comte was already proposing to 'preach the love of Humanity; he knew what Humanity was, but not love [1933:27]. 'This love did not add a single idea to a system of ideas that was self-sufficient, but a living reality without which this system of ideas would have been a dead letter' [1933:29]. This view is more perspicacious than one which would ignore the religious continuity of Comte's 'grande mission' before and after Clotilde. But it goes too far in ignoring the complexifying impact of Comte's religio-affective epiphany on both his sociological analysis and on his system as a whole.
artificially'. By ‘naturally’ he meant for example in marriage, with his own union of head and heart with Clotilde as a prototype. By ‘artificially’ he meant the institution of a wider mechanism, to harmonize society as a whole. Just as the scientific cultivation and dissemination of la foi démontrable required teachers and an educational apparatus, so there also needed to be a system of worship to excite and maintain the sentiments without which the altruisme guiding it would be arid and without deep moral force. Recognizing the need to ‘incorporate the sentiments into the positivist synthesis’ had as its practical counterpart, then, Positivism’s transformation into a fully articulated religion.

In these same categorically expanded terms, the crisis of industrialism which persisted in the absence of such an institution was itself to be understood as ‘religious’. Concomitant with intellectual disorder (the unresolved and unresolvable war of opinion between theological and metaphysical viewpoints), and with institutional disorder (dysfunctions associated with an incomplete division of labour), there had come to be disorder as well at the level of sentiments. Despite its ‘essentially intellectual character’, their ‘alteration’ had indeed become ‘the gravest aspect of the modern anarchy’. In the absence of an authoritative, because consensual, centre around which to rally the higher sentiments of love, the lower, egoistic instincts — ‘nutritive’.

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53 ‘...il ne s’agit nullement de fonder ici l’amour sur la foi. D’après la vraie connaissance de l’homme, ces deux conditions religieuses sont pleinement indépendantes l’une de l’autre, et chacun d’elles se développer spontanément. C’est surtout de cette double spontanéité que résulte la fois la difficulté et l’importance de leur combinaison, naturelle ou artificielle [VIII:47].

54 The argument is developed in the first chapter of the second volume of Politique positive, on Théorie générale de religion, ou théorie positive de l’unité humaine.

55 ‘La principale gravité de l’anarchie moderne consiste en ce que, malgré son caractère essentiellement intellectuel, elle a fini par altérer les sentiments’ [X:370–1].
sexual, power-oriented and vanity/ambition — were insufficiently restrained\(^{56}\). This both produced chronic inter-individual conflict (the Hobbesian problem) and, at the intra-individual level, by permitting the egoistic instincts to dominate the altruistic ones, undermined the indispensable psychological basis for social cooperation. From which it also followed that the social crisis with which France, and the wider industrializing world, was afflicted, was total. And, indeed, in a double sense. On the one hand it was simultaneously a disorder of thought, action and feeling, a crisis affecting, that is, all three fundamental aspects of human existence\(^{57}\). On the other hand, it was a crisis for that existence in its totality, a crisis therefore in which l'organisme social, as a reality transcending the aggregation of self-interested individuals composing it, was itself ultimately at stake.

I would make three observations about this diagnosis.

\(^{56}\) The related notions of ralliement and règlement — which were to have a prominent Durkheimian future — are introduced, in the second volume of Politique positive, as a cornerstone of la théorie positive de religion. ‘Quoi que toujours liés de plus en plus, ces deux modes ne seront jamais confondus, et chacun d'eux suscite une attribution correspondante de la religion. Cet état synthétique consiste ainsi, tantôt à régler chaque existence personelle, tantôt à rallier les diverses individualités’ [VIII:9, emphasis in original].

\(^{57}\) The full extent of the dissolvent trend seen under this triple perspective is neatly summarized in Politique positive: ‘À mesure que la foi se dissout, les esprits s'isolerent et se rétrécissent, les notions de détail prévalent sur les vues d'ensemble. En même temps, l'anarchie mentale altère graduellement les preceptes moraux, d'abord dans la vie publique, puis envers les relations domestiques, et même enfin quant à l'existence personelle. Un égoïsme croissant tend à détruire les meilleurs traditions du moyen âge, en surmontant de plus en plus la résistance féminine, sous les impulsions avouées de l'orgueil et de la vanité, qui laissent souvent apercevoir celles de la cupidité. L'usurpation temporelle dissipant toute trace de la séparation normale entre les deux pouvoirs, la politique se matérialise, et partout on demande aux lois de régler ce qui dépend seulement sur les moeurs [IX:533].
The first is to note that, in the course of elaborating it, Comte's understanding of 'religion' undergoes a change. In his earlier works, religion is an untheorized descriptive label, implicitly defined with reference to belief in some kind of supernatural, and applied exclusively to the various forms of 'theology', from fetishism to monotheism. His more englobing term is 'philosophy', which focuses on the intellectual side, so that the whole series, from theology through metaphysics to positivism itself, can be presented in its continuity, as a succession of systems of general ideas. As for the differentiation within the governmental function between le pouvoir spirituel and le pouvoir temporel, this is explained primarily with reference to the theory of the répartition des travaux [IV:481-4]; and although the retention of this principle in the Positivist program explicitly acknowledges the example of developed (i.e. 'Catholic') monotheism, it is not itself linked to any more general conception of religion as a form or level of social organization in itself.

Against this background, the category of 'religion' makes its sociological appearance in the Politique positive as a kind of missing ingredient, an X factor, to supplement the conceptual lack in the social statics presented in the earlier system of Positive philosophy. Religion, triply articulated as cult, doctrine and regime [VIII:1920], is that dimension of social life which 'rallies and regulates' the sentiments in harmony with thought and action. Through it, a being is 'bound from within to without, by the complete convergence of sentiments and thoughts

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58 In leçon 50 of the Cours, devoted to the general principles of social statics 'ou théorie générale de l'ordre spontané des sociétés humaines' [IV:430], there is no discussion of religion in any of the senses identified above, and the word religion does not even once occur. By contrast
towards the superior power which determines its acts. This definition, it will be noted, is not tied to the particularities of belief, in as much as different religions posit different identities for that external power. It is related instead to a special social function, and to the organs instituted to carry it out. The term, then, has a generalizable, yet restricted, range of sociological application. Empirically, Comte’s ‘religion’ would consist of all the organized practices and representations which pertain to the cultivation of the highest instincts and their harmonious integration into collective life. However, because of the supreme importance of the sentiments in achieving intellectual and political-institutional harmony, this conception of religion necessarily expands, so that it comes to include all that is practically involved in harmonizing social — and indeed individual — life as such. ‘In this treatise’, Comte intones at the beginning of *Tome II of Politique positive*,

religion will always be characterized by the state of complete harmony proper to human existence, whether collective or individual, when all its parts whatever are properly coordinated. This definition...concerns equally the heart and the mind whose concourse is indispensable to such a unity. Religion thus constitutes, for the soul, a normal consensus exactly comparable to that of health with regard to the body.

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59 L’être se trouve ainsi lié, en dedans et au dehors, par l’entièrε convergence de ses sentiments et de ses pensées vers la pouissance supérieure qui détermine ses actes [VIII:18].

60 Dans ce traité, la religion sera toujours caractérisée par l’état de pleine harmonie propre à l’existence humaine, tant collective qu’individuelle, quand toutes ses parties quelconques sont dignement coordinées. Cette définition, seule commune aux divers cas principaux, concerne également le cœur et l’esprit, dont le concours est indispensable à telle unité. La religion constitue donc, pour l’âme, un consensus normal exactement comparable à celui de la santé envers le corps [VIII:8].
A little further on, and again in the *Catechism of Positive Religion*, this expanded sense is given an etymological justification. The word religion 'is so constructed as to express a twofold connection which ... is sufficient to summarize the whole abstract theory of our unity. To constitute a complete and durable harmony what is really wanted is to *bind together* (*lier*) the within by love and to *bind it again* (*relier*) to the without by faith' [XI: 46]. As conceptually clarifying as this seems to be, however, it amounts to a sleight of hand. For, in keeping with the slide from religion as an instance of the social totality to religion as that which constitutes it as such, there is a conflation between social unity and the maintenance of that unity, or, to put it in Durkheimian and Althusserian terms, between the social tie and its reproduction.

'Religion' is simultaneously characterized, in other words, as both what primordially composes disparate individuals into *un organisme social*, and as whatever process may be involved in its ongoing practical accomplishment. It is, then, both the first order unity of the social, and also its second order, or reduplicative, unity. What Comte's commentary on the 're' of religion enables him to overlook is the questions that might arise if these were distinguished. For example: is the 'community' that we might posit as underlying all social relations the same as a communing that takes place with respect to some unifying Other? If not, might there be a contradiction between the (pattern-maintaining and integrative) requirements of reproducing

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61 The same etymological play is made with the word 'humanité', as we shall see in chapter 8 below. That words should have deposited within their multiple senses an extractable insight about real connections was part of Comte’s general theory of language. This is elaborated in chapter 4 of the second volume of *Politique positive* [VIII:216-262].
institutionalized social relations and the letting be of such 'community'? But again, does that question admit of different answers depending on the modality of those already-instituted relations -- for instance, with regard to their degree of coerciveness or exploitativeness, or to their implication in various kinds of exchange?

The second point is more obvious. Comte's definition of religion, which ultimately assimilates society and religion to one another, rests on a particular theory of social being. It presupposes 'societies' as integral entities. And it assumes that the integrity of such entities -- particularly as we ascend from the 'direct unity' of the family to the 'indirect' and 'associational' character of society in the extended sense [IV:448-9] -- is a problematic, disturbable function of the cognitive/emotional binding of individuals together into groups. The social-psychological (and moral) character of this binding, and of the articulation of individuals to the collectivities so formed, will be taken up in the next chapter. What should be highlighted here is just the consequence of this social ontology for what, in Comte's formulation of the religion question, was practically at stake. Societies, like all organisms, like all complex orderings of matter, could break up, dissolve into their constituent elements. Life depends on a balance between 'absorption and exhalation'. Under the influence of this law 'The Great Being finds itself as subjected as lower ones to the permanent necessity of an elementary renewal'. The inference was clear. In securing the spiritual and institutional unity of the social, religion

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63 *Sous son influence directe [la loi seconhide de biologie] le Grand-Être se trouve autant assujetti que les êtres inférieurs à la nécessité permanente du renouvellement élémentaire [VII:590]. In the 'positive theory of death' death is a contingent consequence of disturbed harmony whose constant active renewal constitutes life [VIII:586 *et seq.*].
obviated not just (individual and collective) disorders in the plural, but disorder as such. In its absence, in a full-scale *crise morale*, society could die.

Thirdly, Comte’s determination of religion as the health, qua ‘normal harmony’ and unity of the social rests, on an absolute dichotomy between order and disorder, without any sustainable possibilities in between. Order is full and complete, or else it risks degenerating into chaos. Order itself, this implies, is necessarily repressive. It restrains an entropic tendency to disorder which is perpetually present. Its achievement in any complex organism, correspondingly, requires a functional subordination of the parts to the whole; which itself can only be secured through their subordination to a common centre.

In effect, Comte combines the second law of thermodynamics with the transfer, onto his fundamental conception of *société*, of the functionally hierarchized notion of structure that characterized traditional Catholic social doctrine. That same doctrine had provided a conceptual basis for De Bonald and De Maistre’s defense of centred unity -- sovereignty -- as represented, in the Church, by the headship of God, Christ, and Pope, and in the polity by theocratic monarchy. In industrial society the content of such sovereignty must be brought

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64 ‘*Dans la nature inerte, l’activité d’un système quelconque tend à détruire sa structure, même en mécanique*’ [VIII:340].

65 ‘*Quelque vaines notions qu’on se forme aujourd’hui de l’égalité sociale, toute société... suppose, par une évidente nécessité, non seulement des diversités, mais aussi des inégalités quelconques: car il ne saurait y avoir de véritable société sans le concours permanent à une opération générale, poursuivie par des moyens distincts, convenablement subordonnés les uns aux autres* [IV:449]. For the indissociability of *gouvernement* from *société*, see VIII:226.

66 As a ‘sovereign power...Christianity...is monarchical as everyone knows, and this must be so, since, by the very nature of things, monarchy becomes the more necessary as the association becomes more numerous’. Comte’s dictum that ‘*il n’existe pas davantage de société sans gouvernement que de gouvernement sans société*’ [VIII:267] derives from de Maistre in its very intonation.
up to date, but the form stays the same. Hence, in the schema of Positive Religion, the singular and supreme focus for love, belief and action represented by the Great Being of Humanity. Hence, too, the application of this schema to figuring the ‘divine constitution’ of the individual psyche. Unless embedded in an inter-psychic structure which directs the ego towards, and organizes its whole psychological apparatus around, a fixed point in le dehors (in Christianity, a purely imaginary Big Other), the individual psyche would lack an organizing centre, and dissolve into an internal chaos of warring impulses. It was in just such terms that Comte criticized philosophies, from Descartes onwards, which attempted to base themselves on ‘the famous theory of the I’ [III:621], as a coherent and self-sufficient starting-point for knowledge, or for understanding Man.

Comte’s tenacious assumption concerning the natural necessity of centred and hierarchical unity for the existence and persistence of complex being determined ideals of social and individual life that were as opposed to the heterogeneous and the carnivalesque as to egalitarian utopias of communitas. From this vantage-point, a headless community, as championed by anarchists, from Fourier to Bataille, not to mention the generalized a-centricity pursued, at the level of thinking itself, by Derrida67, was inconceivable. Freedom from order --

67 For Derrida, decentering was an inevitable effect of a relativizing self-consciousness about thought that occurred when the concept of structurality presented itself. This was when ‘language invaded the universal problematic ...in which everything became discourse’ This revealed ‘a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signifier is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and interplay of signification indefinitely’ [Macksey and Donato:249]. Proclaimed by Nietzsche, this was preceded by a phase of contradictory thinking about language — roughly from Rousseau to Hegel — in which the dissolvent effects of language on ‘the universal problematic’ were, with detectable theoretical strain, contained. The allusion to Comte’s law of three stages in Grammatology, where this idea is historically and theoretically worked through, is itself
whether social, psychological, aesthetic or philosophical — could only mean the destruction of being, and to champion it was wickedness itself. Nor could Comte conceive of being, social or otherwise, as a storm-system of contending opposites. We could only burn in the Heraclitan fire. Following the post-structuralists, we could say, in fact, that Comte embodies the most tenacious, and abstract, feature of metaphysics itself. In every dimension of his systematizing construct he was trapped in an unreflected schema of hierarchical binaries.

This was a feature Comte shared with the prevailing thought-world of his time. But in his case it was also held in place by a psycho-biographical factor which, indeed, he explicitly attempted to rationalize as an empirical reference-point for his whole religious and sociological thematization. This was his terror of disorientation, a terror which he experienced at first hand during the manic collapse that disabled him in 1826, and recurrently thereafter. That which he most feared he externalized through the horrific names of ‘chaos’ and ‘anarchy’. Hence his however deconstructive, since, as Derrida shows in his chapter ‘Can Grammatology be a Positive Science?’ [Derrida, 1976:74-94], once écriture displaces langage as the object of linguistic study, the positivization of that science ruins science precisely in any positive meaning of that term.

68 Comte justified his constant appeal to the principle of ‘one into two’ by way of a theory of the universality of binariness as a feature of the ‘combination’ inherent in all arrangement. ‘Toute combinaison, même physique, et surtout logique, devant être toujours binaire, comme l'indique assez l'étymologie. Cette règle s'étend nécessairement aux décompositions quelconques’ [XI:74]. In Comte’s numerological symbolism, one stands for synthesis, two for ‘ordre, défini par l'arrangement’, three for progress [X:101].

69 Comte’s first serious attacks -- sleepless exultation for days on end -- were in early 1826, and he had a full breakdown in April, which halted for three years his ability to publicly conduct his Cours. He was hospitalized till December, and nursed back to health by Massin. He never trusted doctors to help him, and evolved an elaborate dietary and mental regimen which aimed, whether through vegetarianism, sexual abstinence or not reading newspapers, to reduce stressful stimuli. See Pickering:371-403 and Gouhier, 1965:127-137.
almost talismanic need for the certitude of a faith; and hence too, against the dread of inner dissolution, his extreme normatized insistence on that rigid, and brittle, conception of unity and order which was its abstractly negating mirror-opposite.

The subjective dimension

Put bluntly, Comte’s embrace of a Humanist religious conviction is haunted by madness. It represents an almost prototypical example of Freud’s diagnosis of ‘popular religion’ (i.e. the solace of belief in a celestial Father) as an obsessional neurosis which defends the ego against psychotic breakdown⁷⁰. The obsessive regularity of the ritual round he imposed on himself following the traumatic death of Clotilde, his flight into the future ‘habitant une tombe anticipée’⁷¹, are easily diagnosed in such terms. So is the overarching will-to-unity which

⁷⁰ For the relation between obsessional neurosis and religious ritual see Freud, 1990:31-40. Freud summarises as follows: ‘One might venture to regard obsessional neurosis as a pathological counterpart of the formation of a religion and religion as a universal obsessional neurosis. The most essential similarity would seem to reside in the underlying renunciation of the activation of instincts that are constitutionally present; and the chief difference would lie in the nature of those instincts, which in the neurosis are exclusively sexual in their origin, while in religion they spring from egoistic sources’ [ibid:40].

Comte, in the year following the trauma of Clotilde’s death, would appear to have found a personal solution that built one upon the other: he converted a private set of ritual practices into the model for a form of private worship (le culte intime) that could be generalized to all Positive believers. The priest-type black clothing that he adopted in the mid-1820s paved the way for his adoption of the public persona of le grand-prêtre de l’Humanité; and sexual renunciation simultaneously became a matter of religious principle. His abandoned wife Caroline had no hesitation in declaring that he had gone mad (again) and that he should seek medical help [Gouhier:207-8].

⁷¹ ‘Habitant une tombe anticipée, je dois désormais tenir aux vivants un langage posthume, qui sera mieux affranchi des divers préjugés, surtout théoriques, dont nos descendants se trouveront priés...Sans cesser de vivre avec nos meilleurs ancêtres, je vais surtout vivre avec nos descendants, jusqu’à ce que je revive dans eux et par eux après avoir vécu pour eux’. According to Gouhier [1965:221], Comte incorporated this passage
pervades, and is idealized in, his system. We may only marvel at the thoroughness with which Comte sought to re-organize the whole world round him, from the private cocoon of his house on the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince to France, Europe and beyond, so as to buttresss his neurotic solution by providing it, in a fantasy seeking realization, with universal social support.

Yet a psychologicistic reduction of Comte's thought would scarcely do it justice. It would bypass his effort to reflect on his own *crise cérébrale* as source material for a scientific theory of human nature. That he should refer to inner experience at all, in that regard, is at first surprising -- until we remember that the subjective turn in his thinking grew from the realization that *la société* had a lived inside as well as an observed outside, so that the properly social orientation to the social had to be doubly two-sided. To be sure, in approaching interiority, he dismissed theories of the psyche based solely on introspection, favouring instead the 'cerebral physiology' of Brossais and Gall, whence Positivism was to draw the proper, because objective, basis for its own psychology. But the latter, which connected drives and faculties to the hard wiring of brain and nervous system, was nevertheless indexed to the phenomena of individual subjectivity, starting and ending with himself.

In any case, the social crisis of industrialism -- pathologies of conflict and disorder stemming from the persistence of archaisms, the unsettling effects of a transitional 'negative philosophy', and the failure of the newly configured 'normality' to fully emerge -- had its counterpart at the

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from his testament of 1855 regularly into his morning prayers (from 5.30-6.30am) as their opening *évolution*. 

level of individual subjectivity, to which it was intimately and reciprocally linked. Two components of this -- concerning modern disruptions, respectively, to *solidarité* and *continuité* -- need to be distinguished, though they merge in a more general consideration which Comte himself is never quite able to name. Conjured in the spectre of social dissolution, they both present threats to what a later discourse would call the 'ontological security'\(^{73}\) of the individual.

**Ego and solidarity**

The first problem concerns psychopathologies caused by that subjective severance of the individual from the social which Comte calls *égoïsme*. In *Politique positive* [IX:75-6], Comte describes himself as having regressed during his illness in a way which recapitulated, backwards and then forwards, the 'normal' course of cognitive development. At the height of his breakdown, he tells us, he was gripped uncontrollably by a kind of infantile animism, which gave him insight both into the subjective side of Humanity's cognitive development\(^ {74}\), and into the nature of 'healthy' mental balance. This insight makes its way into one of the summarizing

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\(^{72}\) Beginning with his review of Brossais' *Essai sur l'irritation et la folie* in 1828, where *j'utilisais déjà philosophiquement les lumières personnelles que cette triste expérience venait de me procurer si chèrement envers ce grand sujet* [VI:xii].

\(^{73}\) Chapter 3 of *The Divided Self* elaborates the concept. 'Man may have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and in a temporal sense, continuous person. As such he can live out in the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous. Such a basically *ontologically* secure person will encounter all the hazards of life... from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity' [Laing, 1969].

\(^{74}\) *En me procurant aussitôt une confirmation décisive de ma loi des trois états, et me faisant mieux sentir la relativité nécessaire de toutes nos conceptions, ce terrible épisode*
rules of 'first philosophy', which tells us that 'les images intérieurs, i.e. those which well up from the imagination, should normally be 'less clear and active than 'les impressions externelles', i.e. those whose route to the senses is from 'le dehors' [X:176]. As a rule for the intellect, the proposition is couched epistemologically. The same rule, however, converted into a maxim for la morale, is also advanced as the necessary condition for mental health\[^{75}\], a condition that could only be secured to the extent that the individual is firmly drawn outwards, and held there, by an emotionally cathected place outside\[^{76}\].

Fetishism, as the most archaic form of religion and of psycho-mental development, provided a paradigm for the working of that mechanism\[^{77}\]. It erred, to be sure, in attributing 'affections and wills' to inert matter, and in systematically confounding 'life' and 'spontaneous activity' [IX:87-8]. But it firmly externalized the drives of the psyche by fixing the latter in an attitude 'bordering on adoration' towards the imaginatively projected-upon dehors [IX:92]. All the successive synthesizing philosophies — through all the shades of theism, metaphysics, and now positivity — had functioned psychologically in the same way. All, likewise, had been able to do

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\[^{75}\] After noting that the 'fundamental static law of human understanding' is the subordination of 'subjective constructions to objective materials', Comte adds: 'Mais ce principe ne suffit pas pour caractériser la raison, puisq'il convient également à la folie, passagère ou permanente.' Hence the need for a second law, 'qui représente les images intérieurs comme moins vives et nettes que les impressions extérieures. Sans une telle infériorité, que l'aliénation fait cesser, le dehors ne pourrait jamias régler le dedans, qui qu'il continuât l'alimenter et même à le stimuler' [X:176].

\[^{76}\] 'Pour nous régler ou nous rallier, la religion doit donc, avant tout, nous subordonner à une puissance extérieure, dont l'irrésistible suprématie ne nous laisse aucune certitude' [VIII:12].
so because of a socially established dominance in the developmental epochs to which they belong. In every harmoniously operating case, a religiously buttressed consensus presented social members with an emotionally charged centre outside themselves which served at once to ‘rally’ sentiments, to coordinate them with the objects of thought and action, and, reinforced by the discipline of a régime, to ‘regulate’ the lower instincts [VIII:20-21]. Waning theistic belief, however, had weakened this mechanism, and the shattering of the Church without replacement had weakened it further. In the ensuing moral crisis, the outer solidarity of society and the inner solidarity of the individual had simultaneously come into question. In Comte’s understanding of the impact of social disintegration on individual subjectivity we can see the outline of the two-by-two matrix which Durkheim was to elaborate fifty years later in Suicide. Comte’s ‘rallying’ and ‘regulating’ dimensions of the internalized big Real are

77 ‘Outre que l’histoire trouve toujours le fétichisme au début de chaque civilisation, l’évolution personelle manifeste, avec une pleine évidence, ce point de départ nécessaire de toute intelligence, tant humaine qu’animal’ [IX:82].

78 It need hardly be said that Comte offers no empirical evidence whatever to substantiate the claim that, for example in the fifties years since the outbreak of the Revolution, the ‘moral crisis’ had worsened. This was precisely what Durkheim undertook to do in Suicide, examining historical changes and social variances in the suicide rate as the index of a similarly defined problem of social integration. His study begins by surveying the national rates in ten European countries between 1841 and 1878 [1951:46-53].

79 Durkheim’s Suicide highlights three main pathologies, egoism, anomie, and altruism. But a footnote at the end of chapter 5 indicates that ‘there is a type of suicide the opposite of anomic suicide, just as egoistic and altruistic suicides are opposites. It is the suicide deriving from excessive regulation, that of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline. So, for completeness’ sake, we should set up a fourth suicidal type. But it has little contemporary relevance and examples are so hard to find it seems useless to dwell on them. However it might be said to have historical interest. Do not the suicides of slaves belong to this type? ... We might call it fatalistic suicide’ [1951:276n]. Durkheim plainly has in mind a matrix like this:
recapitulated in Durkheim’ distinction between ‘ideals’ and ‘norms’. In which context, the breakdown of moral consensus is similarly conceived as upsetting the subjective balance of the individual by uncorking both the instinctual as such, and within that, the physical impulses that express themselves as limitless greed and desire. However, and leaving aside Durkheim’s liberal-individualist modification of Comte’s normative depiction of industrialism (and his added pathologies of altruisme and fatalisme), Comte collapses the distinction Durkheim also made between the disorders of egoisme and anomie, i.e. between deficiencies of rallying (ideals) and of regulation (norms). He thereby included within the same omnibus category -- égoisme -- disorders on the one hand of cognitive disorientation, and on the other of deficient impulse control. The conflation is itself occluded by the theory of internal and external impressions, the former driven by the affects, through which they are both, as confirmed by Comte’s own manic episode, explained. This enabled him, in turn, both to formulate a (socially embedded) theory of madness — an excess of subjectivity—, as well as to identify a polar opposite disorder of idiotisme which results from ‘too much submission to the external spectacle, with an insufficient internal reaction’ 80. However, it does not cross his mind that, in balancing internal and external impressions, there can also be too much mental unity; nor

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80 ‘Trop de soumission au spectacle extérieur, avec une insuffisante réaction intérieure, détermine l'idiotisme. La folie proprement dite se caractérise, au contraire, par l'excès de subjectivité, même sans hallucination, quand l'appareil méditatif ne rectifie pas les indications de l'appareil contemplatif’ [VIII:486]. ‘Idiotism’ is elsewhere identified with le moderne ascendant de l’objectivité, comprimant la spontanéité mentale, sous prétexte de réalité’. This of course has remained a conventional reproach against (small ‘p’) positivism. Comte imagines himself proof against the charge because of his completed
indeed, that over-unification was itself a problem for any program that attempted to transpose, onto the necessarily more individuated, and cyclonic, terrain of 'industrial society', the architectonics of an idealized medieval harmonie.

But Comte is not just an inferior (if formative) precursor of Durkheim. Classical French sociology, in freeing itself from Comte's theory of social dynamics, and especially from his formula for progress [Durkheim, 1964:18-20], also cut itself off from Comte's interest in time. In so doing, it abandoned reflection on the second aspect of Comte's thematization of the subjective aspect of the 'current crisis'. This concerned problems for individual orientation that flowed, not from a breakdown in consensus, but from disruptions that the birth of industrial society had brought with respect to continuité. Not the least of these concerned the need, in an unsettled post-Christian universe, to re-think the meaning of death.

*Continuity and death*

Comte had criticized (Catholic) Christianity not only for its obsolete belief in 'fictive beings', but also for the individualism of its salvation scheme. In the old religion, each believer was

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objectivism, which objectively incorporates the subjective, and subjectively apprehends that same totality.

81 The decisive break was made by Lévi-Strauss, in simultaneously declaring that history was the domain of contingency, synchronic social structures alone were scientifically knowable, and that attempts like Comte's to provide a model for history were themselves analyzable as myth. See his introduction to Mauss's *Le Don*, translated as chapter 1 of *Structural Anthropology* [Lévi-Strauss, 1967].

82 Monotheism indeed, at least in its completed Catholic form, is the very fount of egoism: "la théorie de l'égoïsme, bien que spéculativement propre ... à la philosophie métaphysique, y émana surtout de la théologie elle-même, qui ... aboutissait finalement,
encouraged, as a motivator for moral action, to focus on their own judged fate in the after-life. The re-focussing of moral affects and energies towards Humanity, and so towards the super-entity in which we really 'live, move and have our being', would remove this anti-social blemish. By the same token, however, a positivized world-view would remove the hope of personal immortality, together with the existentially orienting framework given by what was promised, or threatened, beyond the grave. It left, then, an evident lacuna. Without belief in Heaven, Hell, and an immortal soul, how could individual life -- let alone one dedicated to selfless abnegation -- be subjectively harmonized in the face of its apprehended finitude?

As with other dimensions of Positive Religion, Comte's response to the mortality question -- draws its form from the Catholicism it aims to supercede. An otherworldly heaven is declared a fiction. But the promise of a kind of immortality reappears through the process whereby faithful servants of Humanity are themselves posthumously incorporated into the...

dans la pratique, à une équivalente consécration, par la prépondérance, aussi exorbitante qu'inévitable, que toute la morale religieuse accorde nécessairement, comme je l'ai noté au sujet de qiéïtisme, à la préoccupation du salut personnel, dont la considération...doit naturellement disposer à méconnaître l'existence réelle des affections bienveillantes purement désintéressées' [V:577]. Already in the Philosophie positive, then, Comte is beginning to move towards a modification in his theory of stages, in which metaphysics and monotheism are grouped together as the bad but necessary transitional stage between the spontaneous initial harmony of fetishism, and the final harmony of Positivism.

83 In his 'appreciation' of monotheism in Politique positive Comte notes that what had to perish in Catholicism 'c'était la doctrine, et non l'organisation, qui n'a été passagèrement ruinée que par son adhésion élémentaire à la philosophie théologique ... tandis qu'une telle constitution, convenablement reconstructue sur des bases intellectuelles à la fois plus étendues et plus stables, devra finalement présider à l'indispensable réorganisation spirituelle des sociétés modernes' [V:392]. Catholicism, on this reading, was beset by a contradiction between its (egoistic and abstract) theory and its (love-engendering) cultic practice and organisational structure. Positivism would save the form
immortal body of Humanity⁴⁴. Individual existence is conceived as having two stages, first ‘objective’ and then ‘subjective’. The former is life itself, the latter a mode of existence, *la vie subjective*, which is purely imaginary and depends entirely on the memory that survives, and is perpetuated, in the consciousness of others [X:101-105]. To achieve that blessed state — at best to be venerated in prayer, in the manner of the saints — is to have a kind of perpetual life. Entry into a ‘subjective’ mode of existence parallels the Christian account in other respects too. Like the ascent of the soul into Heaven, the passage from ‘objective’ to ‘subjective’ being⁵⁵ entails a purification — not just in the sense that, upon dying, gross matter is transcended, but in the sublimer sense that the subjective being of one who persists in the mode of memory is idealized as the residue of a socially valued life⁶⁶ [VIII:61 et seq]. As such, indeed, it transmutes into a pure and efficacious force for good. ‘The noble existence which

of the one by replacing the content of the other. With such an affirmation, Mill and others should not have been so surprised by the religious innovations of 1847 onwards.

⁴⁴ ‘Chacun de ses vrais éléments comporte deux existences successives: l'une objective, toujours passagère, où il sert directement le Grand-Être, d'après l'ensemble des préparations antérieures; l'autre subjective, naturellement perpétuelle, où son service prolonge indirectement, par les résultats qu'il laisse à ses successeurs. À proprement parler, chaque homme ne peut presque jamais devenir un organe de l'Humanité que dans cette seconde vie...' [VIII:60].

⁵⁵ For those deemed worthy, seven years after *la consécration suprême* in the final ‘objective’ sacrament of transformation, ‘le sacrament subjectif complète la série des préparations objectives, en proclamant, devient le digner cercueil, une solennelle incorporation au Grand-Être’ [X:130].

⁶⁶ The memorial service in which the life of the deceased is publicly, and selectively, celebrated has become a social fixture even in a completely secular setting. Comte’s variant on this now well-worn idea was to give it an ontological status vis-à-vis Humanity — the dead other, purged of negative associations was to be not merely incorporated into the collective memory, but into the subjective being of Humanity. In earlier (medieval) form, as Ariès has shown [1981:143-5], the eulogy was associated with public demonstrations of grief and mourning, and of course mortals would not presume to make any moral judgments about the salvation of their soul.
perpetuates us in others becomes ... the worthy continuation of that by which we deserved this immortality' [XI:92]. Nor, finally, is the ‘subjective existence’ of the deceased wholly inert.

The dead with us are freed from material and vital necessities, and they leave us the memory of these only that we may represent them better as we knew them. But they do not cease to love and even to think, in us and through us. The sweet exchange of feelings and ideas that passed between us and them, during their objective life, becomes at once closer and more continuous when they are detached from bodily existence.

Like medieval Catholicism’s saints and angels, those who were true organs of Humanity during their life-time can continue to be so, then, from beyond the grave. As for the ‘damned’, i.e. those whose bad deeds at the end of the day outweigh the good, the ennobled prolongation of subjective existence in Humanist heaven is justly denied. Hardened criminals will be buried in unmarked graves. The most wicked, besides being capitally punished by the Temporal power, will be blotted out from public memory. Even their bodily remains will be symbolically unmarked, disappearing into the anatomical laboratories of medical science [X:75].

Comte’s secular transposition of Catholicism’s snakes-and-ladders schema of personal immortality rested, however, on a crucial assumption. Namely, that individuals would actually be remembered, both privately and, for the most worthy, through public perpetuation in the collective memory. But -- and here was the deeper problem -- this could not be at all guaranteed. Just as industrialization had brought chronic problems concerning consensus and

87 ‘Nos morts sont affranchis des nécessités matérielles et vitales, dont ils ne nous laissent le souvenir que pour nous les mieux représenter tels que nous les connûmes. Mais ils ne cessent pas d’aimer, et même de penser, en nous et par nous, Le doux échange de
solidarity, so too, in the stormy the passage from feudalism, appropriate mechanisms to ensure continuité had signally failed to emerge. Care for the collective memory could certainly no longer be left to Christianity. Its own memorials, which praised saints and martyrs but ignored great thinkers, statesmen, and artists, were egregiously one-sided and selective. Also, as displayed by unattended church graveyards, the Church’s attitude to the more ordinary dead was affected by a mystical notion of resurrection that used fear of death to orient believers towards a wholly otherworldly salvation. In other ways, however, the metaphysical camp was worse. With its blind trust in ‘Reason, it had been as unthinking about the prerequisites of social unity through time as it has of those in space. ‘The living rise up against the dead, as witnessed by a blind hostility towards the whole of the middle ages, poorly compensated by an irrational admiration for antiquity’ [IX:367]. It had no pious sense of commemorative continuity at all.

The crucial importance to Comte of (morally selective) memorialization becomes even clearer when we realize that what was at stake in ensuring it was not only the proper edification of individuals, and a socially ramified scaffolding of deep personal incentives to induce an altruistic commitment to the human good. What is re-membered in all the memorializing practices prescribed by Positivism is Humanity itself. Nor was this just in the metonymic sense that, in the cult, each person remembered symbolizes the whole. The point concerns, rather, the kind of whole it is. No more than ‘society’ does ‘Humanity’ consist only of the

sentiments et d'idées que nous entretenions avec eux, pendant leur objectivité, devient à la fois plus intime et plus continu quand ils sont dégagés de l'existence corporelle [XI:92].
synchronously interconnected body of the living. The space of its existence includes the fourth dimension of time. It is intergenerational. Humanity includes, then, not just those presently with us, but also the dead, who live on only in our minds. It also includes those not yet born, who constitute a future horizon for our furthest aims. However, human history is entering its final, fully ‘mature’, stage. So the ratio between ‘objectively’ and ‘subjectively’ existent members (i.e. between the living and the dead) has tilted decisively towards the latter. The larger part of Humanity is a memory-trace within the subjectivity of that diminishing minority currently alive. Without memorialization, then, not only would society lack the unifying ties of ‘continuity’ which help give it, in the Aristotelian sense, an identity as perduring. L’Humanité, as the now mostly imaginary and (in memory) morally transfigured object of faith and service, would cease to exist.

Altogether, then, the discontinuation of continuité posed a further, and profound, problem of moral order. Without a shared sense of historical participation, without the subjective motivator of being at least well-remembered, how could altruism prevail? This aspect of the matter is what Comte foregrounds. But, underneath the issue of moral regulation and

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88 ‘En effet, l’anarchie occidentale consiste principalement dans l’altération de la continuité humaine, successivement violée par le catholicisme maudissant l’antiquité, le protestantisme réprouvant le moyen âge, et le déisme niant toute filiation’ [IX:2].
89 ‘Vous devez, ma fille, définir d’abord l’Humanité comme l’ensemble des êtres humains, passés, futurs et présents’. Of course, not everyone is included in this ‘ensemble’ (hence its emphasis), but ‘ceux-là seuls qui sont réellement assimilables, d’après une vraie coopération à l’existence commune’ [XI:66].
90 ‘Les vivants sont toujours, et de plus en plus, gouvernés nécessairement par les morts: telle est la loi fondamentale de l’ordre humain’ [XI:68].
91 Indeed, the more developed l’espèce humaine, the more that the question of continuité the primary moral problem. ‘Ainsi, la vraie sociabilité consiste davantage dans la continuité successive que dans la solidarité actuelle’ [XI:68].
integration, the current situation also raised an existential spectre which, if not directly mentioned, is implicit in his diagnosis, and, subjectively speaking, is more fundamental still.

Edith Wyschogrod’s *Spirit in Ashes* explores the contemporary aporias for what she calls the ‘authenticity paradigm’ lying at the heart of classical strategies for absorbing the ‘wound of death’, in an epoch when the real continuity of the human species has come to be threatened by the onset of the total ‘death-world’ and ‘man-made mass death’ [1985:8]. According to this paradigm, it is the worthiness of the life lived in a shared and ongoing life-world that sustains the mortal subject. But there can be no such ontological security, no larger moral or logotherapeutic framework, if the everyday or world-historical continuity of time cannot be taken for granted. Wyschogrod’s work concerns the undermining effects of the loss of a future horizon, and it addresses an absolute limit since it raises the issue in the context of *objective* threats to standing. What Comte was confronting was a lesser problem, perhaps. It concerned the merely social breakdown of institutions surrounding the collective memory. What this threatened was just the *subjective* continuity of social time. But it similarly put in question the referentiality, through meaningful deeds and thoughts, of individuals’ lives for others, and thus their *mental* standing as self-consciously finite projective being. Such a breakdown, if it ever became complete would just as surely nihilate Hegel’s Absolute Spirit as Comte’s Humanity, and would just as surely invalidate, therefore, what his de-supernaturalized salvation scheme at once presupposes and aims to maintain: the classical moral response to the meaning of a transient life.
Comte signaled the extent of his concern through a drastic and thoroughgoing proposal: the mnemonic assembly and maintenance of the finest in the human tradition through the vast sepulchral and museal labour of a new Church. Indeed, the Church of Humanity is to be one vast exercise in memorialization — from its celebratory Calendar of benefactors, culminating in a ‘festival for all the dead’ [VII:344], to its funeral shrines and parks, to the private prayers through which the faithful, thrice, daily rekindle their ardour for the Goddess by recalling the finest features of the finest dear departed they can effusively bring to mind\textsuperscript{92}. No doubt, if tradition, and still more the capacity for one, were wholly extinct, Positivism’s syncretic embrace of all the memory cults surrounding family, country, and humanity would have had nothing to build on. Unlike Burke, however, Comte can place no trust in the slowly baking cake of custom, nor in the healthy accretion of popular ‘prejudices’\textsuperscript{93}. That which holds together social time and social space has withered into a defensive clinging to pre-industrial forms against the nihilists of abstracted rationality; while both the spontaneous operations of collective memory, and the ability of these operations to adapt to new scientific-technical conditions, has atrophied. Altogether, the continuist temporality of the organically social has hollowed out, leaving the pressing need for a rationally engineered substitute.

\textsuperscript{92} For the Positivist manner of prayer in \textit{le culte personnel}, see Gouhier [1965:221-2]. Each session, carefully timed and subdivided, would consist in general of a \textit{commémoration} followed by an \textit{effusion}, on the supplicant’s knees before the altar.

\textsuperscript{93} While Comte railed against the insensitiveness of contemporary ‘metaphysicians’ to ‘the best of the Medieval traditions’ [IX:533], his own appropriation of them was more of an abduction, and allows Hayek, for example, to include Comte in his devil’s gallery of totalitarian social engineers [Hayek:191-206]. There is at the same time at least an abstract affinity between Comte’s notion of Humanity as an intergenerational process and Burke’s view that society is a ‘partnership not only of those who are living, but between
What made the situation increasingly urgent was that if the unraveling went too far, just as with the dissolving of solidarity, it might undermine the subjective capacity for society to overcome it. On both scores, the unspoken fear was that it might already be too late. In face of this, the sheer artifice of Comte’s proffered antidote -- which of course he instituted not least for himself -- is striking. The totally encompassing regimen of Positive Religion, blueprinted down to the last detail, resembles nothing so much as the frantic attempt to resuscitate a corpse.

\[\text{those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are not yet born' [Burke, 1965:117].}\]
CHAPTER FIVE

LOVE AND THE SOCIAL BODY

The notion that the darkest night is just before dawn is a commonplace of Western eschatology. In the secularized version of that trope, which surfaced in the dream of an immanent and imminent social transformation during the epoch of bourgeois revolution, and which was a pronounced feature of radical thinking on both sides of the Rhine before during and after the traumatic course of actual revolution in France, the contrast was between a coming reign of reason and freedom and a darkening night of repression, corruption and stupidity, in which old monarchical-clerical regimes were obtusely blocking the path of historical progress. For Hegel, the Jacobin terror was itself the darkest moment. Thereafter, in the disillusioned light of capitalist day, it was the ravages of primitive accumulation and early industrial production in the ‘dark satanic mills’ that provided the nadir of self-caused social misery against which to set the millenarian hope. Whence, via both Saint-Simonian and left-

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1 In the translation of Biblical into political themes Norman Cohn’s classic study, *The Pursuit of the Millenium*, argues the formative role of late medieval millenarianism. He especially emphasizes the modern influence of the trinitarian historical schema (age of the Father, age of the Son, Age of the Holy Ghost) developed by the thirteenth century Franciscan mystic, Joachim of Fiore. Whatever the subterranean import of this for Hegel, Comte’s grand historical model was more binary than trinitarian. Two organic unities -- the fetishist/spontaneous synthesis of humanity’s childhood, and the perfected order of our Positivist maturity -- are joined by a long transitional period of troubles corresponding to our collective youth.

2 In the Hegelian narrative, absolute freedom negating itself in the Revolution’s abstract veneration of a wholly insubstantial beyond is the dramatic climax of Enlightenment, before its final sublation in the rise of ‘the moral life of Spirit’ [1967:610]. ‘The remote beyond that lies beyond this its actual reality, hovers over the corpse of the vanished independence of what is real or believed to be, and hovers there merely as an exhalation of stale gas, of the empty être suprême’ [Hegel, 1967:602].
Hegelian translations, the figure made its way into the imaginary of all variants of modern socialism, framing a sense of time which has been, and remains, intrinsic to the very formation of the left as a political and ideological force. Picking a phrase of Rosa Luxemburg that had been a rallying cry in the Spartacist uprising in 1919, a French neo-Trotskyist circle launched a journal in 1949 with the name Socialisme ou Barbarisme⁢. When Jean-Francois Lyotard, who had been a member of its editorial collective, associated himself with contemporary ‘suspicion towards all meta-narratives’ in The Postmodern Condition he was distancing himself not only from totalizing philosophies of history that saw that process culminating in a realized and redeemed humanity, but also from the apocalyptic, and polarized, sense of time to which such thought-grounding teleologies were linked⁴.

In all these cases, from the Book of Revelations to the contestative-utopian gestures and happenings of May 1968, we see the same figure -- disaster turning to triumph, misery to bliss — being used, above all, to provide a definition of the present. It is a definition that can at once console, inspire and make sense of a fluid yet frustratingly intractable historical situation. It has its echoes, too, in the traditions of the radical right, as for example in Heidegger’s play

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³ Its leading figures were Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and Edgar Morin. For the history of the journal and its role in May 1968 see Starr [1995:24-30]. For Lyotard’s relations with the journal, which he left in 1964, see Smart: 35-36.

⁴ It may be said that Lyotard retains, in the very image of the postmodern, a version of the same trope -- the dreadful totalitarianisms of modernism co-existing, in the present, with the promise of a new (unpresentable) sublime: ‘We have paid dearly for our nostalgia for the all and the one, for a reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, for a transparent and communicable experience. Beneath the general demand for relaxation and appeasement we hear murmurings of the desire to reinstitute terror and fulfill the phantasm of taking possession of reality. The answer is: war on totality. Let us attest to the unpresentable, let us activate the differends and save the honour of the name’ [1992:24-5].
with Hölderlin’s line ‘But where danger grows / The saving power is also’\textsuperscript{15}. The effect of linking this experience of time with a teleological view of human history is to determine the present as the last stage of a crisis of transition which will usher in the wonderful, actualized and redeemed world in which the whole process culminates. The present, then, is endowed with a transcendental meaning. It constitutes — with maximum perils and maximum promise — the crucial because \textit{penultimate} moment in the human story.

Comte, in these terms, is clearly a ‘penultimatist’. The present age was wracked by ‘\textit{une grande}’, in which the very capacity of the human collectivity to survive as a collectivity was mortally at stake. Hence the pressing need for the emergency repair job of a new, revitalizing, religious institution. But looked at calmly, through the Olympian eyes of a predictive science, the crisis was \textit{passagère}, a passing necessity in the longer arc of crisis which reached back to the fourteenth century and which was destined to usher in Humanity’s \textit{final}, and finally ‘\textit{normal}’, state of order and realized progress\textsuperscript{6}. All that was needed to bring the disorderly epoch of metaphysics, individualism and social anarchy to an end was the synthesizing, synergising and sympathising reforms that Comte’s own efforts were designed, at an

\textsuperscript{15} ‘The self-same danger is, when it is as the danger, the saving power...in as much as it brings the saving power out of its -- the danger’s -- concealed essence that is ever susceptible of turning’ [1977:42]. And so it is with ‘modern technology’: ‘Will insight into that which is disclosingly near bring itself into being...Will we see the lightning flash of Being in the essence of technology?’ [ibid:29]

\textsuperscript{6} The \textit{opuscule} of 1822 opens thus: ‘Un \textit{système social qui s’éteint, un nouveau système parvenu à son entière maturité et qui tend à se constituer, tel est le caractère fondamental assigné à l’époque actuelle par la marche générale de la civilisation...Elle est conduite vers l’état social définitif de l’espèce humaine, le plus convenable à sa nature, celui où tous les moyens de prospérité doivent recevoir leur plus entier développement et leur application plus directe [Xapp:47].
adequately prepared point in time, to bring in train. Humanity, unveiled to Comte as le vraie Grand-Être, was on the edge of revealing its true destination to all.

As with other progressivist philosophies of history, Comte's telos is derivatively Christian. According to the laws of social development, 'Man becomes more and more loving', while 'Humanity becomes more and more religious' [IX:10]. At the summit of that development is an apprehension that 'we are every one members of one another'; as if the human collectivity had itself become tantamount to the deus communis which the Incarnationist doctrine had foregrounded over the deus absconditus of an older monotheism. Altogether, Comte's perfected humanity is a society-become-universal, a world united and perpetually at peace; and one that has become so because, propelled by its objective yet redemptive logic, the human community has been transfigured into one large family bound together by love. Such images today are banalized in Coke and Beneton commercials. Yet their promotional use suggests their continuing ideological power. Some such notion of future community, founded on the saving power of human love, continues to subtend progressive impulses, whether liberal and meliorist or socialist and revolutionary. In postmodern intellectual circles one could say that it is the conscious withdrawal of this horizon -- in disavowal as well as disappointment -- which negatively lends force to the thinking of 'postmarxists' too.

The Pauline reference is explicit. 'On voit déjà l'admirable saint Paul devancer, par le sentiment, la conception de l'Humanité, dans cette image touchante mais contradictoire: nos sommes tous les membres les uns des autres. Le principe positiviste devait seul révéler le tronc unique auquel appartiennent nécessairement tous ses membres spontanément confus' [XI:70; emphasis in original].

For a powerful analysis of the 'logics of failed revolt' detectable within the post-68 writings of the French post-structuralists see Starr [1995:15-34].
As obsolete as the scientific basis now is which Comte tried to provide for the axial place of love in the scheme of things, it did represent a systematic attempt to cash out Saint-Simon’s ambition to base moral and political principles on a science of man\(^9\) and in so doing to reflect 'positively' on the fundamental nature of what the Western tradition has long regarded as its supreme ethical value. It did so moreover not only with respect to the relation between love and (a physicalist) psychology, but also with reference to the anatomy of the social. Indeed, Comte’s account of the affective element in social relations represents a seminal effort to delineate, at both the individual and social levels, the determinants of what a Freudian tradition calls the 'libidinal economy'\(^{10}\). In this context, critical reflection on Comte’s version of a love-centred social teleology can serve two purposes. On one hand, the very fullness of Comte’s conceptualization can aid in the development of a framework for assessing the logic and categories employed in all such thematizations. On the other, Comte’s eccentric blending of Catholic-conservative with liberal-progressive visions of love and community provides an intriguing reference-point for interrogating other versions of that ideal, and especially those, from communitarian to social-democratic, which are more heavily weighted towards the latter. His combined championing of social love and rejection of radical egalitarianism oppose him

\(^{9}\) The emphasis must be on ‘systematic’. As Gouhier notes, such an idea was widespread at the time; furthermore, Comte’s starting point was in mathematics and biology, whereas Saint-Simon was turning from physiology to political economy as the basis for such a science at the precise moment when Comte became his secrétaire. For a detailed account of the relation and differences between their projects, see Volume III of Gouhier’s *La Jeunesse d’Auguste Comte*, especially 385-407.

\(^{10}\) But of course without any concept of the unconscious, and with *les penchants* and *les sentiments* instead of desire. Comte used the paired terms *économie individuelle/economie sociale* to speak of the ensemble of active/intellectual/affective field of forces in play.
both to Marx and to Nietzsche. His insistence that love and social unity be thought through in relation not only to space, as solidarity, but in relation to time, as continuity, also points to a dimension of the problem of 'community' which - pace Innis's 'Plea for time'\(^\text{11}\) - has largely dropped out of sight\(^\text{12}\).

Whatever we make of Comte's 'cerebral physiology' and grand narrative of historical progress, then, and besides the intricacies and amplitude of his would-be scientific rationale for the ideal he believed to be in course of realization, Comte's characterization of love in relation to individual and social being is still in certain respects worth pondering. In Comet's religion of love - and religion for him was always, whether it knew it or not, the social organizer of love -

\(^{11}\) According to Innis, a declining concern for time has resulted from the progressive techno-economic movement of industrialism itself: 'Industrialism implies technology and the cutting of time into precise fragments suited to the needs of the engineer and the accountant' [1982:40]. This effect might have been subsumed under Comte's point about industrialism and l'esprit de détails, except that Comte considers the dissonant effect of the latter exclusively with regard to social space (solidarity), and not at all with regard to social time (continuity). The modern rupture with continuity is taken to have ideological causes, related to the more generally anarchic and destructive thrust of 'metaphysics'.

\(^{12}\) The concern for 'roots' in contemporary ethno-cultural discussion (as for example in Bernal's Black Athena), might be taken as a counter-example, though it is generally less focussed on recovering continuity per se than in forging collective identities out of rediscovered (or invented) origins. For a broad-ranging discussion of the place of tradition in the current (era of downsizing etc) 'realignment' of left and right see Giddens 1994. 'Socialists', he observes, more often than not find themselves trying to conserve existing institutions — most notably the welfare state — rather than to undermine them. And who are the attackers, the radicals who wish to dismantle existing structures? Why, quite often they are none other than the conservatives — who it seems wish to conserve no longer' [1994:22]. Today, we might add, besides the question of the welfare state discussed by Giddens, the university and its autonomy are likewise at issue in this paradoxical political cross-fire, together indeed with a whole host of 'traditional' public institutions from broadcasting and highways to (in Britain) the monarchy.
we confront an eminently challengeable, yet possibly instructive, variant of love itself as an ethical and political ideal.

**Individual and society**

Comte's 'individual' and 'society' are evidently implicated in one another, yet he by no means reduced the psychological determinations of the individual to the over-riding fact of this implication, any more than he reduced his understanding of the determinations of the social solely to that of a single human organism writ large. In delineating his conception of love in relation to the constitution of human society, then, we must first disentangle its sociological and individual-psychological elements. After that (in the next chapter), we can dynamise the model to see how Comte conceived of love as a growing historical force -- a force that was destined, at once, to replace violence as the affective foundation of social unity, and to universalize into a generalized benevolence that would embrace not only the perfect wholeness achieved by the human species as it became at last pervasively réligieux and aimant, but even the planet and the 'universal order' beyond.

All begins, and ends, with the question of order. Progress is its perfecting. In Comte's understanding of the 'general laws of life' there is more than a shadow of Aristotle's natural

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13 The analogy was of the 'yes, but' variety: 'Il serait... irrationel... de vouloir servilement conformer l'analyse fondamentale de l'organisme collectif à celle de l'organisme individuel... Toutefois, la similitude essentielle des deux cas statiques doit déterminer un certain correspondance...' [VIII:289].
entelechies, and (perhaps through Leibnitz) of the scholastics' appeal to a language of 'substantial forms'\textsuperscript{15}. In positivist terms though, there could be no attribution of final causes. So if nature nonetheless behaved as if there were, this must be accounted for in some other way. Comte's accounting unfolded within a wider effort to square a conception of the biological organism — the phenomenal entities of the new life sciences of botany, biology and physiology — with the mechanistic principles which had proved so effective in scientifically mastering the non-life domains of astronomy and physics\textsuperscript{16}. Differences of quality, Comte never tires of assuring us, including (as Brossais had apparently demonstrated) the difference

\textsuperscript{14} 'Aucune doctrine n'a même tenté cette fusion, qu'il établit spontanément...d'après son échelle encyclopédique...d'où résulte aussitôt son efficacité pratique... L'ordre devient alors la condition permanent du progrès, tandis que le progrès constitue le but continu de l'ordre. Enfin, par une plus profonde appréciation, le positivisme représente le progrès humain comme consistant toujours dans le simple développement de l'ordre fondamental, qui contient nécessairement le germe de tous les progrès possible' [VII:105].

\textsuperscript{15} For the importance of this notion for Spinoza and Leibnitz see Woolhouse [1993:9-12]. 'Substantial' forms are contrasted with secondary, or 'accidental forms'. The latter can change without affecting the ongoing and defining essence of an entity, while the former define an entity's 'essential unity', in so far as it is an \textit{entia per se} and therefore has one. The principle that progress is always the progress of order can easily be translated into such terms. For Comte, organicity is the 'substantial form' of all organisms as such. There is thus an essential continuity with respect to that form however it develops; a form that in essential respects perdures, therefore, not only throughout human history, but also throughout \textit{la série animale}, from the most primitive unicellular creature to \textit{l'Humanité} itself.

\textsuperscript{16} For Comte's discussion of mechanics — as established in mathematics and developed in the physical science — for the formation of biology, see \textit{Leçon 38} of the \textit{Cours}, especially III: 323-342. After disposing of the reductionist notion that the biological domain is calculable in the same way as the less complex domains of inorganic phenomena, Comte excoriates 'l'absurde principale de la prétendue indépendance des êtres vivants à l'égard des lois universelles du monde matériel'. This has led 'les physiologistes à regarder ces êtres comme essentiellement soustrait à l'empire des théories fondamentales de l'équilibre et du mouvement; tandis que ces théories constituent, au contraire, la véritable base élémentaire de l'économie organique envisagée sous cet aspect' [III:331-2].
between normality and pathology can always be understood as differences in magnitude with respect to the limits of equilibrium [III:261-3]. Whence the importance he ascribed to advances since the seventeenth century which had led mathematics, through Cartesian geometry and differential calculus, to a general theory of mechanics. These advances held the prospect, he believed, of describing the complex dynamics of life-forms and thereby grasping, if not the 'hidden causes' of life, then at least the mathematical properties of the regularities of concomitance and succession which life-forms exhibited in what we could observe of their 'events'.

From the three laws of motion, identified with Kepller (inertia), Galileo (co-variance of all elements in a system) and Newton (equivalence of action and reaction), and developed into a general theory by Lagrange and others, Comte derived a general equilibrium theory applicable to complex systems. Within the given range of stability conditions, equilibrium is self-correcting, a principle that applies not only to static systems but also to dynamic ones, including those composed of forces vivants [I:600-604]. In this abstract but universally applicable sense, order dominates progress, and an entity's manner of organization, and re-organization, dominates its course of development. As the 13th Law of Positivism's 'first philosophy' puts it: 'Always subordinate the theory of motion to that of existence, by looking

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17 It was for this reason that 'parmi les trois éléments essentielles [logic/number/algebra; geometry; and mechanics] que nous avons reconnu dans l'ensemble de la philosophie mathématique, c'est surtout la mécanique qui s'applique à la biologie sous le point de vue scientifique proprement dit' [III:341].

18 Summarized in the 'mainly objective' laws, 10-12, of first philosophy [XI:388]. For an elaboration of Comte's understanding of the laws of static and dynamic mechanics as they pertain to the theory of equilibrium, see Leçon 18 of the Cours, especially 567-589.
on all progress as the development of the particular order in question, the conditions of such order, whatever they be, regulating the mutations which together make up the evolution.\(^19\)

But what about the order, and orderly progress through all the metamorphoses of its life-cycle, of that life-form Comte called 'society'? If it was a life-form -- and certainly, like other organisms, it actively maintained itself by modifying the milieu on which it was physically dependent\(^20\) -- then it should at least obey the general laws of life, which included that in-built tendency to dynamic equilibrium which he conceived as order-in-progress. However, as witnessed by the very crisis Comte was seeking to address, order in the social sphere could hardly be regarded as automatic. It could readily, and deeply, be disturbed. This was indeed just the point. The question of order in relation to social development was a special case, and it was so because of the special kind of 'existence' society constituted.

What distinguished society from all the other organisms studied by the life sciences was not just its unparalleled size and complexity, but the problematic manner in which the individual organisms of which it was comprised combined into a vital system [VIII:288-30]. Unlike cells

\(^{19}\) 'Subordonner toujours la théorie du mouvement à celle de l'existence, en concevant tout progrès comme le développement de l'ordre correspondant, dont les conditions quelconques régissent les mutations, qui constituent l'évolution' [XI:388].

\(^{20}\) 'Le mode d'existence des corps vivants est... nettement caractérisé par une dépendance extrêmement étroite des influences extérieurs...[P]lus on s'élève dans la hiérarchie organique, plus en général cette dépendance augmente nécessairement, par la plus grande complication qu'éprouve le système des conditions d'existence à mesure que les fonctions se développent en se diversifiant davantage...[S]i des fonctions plus variées multipliant inévitablement les relations extérieures, l'organisme...réagit en même temps de plus en plus sur le système ambiant, de manière à le modifier en sa faveur' [III:226-7].
in a physical body — whose existence and importance Comte in any case doubted\textsuperscript{21} — each individual within the human group is capable, if not of living entirely outside the social ensemble (as god or beast, noted Aristotle) then certainly of acting, thinking and feeling at variance with it. Each individual has its own conditions and imperatives of life; independently of social requirements, it has a mind and will of its own. The parallelism between the systematic conception of the individual organism and the collective organism could not then be complete, 'since the composite nature of the one differs profoundly from the indivisible constitution of the other' [VIII:228]. To be sure, for Comte it was not individuals but 'organs' and 'tissues' that formed the irreducible elements of \textit{l'organisme universel}\textsuperscript{22}. Nevertheless, without the cooperation of individuals these latter could not even exist. Thus the achievement of order in society involved not only a harmony of 'organs and functions' corresponding to the equilibrium conditions proper to its stage of development. It also required the successful combining of individual human organisms into a group that was sufficiently unified, in the first place, to have functions and organs capable of operating at a social level. Social operation, in other words, necessitated inter-individual co-operation\textsuperscript{23}.

\textsuperscript{21} Comte saw the concept of 'cell' as an illicit analogy from the molecule of chemistry [III:343]. He also considered that the idea harboured a metaphysical search for the essential substance of 'life', as opposed to his own approach which emphasized its overall mode of 'organization' [III:228 et seq]. According to Pickering [1993:595], Comte's rejection of cellular theory (as well as vivisection and microscopic research) meant that 'Comte failed to put himself at the forefront of biological research' and 'proved embarrassing to some of his disciples'.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Il faut surtout distinguer entre les éléments, immédiats ou médiats, propres à l'organisme universel, et les agents our représentants qu'il exige. Tout être devant se former de ses semblables, l'Humanité se décompose, d'abord en Cités, puis en Familles, mais jamais en individus} [X:31].
So the question arises about the nature of co-operation itself. The possibility of this freely occurring implies the willingness of individuals to forego individual interests in favor of collective ones, an attitude of unselfish sociality which Comte called altruisme. Put this way, the whole moral problem of society, indeed the moral secret of religion itself, was how to secure the preponderance of altruistic over egoistic instincts. This would not be a problem if, as with ants and bees, the requisite cooperative spirit (l'esprit d'ensemble) was instinctually dominant, and thus biologically guaranteed. On the other hand, however, if there were no instinctual basis for cooperation whatever it could only ever be achieved coercively, that is through the forced unity of a group held in thrall by 'the right of the strongest', or by mutually exercised violence. This, though, could hardly be thought of as a real bonding between individuals, and would leave the social as such unexplained.

The human nature debates that traversed early modern political theory had pitted partisans of 'natural goodness', like Shaftesbury, against those, like Hobbes, who asserted, in conformity with the doctrine of original sin, the limitless egoism of human desire²⁴. Between these positions Comte, in effect, steered a mid-way course, one not far indeed, in its dynamic and dialectical understanding of the human faculties, from that of Rousseau. Like the citizen of

²³ In general terms, 'Une conciliation permanente entre le concours et l'indépendance constitue le noeud fondamental de la socialité'. Comte conceded that the balance might be upset, and that the collective existence would be destroyed 'si le concours pouvait jamais éteindre l'indépendance. Car la coopération humaine exige autant la séparation des efforts que leur convergence jamais'. But this was not the main problem. 'Le danger consiste surtout dans l'excès d'indépendance, plus imminent que l'excès de concours, sauf des exceptions aussi courtes que rares [X:34].

²⁴ The relation of these positions to the theory of progress is discussed in Bury [177 et seq].
Geneva\textsuperscript{25}, Comte held that human impulses were dichotomous, divided into a conflicting and mutually interacting set of self-regarding impulses on the one hand, and a set of other-regarding ones, on the other, linked to natural sympathy for fellow creatures\textsuperscript{26}.

But two things distinguished Comte's version of this position. One was his insistence that the understanding of instincts\textsuperscript{27}, and their relation to reason and the formation of will, be placed on a physiological basis\textsuperscript{28}. The second -- closely related -- was that the two sets of instincts,

\\hspace{0.5cm}25\textit{Comte himself} judged this midway position to have been best developed (among the metaphysical thinkers) by Hume, Smith and Ferguson, \textit{`l'école écossaise, qui admettait la sympathie en même temps que l'égoïsme} [III:630]. Comte's invariably negative references to Rousseau allude mainly to \textit{The Social Contract}, and never to the \textit{Second Discourse}.

\\hspace{0.5cm}26 In his general discussion of this distinction in chapter 45 of the \textit{Cours} (the ten components of the instinctual/phrenological 'series' are only specified and systematized in Volume I, chapter 3, of \textit{Politique positive}), Comte follows Gall in labeling the egoistic instincts as \textit{penchants} and the altruistic ones as \textit{sentiments} [III:640]. In his later revision of Gall, however, he reserves the former term for 'the instincts when active' and the latter for 'the instincts when passive' [VII:680]. As for the egoistic/altruistic distinction itself, Comte offers, as a working definition, that the former \textit{`rapporte simplement à l'individu isolé, ou tout au plus, à la seule famille, successivement envisagée dans ses principaux besoins de conservation, tels que la reproduction, l'éducation des petits, le mode d'alimentation, de séjour, d'habitation etc, tandis que le second genre, plus spécial, suppose plus ou moins l'existence de quelques rapports sociaux, soit entre des individus d'espèce différente, soit surtout entre les individus de la même espèce} [III:640-1].

\\hspace{0.5cm}27 The term instinct itself was broadly defined, so as to include all the classical 'faculties'. It included \textit{`toute impulsion spontanée vers une direction déterminée, indépendamment d'aucune influence étrangère'} [622]. This accorded with his notion, again developed from Gall, that not only the 'affective motors' but also the 'intellectual functions' and 'practical qualities' (courage, prudence, perseverance) were 'interior functions of the brain'. Comte's full classification is given in the \textit{tableau systématique} appended to \textit{Politique positive} [VII:727].

\\hspace{0.5cm}28 \textit{`La théorie positive des fonctions affectives et intellectuelles est donc irrévocablement conçue comme devant désormais consister dans l'étude, à la fois expérimentale et rationelle, des divers phénomènes de sensibilités intérieurs propres aux ganglions cérébraux...'} [III:608-9]
altruistic and egoistic, were set into a larger natural hierarchy. It was indeed a double scale, in which the affective refinement and moral worth of an instinct was inversely proportional to its natural force [IV:440-2]. It was this which framed the contradictory insertion of the individual into the group. In the case of the individual psyche, the 'coarsest' (plus grossiers) instincts -- which comprised the egoistic impulses of the body (hunger and sex) its activity (the 'instinct for self improvement') and of the soul (vanity and ambition) -- were more energetic and powerful than the 'worthier' (plus dignes) ones of social sympathy [III:619]. Yet what was functionally important for the formation and life of la société was the preponderance of the latter over the former. Hence the perennial moral problem of ensuring, through some form of social intervention, that the biologically natural hierarchy of impulses in the individual was corrected, and indeed reversed29.

Comte's conception of the affective basis of the social tie was opposed, it will be clear, not only to any merely negative conception of sociality founded in fear and coercion, but to any version of contract theory. The objection that a situation in which individuals consciously combine, by a founding and implicitly repeated act of will, already presupposes the social state it would explain, had been formulated by many thinkers before Comte, including both Rousseau and De Maistre30. Comte similarly stressed the impossibility of a social bond resting

29 'De la résulte le grand problème humain....: subordonner, autant que possible, la personnalité à la sociabilité, en rapportant tout à L'Humanité. L'état social tend toujours vers cette inversion radicale de l'économie individuelle, parce qu'il développe nécessairement le plus faible instinct et comprime le plus énergique [VII:692].

30 Of course, if both reject the idea that society was founded on an original compact, they differed with respect to whether the procedure of deriving society from a prior state of nature was itself admissible. Thus Rousseau: 'The philosophers, who have enquired into
solely on the exercise of the mind [III:618]. For him, indeed, contract-based theories of the social were not just incorrect. They symptomatised a broader aspect of contemporary's humanity's long metaphysical disorder: the linked rebellions of the individual against the social, and of the head against the heart. Only a mind already impelled by needs welling up from benevolent, altruistic, instincts could think, in the first place, from the perspective of the social interest. The price of this not being the case was that the thought of individuals would be impelled by the a-social, not to say anti-asocial, instincts of egoism. Even, then, for the achievement of the *philosophical* consensus which Comte envisaged as the pre-condition for a restored social unity, a more primordial, affective, bonding between individuals was necessary. That it was possible at all -- despite the spontaneous and driven selfishness of individuals -- depended on the existence of an actual impulse for sociability. The totality of sub-instincts which made up this impulse -- *attachement, vénération* and *bonté*, or *bienveillance* [VIII:16] - - together comprised what Comte called *l'amour*.

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31 ‘*Car la prépondérance actuelle de nos facultés affectives n’est pas seulement indispensable pour retirer continuellement notre faible intelligence de sa léthargie native, mais aussi pour donner à son activité quelconque un but permanent et une direction déterminée sans lesquels elle s’égarerait nécessairement en de vagues et incohérentes spéculations abstraites*’ [IV:439].

32 Of these three, the first two were qualified as ‘special’, as having a circumscribed object of affection, while the latter was ‘general’ because its object was diffuse. This generality made *bienveillance* alone of the three wholly disinterested. Hence it was ‘*l’instinct*
Love and the social tie

'Love', it will be noted, is for Comte a plural force: les sentiments sociaux. This accorded with his version of Gall's 'cerebral physiology'\(^3\). But it also accorded, from the side of sociology, with what he took to be the complexity of the social tie. In the case of a social group whose members are personally known to one another and whose interaction is face-to-face, the social tie can readily be conceived to consist in the direct bonds of affection that form directly and dyadically between pairs of individuals. The overall result, in that case, is that the group so formed is intensively bound together so that it assumes the form of a 'veritable union'\(^3\). But what of the case of larger groups in which encounter and interaction are more sporadic, or in that of national societies where interaction between more than subsets of

\(3\) 'Ces penchants supérieurs sont peu nombreux: mais on ne pourrait les réduire à un seul, sans retomber aussitôt dans la confusion métaphysique d'où Gall nous a retirés' [VII:701].

\(3\) 'Il est incontestable que l'ensemble des relations domestiques ne correspond point à une association proprement dite, mais qu'il compose une véritable union... À raison de sa profonde intimité, la liaison domestique est donc d'une tout autre nature que la liaison sociale. Son vrai caractère est essentiellement moral ... Fondée sur l'attachement et la reconnaissance, l'union domestique est surtout destinée à satisfaire directement, par sa seule existence, l'ensemble de nos instincts sympathiques, indépendamment de toute pensée de coopération active et continue à un but quelconque...' [IV:472; emphasis in original]. This passage makes clear that Comte, at least in the Cours, was working with Aristotle's definition of organized society as 'an association of persons formed with a view to some good purpose' [1962:25]. Hence, of course, the importance of a consensus over ends, and a mechanism for co-ordinating the collective will. The theoretical problem this presented for Comte was how to square the voluntary character of such an 'association' with its ontological priority to the individual, as in conservative Catholic social theory.
individuals with one another is inconceivable? And, at the limit of globality, what sort of social tie is it, or could there possibly be, which binds all the people in the world together into the Ecumene of Humanity? At the very least we would have to say that the Other (l'Autrui) to whom loving sentiments are directed becomes more abstract as the group increases in scale and anonymity.

For Comte there were in fact (at least) two distinct modalities in which living individuals could, and did, bond with other living individuals in order to constitute, in the strong sense of the term, a social group. The first is the one already mentioned, that of directly emotive interpersonal attachment. This was exemplified for Comte by the sentiments that bound together a family\(^3^5\). These sentiments themselves were conceived to be heterogeneous, both with respect to the social relations involved and with respect to the corresponding forms of love. The bonds of affection between husband and wife, parents and children, and indeed between siblings, had each their own specific character. ‘The family’ regarded as paradigmatic, moreover, for an analysis of primary group attachments had pre-given structural features. Whatever its historical vicissitudes, it was always taken to be sharply age-graded and sexually differentiated\(^3^6\). Its combinatory of attachments, we might add, was androcentrically, indeed

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35 The affective dimension of the family is discussed in Leçon 50 of the Cours [IV:447 et seq], and in chapter 3 of Volume II of Politique positive ou Théorie positive de la famille humaine [VIII:177-215]. The latter dispenses with the former’s distinction between les instincts sympathiques and le sentiment de coopération, working instead with the trichotomy between attachement, vénération, and bienveillance.

36 ‘La théorie sociologique de la famille peut être essentiellement réduite à l’examen rationnel de deux ordres fondamentaux de relations nécessaires, savoir: la
patriarchally, delineated from the vantage point of the mature married male as its temporal head. A profound consequence was that what Comte took to be the primary group’s principal affective bonds were always already hierarchically inscribed.

This is clear in his account of the two-way relation between children and parents. The love felt for parents, not only as Origin but as household rulers, providers and protectors, is mingled with awe and respect. The love from parents to children is bounteous from a position of power. The first is the case of what Comte calls vénération\(^37\); the second, where affection is mingled with protective magnanimity, is bienveillance or bonté\(^38\). Altogether, then, the affective relation between parents and children, as generally between superiors and inferiors, entails the reciprocity of different, but similarly hierarchised, forms of love. But what of marriage? Here we might think that Comte had identified a form of love between equals, and the attachement which ordinarily designates ‘the profound linking of two beings’ [VII:702] is certainly positioned in his scale of loves as the locus of affective parity. However, the sexual division of labour — he deals with the world, she with household and children — which Comte took to be both socially necessary and biologically given (women were le sexe affective, men le

\(^{37}\) The distinction between the two ‘special’ social instincts of attachement and vénération is made as follows. The first ‘indique les instincts les plus circonstrites. Il ne lie profondément que deux êtres à la fois. Quant à la vénération,...[I]a soumission volontaire constitue son caractère essentiel. C’est pourquoi elle s’applique toujours aux chefs, tandis que le penchant précédent préfère l’égalité [VII:702; emphasis in original].

\(^{38}\) ‘[C]’est la paternité qui nous enseigne directement à aimer nos inférieurs. La bonté proprement dite suppose toujours une sorte de protection...’ [VIII:189]
sexes intellectuel et actif [VII:246]) complicated the picture. There was in fact a double asymmetry between spouses. The husband had material power, and was head of the household. But in matters of feeling he was inferior to a wife who was consequently to be adored at the same time as regarded with the kind of bienveillance proper towards a child. Thus even marital affection turns out to be less an attachement in Comte’s sense than a doubled hybrid of the two unequal sorts of love.

What is remarkable in Comte’s account is his reluctance to place himself, and theorize from, within the one nexus of his family system wherein the power relations of gender and generation would be nullified: the affective relations between same-sex siblings. They are mentioned, only to be dismissed as ‘of too little political importance to be specially dwelt on in this study’ and, in any case, as attaching themselves, when they acquire any scope, ‘to a notable inequality of age’ [IV:466-7]. Thus,

whenever fraternal coordination becomes strong enough to exercise any political influence, this is evidently, at root, because the older brothers, assuming a kind of

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39 The affective superiority of women, and the natural superiority of men in every other respect, was both physiologically given and accentuated by social evolution. ‘La biologie tend finalement à représenter le sexe féminin...comme nécessairement constitué...en une sort de l’état d’enfance continue, qui l’éloigne davantage, sous les plus importants rapports, du type idéal de la race’ [IV:456]. Lest it be thought that he has mistaken the cause (infantilization) for the effect, Comte adds that no one today can seriously contest ‘l’évident infériorité relative de la femme, bien autrement impropre que l’homme à l’indispensable continuité aussi bien qu’à la haute intensité du travail mental, soit en vertu du moindre force de son intelligence, soit à la raison de sa plus vive susceptibilité morale et physique, si antipathique à toute abstraction et à toute contention scientifiques [IV:457].
paternal ascendency, artificial or spontaneous, maintain domestic unity against individual differences... One cannot doubt, consequently, that absolute fraternal equality is transitory... destined to dissolve later on under a new spontaneous organization of the domestic hierarchy.\footnote{\textit{Toutes les fois, en effet, que la coordination fraternelle est assez fortement établie pour exercer une véritable influence politique, c’est évidemment parce que les aînés, prenant une sorte d’ascendant paternel, artificiel ou spontané, maintiennent l’unité domestique contre les divergences individuelles...l’absolue égalité fraternelle ne doit être, au fond, aussi transitoire que les autres, et pareillement destinée à disparaître ultérieurement sous une nouvelle organisation spontanée de l’héritage domestique [IV:467]. A similar argument is offered in Politique positive [185-6], although it is also conceded that this domestic affect is ‘le mieux susceptible d’extension extérieur’ and, at least among living contemporaries, even ‘fournit partout le type spontané de l’amour universel’ [VIII:186]. The reference [IV:186] to the prevalence of fraternal bitterness — amertume — suggests that personal experience confirmed his depreciation of fraternity at a family level. Likewise his reference to the role of les aînés, which recalls not only his literal place in the birth order but also his leadership role in the student movement at l’École Polytechnique in 1815-16.}

Comte’s catalogue of inter-individual forms of affection within the family, then, is starkly incomplete. Fraternité gets short shrift, sororité (at least as a solidary relation\footnote{\textit{Le} type féminin.} gets no attention at all. Not only, in consequence, does Comte deny the viability of fraternité as a social ethic. There is also no discussion of how an egalitarian sibling affection might extend its range informally, as friendship\footnote{\textit{A man’s sister, like his wife and daughter, can of course be venerated as an embodiment of le type féminin. For the (subordinate) place of sisterly adoration within le culte intime see X:III.}} — an absence which can be read as allergic not only to the

\footnote{\textit{Plus tendre que l’amitié fraternelle, l’union conjugale inspire une vénération plus pure et pure vive que le respect filial, et plus dévouée que la protection paternelle [VIII:187].}}
give-and-take of friendship itself, but also to the kind of solidarity that arises in the course of rebellious (and potentially an-archic) struggle against any and every dominant power.

The complex of emotional bonds uniting Comte's *famille* provided him with a model for thinking about social unity in a broader sense. The same three forms of love, *attachement*, *vénération*, *bienveillance*, parade all over his social stage. However, the mode of direct inter-individual ties which the familial model exemplifies could only obtain within the restricted range of a primary group, at most the family extended into a tribe. For individuals to be mutually attached as anonymous members of a larger association required a different affective mechanism. This was a form of attachment mediated by their common attachment to that transpersonal Other represented by the group itself. This *second* modality of the social tie still rested on the binding force of love. But the mechanism was indirect, and the resulting inter-individual ties 'more extended and 'less intense' [IX:190]. In the first instance, and as an

*Néanmoins, notre première enfance ne put vraiment suffire à notre initiation morale qu'envers l'attachement proprement dit, auquel des relations bornées conviennent davantage* [IX:235]. The personal particularity of 'attachment' is taken to be its limit. It is therefore not this, but the 'veneration' fostered by polytheism and monotheism which eventually extends, with all its hierarchical quality, into *le bonté* which Positivism in turn brings to the fore.

44 In the *Philosophie positive* the shift from the family to a wider form of *société* is seen as involving a reversal in the relations between 'special' and 'general' forms of sociability: 'Quoi qu'une coordination habituelle entre des travaux distincts s'y doive spontanément établir à un certain degré, son influence est secondaire....Dans les combinaisons sociales proprement dites, l'économie élémentaire présente inévitablesment un caractère inverse: le sentiment de coopération, jusqu'alors accessoire, devient, à son tour, prépondérant, et l'instinct sympathique, malgré son indispensable persistence, ne peut plus former le lien principal [IV:472]. The argument in *Politique positive* [IX:et seq] is fundamentally the same, except there is not the same insistence that 'l'instinct personnel ne cesse point de servir de guide et de mesure à l'instinct social', nor therefore that the ultimate role of the
expression of vénération and bonté rather than attachement, the object of affection was not a person. It was that entity constituted by all persons in so far as they are similarly connected with one another through their common but separate love for this connecting Third. On that basis, and as a kind of secondary effect, an attachement could then form also between fellow group members. But it was necessarily weaker than the kind obtaining within a family, while the primary ingredient of the extended social tie was what tied each to the Other composed of them all.

The germ of such a mediated social attachement could already be found in the family. That is, in the solidarity that flowed from its members' common love for their particular family as such, symbolized as a temporal institution in the name of the family 'house'. In the family, though, its role was secondary to that of 'the direct satisfaction of sympathetic instincts' [IV:472], and it was only in the more extended group identification which came about with the formation of ensemble of social instincts is not to 'subordinate' but 'tempérer et modifier, à un degré plus ou moins profond, le système des penchants personnels [IV:443].

45 The polytheism of antique society 'dut donc avoir en vue la cité, comme le précédent la famille, et le suivant l'église' [IX:190]. These entities came most directly into play with regard to the goal of activity, in considering the future beneficiaries of collective labour: 'Un fétichiste travaille surtout pour sa propre postérité, ce qui dirige suffisamment la seul existence morale qui puisse alors surgir. En devenant polythéistes, nous avons principalement en vue notre postérité civique, d'après une activité collective dont les résultats ne sont réalisables qu'envers l'ensemble de nos successeurs nationaux. Mais le monothéisme, précurseur immédiat du positivisme, fit assez pressentir l'universalité finale pour consacrer déjà chaque grande élaboration, même purement spontanée, à la postérité générale...' [IX:191].

46 'L'etymologie du mot patrie, et l'usage universel qui confond la famille avec la maison suffiraient pour indiquer l'intime connexité entre la possession du sol et l'ensemble de l'existence domestique' [VIII:286-7; emphasis in original].
la Cité in the city-state of early antiquity\textsuperscript{47} that the solidarizing role of this second mechanism became decisive. Its symbolic focus was the collectively occupied territory, la patrie — which at once extended the group to its maximal range of familiarity, fixed activity in relation to the productive development of a given piece of la terre, and provided an affectively suffused image of the collectivity as a common object of non-personal love. Whence its crucial intermediary role between the family and humanity as a whole ‘where activity combines with veneration around a fixed hearth’\textsuperscript{48}. With an extension of scale, moreover, a remarkable property of this form of social tie came to the fore: its capacity to transcend the always potentially conflictual particularities of smaller-scale but more personally intense attachments, including the égoïsme collectif engendered by the family itself [VIII:212].

Viewed in global perspective, however, national patriotisms were themselves conflictually differential, and limited by particularisms of people and place\textsuperscript{49}. This was why the most elevated minds, from the Roman philosophers of humanitas [IX:348] to the eighteenth century

\textsuperscript{47} The city-state also plays a crucial role in Comte’s théorie positive de la propriété [Chapter 5 in Volume III of Positive politique]. Attaching a people to a physical territory made visible and social the dependence of humanity on an external milieu which it also loved as its own [IX:362 et seq]. For Comte, evidently, there was no ‘right of first occupier’, collective property in land was antecedent to individual ownership, and pride in property was to be regarded above all as a moral force attaching the human collectivity actively and affectively to le dehors.

\textsuperscript{48} ‘A ce degré purement affectif, doit succéder une vie essentiellement active, qui suscite habituellement des liens plus étendus, aussi restreints toutefois pour comporter une suffisante intimité d’après une coopération assez sentie. Ces deux conditions ne deviennent conciliables que dans l’existence civique proprement dite, à laquelle se rapportera toujours la véritable institution de la patrie, où l’activité se combine avec la vénération autour d’un foyer inaltérable’ [IX:363].
dreamers of 'universal peace', had always aspired for a sociality that could embrace the whole of humanity. This impulse had been nurtured contradictorily (both because of its 'intellectual egoism' and because of the persistent militarism of the countervailing system of states) by the now shattered Christian Church. But in an age of massive industrial production and growing global inter-connectedness such promptings appeared to be losing, at last, their merely optative quality. For Comte, as for liberals and socialists, industrialism was creating the conditions, both material and moral, for the historical emergence of just such an epoch of global peace and goodwill. So the furthest possible extension of the social tie based on group rather than individual attachment could already be practically envisaged. Now that la révolution occidentale had prepared the mental and practical ground, the situation only required (though it was a big only) that the sentiments spontaneously seeking to attach themselves to Humanity as a whole be provided with a suitable symbolic focus, buttressed by a socially reproductive apparatus of worship and belief.80

Each successively more inclusive affective community -- la famille, la cité, l'Église, l'Humanité -- had its 'appreciated' place in la série sociale [VIII:304], a scale which simultaneously provided a historical, sociological and moral framework for grasping the

80 'Tous les groupes limités tend d'abord à des hostilités mutuelles...la patrie réellement mérite des reproches analogues' [VIII:212].

Whence, 'faute d'une stimulation continu et directe' (because of the anarchic character of the rupture with monotheism), the providential significance of Clotilde. 'Ce complément nécessaire résulte d'une angélique inspiration, trop tôt développé par la mort...Quelques mois après cette effusion fondamentale, mon cours public en 1847 marqua l'irrévocable événement du positivisme religieux, en condensant nos sentiments, nos pensées et nos actions autour de l'Humanité, définitivement substituée à Dieu [IX:618].
significance of the final emergence of society's final term in Comte's own day. The series represented a logico-historical account of the rise, and ultimate universalisation, of the social. It also framed a synchronic account of the circles of sociality in which contemporary members of the most advanced national societies were affectively embedded. At the same time it was a moral scale, describing a hierarchy of moral refinement in which each wider group attachment while weaker (because more abstract) than the one below was, by the same token, more elevated. As we move from love of family, to love of country and ultimately to love of all humanity, that love, becomes ever more universal because ever less mired in the contradictions and imperfections of particularity.

The ascending scale of sociality also mirrored what Comte considered, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, to be the logical and actual path of individual moral ascent. Thus, the family develops our sentiments, the city/state our active faculties, the church (theistic then Humanist) our intelligence [VIII:341]. At the same time, in the path from familial to patriotic to ecumenical-humanist attachments, progressively higher and purer modes of the social instinct are brought into play, distancing the embodied and situated individual more and more from its immediate egoistic interests and drives. But before turning to this, there is one more piece of Comte's construct to consider. I have mentioned that for Comte there were two

51 In its elaborated form, this is incorporated into le tableau socialatrique [X:159]. The latter characteristically arranges the subdivided logico-historical moments of sociality (liens fondamentales; états préparatoires; fonctions normales) into 81 fêtes distributed into thirteen lunar months. Each month celebrates one of the principal social categories (Humanité, Mariage, Paternité, Filiation, Fraternité, Domesticité, Fétichisme, Polythéisme, Monothéisme, Femme, Sacerdoce, Patriciat, Proletariat). The middle
modes of group attachment, immediate and mediate, and that each had its own distinctly structured instinctual base. In the first mode, what is brought into play is direct inter-individual *attachement*. But what is the kind of ‘love’ mobilized in the individual’s affective attachment to the social group as a whole?

Comte’s answer is by no means straightforward. He sometimes used the term *attachement* generally to describe the ties which individuals have with one another within any sociated group. But such ties as form horizontally between group members are distinct from the affective relations which connect individuals to the group itself. In as much as that object is necessarily larger and more elevated than any of the individuals of which it is comprised, the sentiment of positive affect towards it would be defined in Comte’s terms as *vénération*. It is a veneration, moreover, that is bound to heighten (but also etherealize) the further up the scale of social love-objects we go. The pieties of respect for family can elicit a strong sense of honour and gratitude, but hardly a sense of abasement. The feelings of the patriot, however, were more elevated, and could even transcend intense personal attachments. From which Comte extrapolated the possibility of a still higher level of veneration. This, in a universalized form of group unity, had for its object Humanity as a whole — an entity whose majestic

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52 ‘On voit ainsi que, parmis les trois organes cérébraux des instincts altruistes, le sentiment religieux dépend principalement de l’organe moyen, consacré à la vénération’ [VIII:15-16].

53 ‘Depuis l’amour de la tribu ou de la peuplade, jusqu’au plus vaste patriotisme, et même jusqu’à la sympathie envers tous les êtres assimilables, le sentiment ne change pas sa nature. Seulement, il s’affaiblit et s’ennoblit à mesure qu’il s’étend...’ [VII:703].
distance from, and eminence over, the individual properly called forth the kind of 'adoration' which adherents of a fictive theism had become accustomed to pour out towards their God\textsuperscript{54}.

This, though, is only a partial answer because it does not yet take into account the complication introduced by Comte's insistence in all dimensions of his theorization that a fully positivized understanding of \textit{la société} should take into account (as rationalist theorists of the social had not) that it exists in time as well as space. The unity of the social had always to be explicated with respect to the dimension not just of \textit{solidarité}, but also of \textit{continuité} -- without which, indeed, the capacity for cumulative (mental) development which distinguished \textit{la société humaine} from that of other animals would be unintelligible.

Here, again, the paradigm was provided by the family with its three types of love, and three types of social tie. Within Comte's \textit{famille}, two structures of hierarchized relations and affections are set in play. One relates to gender and is centred on marriage. The second relates to age, and articulates with generational difference\textsuperscript{55}. Here, the exchange of honor/respect and

\textsuperscript{54} The model for such a divine love was the medieval \textit{Imitatio}, not the contemporary form of 'Catholicism' which Comte invariably deprecates. Although he never thematizes the difference, in Christian worship, between the identificatory love for Christ the Mediator and the non-identificatory love for God-the-Father, it is clearly the former which provides the model for his love of Humanity, while the latter is criticized as a kind of servile flattery. In worshiping the new Déesse, he explains to in \textit{Catéchisme positiviste}, 'Nous ne l'adorons pas comme l'ancien Dieu, pour la complimenter, ma fille, mais afin de la mieux servir, en nous améliorant' [X:76].

\textsuperscript{55} Hence its paradigmatic as well as preparatory value: '\textit{La constitution domestique fournit spontanément la première manifestation de cet attribut fondamental de toute existence composée; car les enfants représentent l'avenir, et les veillards le passé, sous l'immédiate prépondérance de l'âge mûr} [X:35].
magnanimity between older and younger generations elicits from each the equally unequal mode of love it is due. In Comte’s Positively restored cult of the hearth, attachement (as between siblings) is the form of love proper towards age peers, vénération (as of children for parents) is the love due to elders, and bonté (as of parents for children) that due to the young [VIII:185-9]. Love between now living generations binds the family together in its flow through time. It affectively connects the family’s present with its future and its past. But the generations of a family are not just those now living. There are earlier ancestors no longer alive, and children’s children not yet born [X:32]. The bondedness of a family through time, then, its continuité, is a function of how strongly its members can cherish and draw strength from remembered predecessors on the one side, and bountifully provide, on the other, for those still to come.

The same considerations, but on larger scale, apply in the cases of love for country and love for humanity. The objects of patriotic and Humanist love are multi-generational. Accordingly, while that love, as from individual to Maison, Patrie, Humanité, is weighted as a whole towards the venerative, it nevertheless engages, as towards society present, past and future, feelings of attachement and benevolence as well. In ‘the healthy case’, collective activity derives its inspiration from those who went before and its goal from those ahead: ‘We always work for our descendants, but under the impulsion of our ancestors, whence derive both the elements and the procedures of all our operations’.

Once more, then, we have a triply

56 ‘[L]’existence du Grand Être repose nécessairement sur la subordination de la population, objective envers la double population subjective. Celle-ci fournit, d’une part la source, d’autre le but, de l’action...Nous travaillons toujours pour nos descendants,'
articulated form of social tie. In addition to the immediate emotional attachment, felt, with varying degrees of intensity, between current social members, there is also the venerative love which keeps alive the finest works and personages in the national, or global, human tradition and the benevolent regard for future generations which keeps us pointed towards social progress and perfection.

Just as with the synchronic aspect of order, we may note, Comte’s insistence on the continuous linkage of the present with past and future simultaneously served as a normative framework for describing/prescribing the temporal conditions for (both individual and collective) mental health, and as an essential element of his social ontology. The combination of loves directed by individuals towards the big Other of the social not only makes possible a ‘healthy’ and harmonious integration of feeling, thought and action. It was also necessary to the actual existence of (a) society, both in the present and as an entity whose being is inherently extended through time. This, on the face of it, would imply an essential symmetry between solidarity and continuity as indispensable dimensions of social unity. However, two respects in which the cases are not symmetrical in Comte’s construct should be underlined.

First, the mode of presence of society’s past and future is clearly not the same as the mode of presence of its present, with further implications for the variant affective ties individuals form.

\[\text{\textit{mais sous l’impulsion de nos ancêtres, d’où dérive à la fois les éléments et les procédés de toutes nos opérations}}\] [X:34].

\[97\] In preliterate societies, tradition is maintained by the double venerative relation that a) elicits respect for \textit{les vieillards} who themselves b) veneratively ‘\textit{perpétuer les traditions essentielles}’ [VIII:361].
with it. For Comte the point is fundamental. The present society, though present only in its 'events', is apprehended objectively, as a phenomenal dehors, albeit as one we are also within. Past generations, however, only exist in the mode of memory, imaginatively reconceived, and future ones in an imaginary which has not even second-hand phenomenal materials from which they might be conjured up. Love for la société, then, is one part 'objective' and two parts 'subjective'. To the extent that it is the latter, such love is not directed towards an independently existing entity in the dehors, but towards a being which is only constructed subjectively, and which therefore only now exists in the dedans. We can see here why Comte placed such stress at the outset of his Synthèse Subjective on developing a logic of sentiments which would display the 'normal' harmony obtaining between the logics of sense, image and sign. The spontaneous evincing of affection for a being which lay mostly in the mind, and which preponderantly consisted, indeed, in memories of people and their achievements who were mostly dead, had already to have before it, in the mind's eye, something which had been built, as image and idea, out of the subjective materials of the mind itself. This was also, Comte explained, why Positivists pray with their eyes closed.

58 'La vraie population humaine se compose ...de deux masses toujours indispensables, dont la proportion varie sans cesse...Si l'action et le résultat dépend surtout de l'élément objectif, l'impulsion et la règle émanennent princalement de l'élément subjectif. Libéralement dotés par nos prédécessors, nous transmettons gratuitement à nos successeurs l'ensemble du domaine humain, avec une extension de plus en plus faible en proportion de ce que nous recevons' [XI:69].

59 'Nos contemplations religieuses s'accompliront sciemment au dedans; tandis que nos prédécesseurs s'efforçaient vainement de voir au dehors de qui n'existait qu'en eux-mêmes; sauf à rejeter sur la vie future la réalisation finale de leurs visioins...Un signe familier indiquera bientôt cette distinction envers la majeure partie du culte privé. Car le
The largely imaginary character of the collective object of Positivist love is linked, as we have seen, to the programmatic importance Comte placed on restoring a sense of collective memory. Indeed, Positivism would have us believe that the consecration of tradition is destined to become a more prominent feature of social organization than ever before. More even than in the case of tribalism and ancestor-worship, 'the living' in industrial society 'will be governed by the dead' [XI:68]. This points, though, to a second difference between Comte's treatment of solidarity and continuity which he did not reflect on, and which amounts, in fact, to an inconsistency in his overall design. As society becomes more extended, more differentiated, and more voluntarily cooperative, the mode of solidarité shifts from direct emotional 'union' to a more attenuated and indirect form of linkage. But no similar or accompanying change in modality is projected with regard to continuité. To the contrary, the de novo character of first Christianity and then industrial modernity with respect to the thought and culture of previous epochs is defined purely as an 'aberration' . Far from it heralding, for example, a shift in temporal orientation towards the future away from the past, it contravenes the normal path; as against which the Positive Polity will not merely restore the lost continuity of historical tradition, but will amplify both the scale of that tradition, and the social resources devoted to its transmission. To be sure, Comte justifies the effort (embodied in the Calendrier positive) in terms of the world-uniting syncretism it might make possible. Appreciating the past facilitates the incorporation into the positivist Church of peoples which currently

positiviste ferme les yeux pendant ses effusions secrètes, afin de mieux voir l'image intérieure...'[ IX:83].

60 For the pervasive significance of this term for Comte — which had the same general sense as the inversion metaphor mobilized by Marx in his concept of 'ideology' — see Kofman, 1978:86-101.
represent the whole range of achieved developmental stages [VII:379-381. At the same time, though, it presupposes that the development of continuity, unlike that of solidarity, ‘normally’ follows a linear path that merely intensifies the form of temporal organization proper to the family and l’enfance humaine.

The picture of Comte’s conception of the social tie would now seem complete. However, a third modality can also be identified, although it was for him so interwoven with the second that he never separately identified it. If the first case is that of direct inter-individual mutual attachment, and the second that of a mediate attachment of individuals to one another through a transcendent Third, this final mode of attachment is a cooperativeness that operates immediately as a kind of second nature. It arises in the case where — as a result of the final preponderance, in the fully Positivized Polity, of the highest form of love — each individual is so saturated with social feeling that his (and in the public realm, for Comte, it is always his\textsuperscript{61}) individuated thought and action is immediately produced as social in sensibility and effect.

Saint-Simon’s New Christian injunction to ‘love one another as brothers’ had arisen as a religious supplement to the main moral principle of industrialism, namely that all are to

\textsuperscript{61} ‘Tel est donc le vrai sens général de la progression humaine: rendre la vie féminine de plus en plus domestique, et la dégager davantage de tout travail extérieur, afin de mieux assurer sa destination affective’ [VII:249]. The corresponding exclusion of women from industrial, professional and public life was to be compensated for by the systematic application of the rule — la loi naturelle de notre espèce — that l’Homme doit nourrir la femme [VII:248]. This rule would extend to all women, including those without the direct support of a husband or family. ‘À défaut de l’époux, et des parents, la société doit garantir l’existence matérielle de chaque femme, soit en compensation d’une inévitable dépendance temporelle, soit surtout en vue d’un indispensable office moral’ [ibid:249].
consider themselves workers within the common enterprise of improving life for all\textsuperscript{62}. Against the background of an increasing differentiation of inter-related social tasks, Comte’s *esprit de l’ensemble* pointed to the same harmonizing need\textsuperscript{63}. But Comte took the argument one step further. The complex organizational structure of an advanced social organism implied not only differentiated tasks, but also differentiated skills, knowledge and even personalities\textsuperscript{64}. In the end, therefore, in order to obviate the socially fragmenting effects of an intricate division of labour, what was needed was not so much a counter-vailing moral-affective unison, as the achievement of a polyphonic harmony\textsuperscript{65}. The machines of industry, and more especially the

\textsuperscript{62} The principle that ‘*tous les hommes doivent se regarder comme frères*’ is first announced in *l’Appel aux philanthropes* which (in 1821) closed the first part of Saint-Simon’s *Système industriel*. ‘Les crétiens d’aujourd’hui sont appelés par Dieu à tirer les grandes conséquences politiques du principe général qui a été révélé aux crétiens primitifs. Ces conséquences sont que le pouvoir temporel appartienne aux hommes utiles, laborieux et pacifiques; que le pouvoir spirituelle appartienne aux hommes qui possèdent les connaissances utiles à l’espèce humaine; en un mot, que le système industriel et scientifique se constitue’ [cited in Gouhier, 1933 III:231].

\textsuperscript{63} ‘*Toute la rénégation pratique peut se réduire à systématiser dignement les tendances spontanées de l’industrie modern vers le caractère collectif...Une existence où chacun travaille habituellement pour autrui devient mieux accessible au sentiment social que l’activité militaire...*’ [X:57].

\textsuperscript{64} ‘*Les diverse aspirations qui résultent successivement de l’initiation humaine se trouvent ainsi réalisé simultanément, malgré leur apparent contradiction, due seulement a l’insuffisance de la synthèse provisoire. Toujours fondée sur l’ensemble de notre constitution, la disipline positive doit également seconder l’extension et l’harmonie de nos attributs quelconques*’ [X:46].

\textsuperscript{65} It was on these grounds that Comte criticized the contemporary revolutionary left for stressing a homogenizing form of solidarity that would (besides ignoring the need for *la continuité historique* [VII:160]) suppress individuality altogether. ‘*L’ignorance des lois réelles de la sociabilité se manifest d’abord dans la dangereuse tendance du communisme à comprimer toute individualité. Outre qu’on oublie ainsi la prépondérance naturelle de l’instinct personnel, on méconnait l’un des deux caractères fondamentaux de l’organisme collectif, où la séparation des fonctions n’est pas moins nécessaire que leur concurs...Le grand problème humaine consiste à concilier, autant
social machine of industrial society itself, would work harmoniously towards the common good only if each element of that machine took it upon themselves to serve the social interest as an independently operating agent of the whole.

Of course, the religion of Humanity had homogenizing elements. Its cult and doctrine of Humanity were to be the same for all. But the régime was designed to moralize each particular 'servitor' with attention to the specific subjective requirements of serving their appointed office, given its particular place within the technical division of labour and the social chain of co-ordination and command. Altogether, then, through a combination of differential socialization (confirmed in career terms at the point of destination [IV:123]), and all-suffusing bienveillance, Positive religion was designed to produce and reproduce the subjectivity of that ideal synthetic subject: the fully social individual.

We may concur with Mill\(^\text{66}\) that the pervasively intrusive and obsessively systematized religious apparatus Comte envisaged was at variance with the cultivation of independent thinking and action necessary for the perfectly voluntary cooperation that was its stated goal. His second

\(^{66}\) For Mill, Comte's attempt to theorize the conditions for voluntary cooperation within a spontaneous division of labour so emphasized l'esprit de système that it was invisible even as an aim. 'It never seems to enter into his conceptions that any one could object, \textit{ab initio}, and ask, why this universal systematizing, systematizing, systematizing? Why is it necessary that all human life should point to one object, and be cultivated into a system of means to a single end?' [Mill:141].
mechanism of social unity, with its stress on doctrinal and cultic unity, is certainly hard to square with the cultural exigencies of the third; yet both are supposed to operate at once. To which extent, there is indeed a contradiction in Comte's thinking. It should be noted, though, that the goal embodied in this latter -- the achievement of an individuated community that would finally sublate the antinomy of individual and society -- is maximal, a limit-case of sociality which, as an ideal for thought and practice, would be hard to exceed. In this respect, moreover, Comte is closer to the early Marx than to any kind of reforming liberalism. Marx's conception of the reconciliation of individual and society within 'human society or social humanity' [1947:199], in which all will regard themselves immediately as social individuals ('the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being' [1964:135]), and in which the 'free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' [Feuer:29], is echoed in the finally triumphant Humanity which Comte himself aimed to help make come to pass.

Marx's understanding of this ideal is doubtless more appealing than Comte's. He placed greater emphasis on the many-sided flowering of the individual. He also held to a considerably less directive notion of how such social individualism might arise. Marx (but not Stalin or Mao) saw no need for a *kulturkampf* against 'bourgeois individualism', still less for the vast moralizing and propagandistic apparatus represented by Comte's new *pouvoir spirituel*. By the same token, however, Marx could be said to have been one-sided in the other direction. In the *German Ideology*, the Revolution itself serves as a once and for all cleansing of 'the muck of ages' [1947:69], and he has nothing to say about the reproduction, and vitalization, of the moral culture that might be required for the 'free cooperation of free individuals' thereafter.
Though Marx himself can hardly be held responsible, this left future socialists to that extent theoretically defenseless against the authoritarian and coercive strategies through which ‘actually existing socialisms’ attempted, this century, to close the gap.

Without arguing the need to abolish capitalism (the new order, in embryo, is already here), Durkheim’s concern for ‘moral education’ and the restoration of ‘professional associations’ is preoccupied with just this issue. In which respect, his *Division of Labour* aims to address Comte’s inconsistency by drawing a sharp distinction between the two types of solidarity — the one founded in a unity of social sentiment and belief, the second in a functional interlock between differentiated and morally autonomous individuals — which Comte’s perfected industrial order implausibly combines. Durkheim’s disentanglement of organic from mechanical solidarity, and his assignment of them to historically successive social types, introduced a powerful corrective into the Comteian model. At the same time, Durkheim considerably abbreviates the Comteian problematic of the social tie not only by dimensionally reducing its complicated mapping of the place of ‘sentiments’ in the cohesion and life of the social body, but also by ignoring (rather than, as was necessary, reformulating) its attention, in both respects, to the dimension of time.

**Love and the individual psyche**

Comte’s ‘treatise on theoretic morals’, which he never lived to complete, was to be the second volume of the *Synthèse subjective, instituant la connaissance de la nature humaine* [X:542].

It was conceived as the summit of his system, a third system after those of positive philosophy
and positive politics, which would unite theory with practice by placing the understanding of individual human subjectivity on a finally scientific basis. Just as his social theory was couched as a story of society's necessary progress towards perfect unity, his 'positive theory of the soul' [VII:731] was indexed to a vision of its ideal but realizable perfection, with both perfections being assumed necessary for the achievement of the other. It is the broadly 'sociological' dimension of this theory which I have been considering so far. But to grasp more fully the character, and limitations, of his conception of love and the social body, we must also scrutinize its psychological presuppositions. These were to be the topic of La science de morale's first chapter, which aimed to advance a 'positive' framework for understanding the place of love within the economy of the individual psyche. While that chapter remained unwritten, its intended material, under the rubric of 'cerebral physiology', is already introduced in the Système du politique positive [VII:694-703] and summarised in Catéchisme positiviste [XI:231-241]. his Tableau systématique de l'âme [VII:726 facing].

In the nascent neuro-physiology of his day, three hypotheses, whose factuality he assumed to be demonstrated, caught Comte's attention, promising as they did to provide the requisite scientific bridge between the physical and 'moral' study of l'Homme. The first was that the brain was the organ which housed not only the mental faculties, but also those governing motor activity and, more significantly, the receptors and control switches for passions and impulses as well [VII:680]. Understanding 'cerebral physiology', then, was key to breaking from a purely speculative (and introspective) approach to what had classically been called the problem of the soul, and in the eighteenth century, that of 'human nature'. The second was that these three sets of faculties were lodged in specifically locatable regions of the cerebral
apparatus, and that this determined the commerce they had both with one another and with the organism's internal and external milieu [VII:682]. The third was that the three cerebral functions, pertaining to sentiment, intellect and action, could be further subdivided into component functions. Each corresponded to a distinct feature or capacity of the 'moral personality', as classically understood, and each was similarly locatable, with its own neural sub-system and 'cerebral ganglion', in a specific region of the brain [VII:684].

What interests me here is not the empirical basis of these claims, but the psychological assumptions which this schema, and particularly those aspects formulated under hypotheses two and three, permitted Comte to introduce as givens with his wider theorization about love and the being of the social.

From the second hypothesis (localization of the three principal faculties), Comte derived an overall thesis about the relation between 'cerebral physiology' and the healthy, because harmonious, functioning of the psyche. 'The speculative and active regions of the brain have nervous communications only with the senses and the muscles, in order to perceive the external world and modify it. On the contrary, the affective region, which forms the principal mass, has no direct links at all with the outside, with which it connects indirectly through its own relations with the [the faculties of] intelligence and activity'67. At the same time, the affective region of the brain is in the centre, and has two symmetrical halves. Unlike the faculties of

67 'Les régions spéculatives et actives du cerveau n'ont de communications nerveuses qu'avec les sens et les muscles, pour apercevoir et modifier le monde extérieur. Au contraire, la région affective, qui constitue sa principale masse, n'a point de liens directs avec le dehors, auquel la rattachent indirectment ses relations propres avec l'intelligence et l'activité' [XI:228].
sensation/cognition and action/motion, then, which are characterized by their 'intermittence', those pertaining to feelings and impulses are active all the time [VII:690]. As a result, 'emotive life doubly constitutes the unity of the human or animal soul, whether as a principle of consensus or as a common source of its continuity'.

The import of this topography in the context of the Comteian narrative about positivization is dramatic. At the highest point of scientific development, when the human understanding of the human mind, and thus the very subject of scientific knowledge, itself becomes a topic for positive Enquirer, what reason itself had deemed to be the self-sufficiency and psychic sovereignty of the rational ego is completely overthrown. In Comte's new picture — which effectively put Hume's anti-Cartesian skepticism on a 'scientific' basis — reason is not so much a slave to the passions, as replaced by them as both the literal and directing centre of the human brain. At the same time, the affective region is in every sense blind. It receives its impulses not through the senses, from the outside world, but directly from the body-world, under the skin. Left to its own devices, its direction is incoherent. If the human organism, then, is to survive and thrive in its active relation with the world, the impulses that drive its thought and action have urgent and continual needs for the 'counsel' of the one and the externalizing capacity of the other. Feeling impels action aided by thought. 'Act from feeling,

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68 'La vie affective constitue donc doublmente l'unité de l'âme humaine ou animale, soit comme principe du consensus, soit source commun de la continuité' [VII:690].

69 'Sans méconnaître l'attrait direct des opérations mentales, on reconnaît ainsi que leur essor énergique et soutenu ne développe jamais que pour éclairer l'activité commandé par une passion quelconque' [VII:688].
think to act’ [VII:688]. The harmonious functioning of this tri-partite system is, for Comte, the harmony of the soul itself.

But given the asymmetry of the three corresponding regions of the brain, and of their respective relations with le dedans and le dehors, how is such harmony to be conceived? Neither thought nor will — those two shibboleths of radical enlightenment reason — could serve by themselves as pivots around which an integrated subjectivity might form. This would fly in the face of the dominant role played in the mental apparatus by the affects, both within the apparatus as a whole as well as in the life of the other two mental faculties. The achievement of harmony, therefore, between the feeling, thinking and acting functions of the brain or soul (deus sive natura, as it were), must depend on the disposition of the affects themselves.

And so to Comte’s third hypothesis. This was that each of the three main regions of the brain interrelated more specific capacities (whether of feeling and propensity, intellect or action), each of which had their own independently locatable cerebral basis. In his tableau systématique 70, Comte classified eighteen such functions in all. Three of these, Activité, sub-

70 Comte’s ‘Classification positive des dix-huit fonctions du cerveau humain ou tableau systématique de l‘âme’, which ‘systematized’ the ‘cerebral physiology’ he drew from Gall, was composed in November 1846, as part of his ‘moral regeneration’ [VII:679]. It is reproduced at the end of the first volume of Politique Positive [VII:726, facing] and again as an appendix to the Catéchisme. While he claimed therein to have mapped the brain’s essential organs and functions, he frankly admitted to the incompleteness of its empirical basis. ‘C’est pourquoi le nombre et le site des organes intellectuels et moraux s’y trouvent seuls indiqués, sans rien préciser même sur leur forme ou leur grandeur. Une étude objective, qui n’est pas encore instituée convenablement, peut seule compléter cette
divided into *Courage* and *Prudence*, and *Firmeté, d’où prudence*, were classified as *qualités pratiques* or *résultat*. Five more were classified as *fonctions intellectuelles* or *moyens*. These included four for *Conception*, sub-divided into modes of intellec-
ts described as concrete-
synthetic, abstract-analytic, inductive-generalizing and deductive-systematizing, and one for *Expression*, which incorporated all forms of communication, from the mimetic and oral to the written. It is the ten remaining functions, however, on which we need to focus. Gathered together under the abstract category of *Principe*, they comprised what he called ‘the affective motors: propensities when active; feelings when passive’ [VII:726].

As with every other aspect of Comte’s systematizing classifications, the ten affects are arranged into a series [VII:694-704], with the logical property that each succeeding member of the series is dependant upon, but higher than, and therefore capable of modifying (within set limits), the one that comes before. In ascending order, we have, first, the seven ‘personal motors’, sub-grouped into those of Interest and Ambition. The former were divided into Instincts of Preservation, comprising the nutritive, sexual and maternal impulses (these two distinguished as survival interests of the race, rather than of the individual) and Instincts of Improvement. These, in turn, comprised the military instinct (improvement ‘by destruction’) and the industrial (improvement ‘by construction’). Ambition, finally, was sub-divided into the Temporal and the Spiritual -- hence Pride, or ‘need for power’, and Vanity, or ‘need for approbation’.

*théorie subjective du cerveau, en déterminant la constitution propre de chacun d’eux* [IX:239].
To complete the series — no surprise — the seven egoistic instincts are followed by the three social ones we have already encountered, i.e. by the three species of Comteian love. First, are the ‘special’ altruistic instincts of Attachment and Veneration. Then comes the ‘general’ one at the very top of the scale: ‘Benevolence or Universal Love (sympathy), humanity’. The first two forms of love are ‘special’ presumably because the immediate object of their affection is particular individuals — companions and contemporaries in the case of attachement, the great and the dead in the case of vénération [VII:702-4]. Bienveillance, on the other hand, initially cultivated in the form of parental love, is ‘general’ by virtue of the necessary vagueness of the future individuals it aims to benefit. Christianity, of course, rendered the seven egoistic instincts as the seven deadly sins\(^1\), but it did not include these last three, and especially the highest of these, in its catalogue of innate human impulses at all. The disinterested love — agape, charité — that had the power to redeem fallen nature could only be conceived as coming into the soul from without, i.e. through the mediating sacrifice of the Son, through priestly sacraments and the mysterious activity of the Spirit, all amounting to the free gift — the grace -- of God. For Comte, on the other hand, while an external factor was still needed -- society, in its march to perfection from family to country to Humanity -- there were innate psychic materials upon which to build\(^2\).

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\(^1\) It is noteworthy however that pride, the deadliest Christian sin, is for Comte the egoistic element closest (physiologically and subjectively) to the social sentiments. For Comte, of course, the egoistic impulses were not evil per se, indeed their exercise is essential for human life; nor are they necessarily at odds with the altruistic ones. One point of his cerebral physiology is that they naturally coexist. The conflict concerns which set will be dominant, especially with regard to action and intelligence [VII:691-2].

\(^2\) *Le grand saint Paul, en construisant sa doctrine générale de la lutte permanente entre la nature et la grâce, ebauch a réellement, à sa manière, l'ensemble du problème moral, non-seulement pratique mais aussi théorique. Car, cette précieuse fiction compensait*
Comte’s series of propensities and sentiments is morally qualitative, running from the lowest and most vegetative of the base instincts to the highest and most angelic of the ‘social’ ones. But it exemplifies what Comte takes to be a physiological ordering as well. While the intellectual faculties are in the frontal lobe, and the active ones immediately behind [VII:684], the ‘affective motors’ are located in a kind of sphere that runs from the centre to the back of the cerebellum. They are so arranged, moreover, that the highest are towards the middle, with the lower ones fanning out in a nether region towards the lower back. The effect of this arrangement is that the outer and lower motors are closest to the direct (‘vegetative’) impulses flowing from the rest of the body. They are subject, therefore, to relatively higher and more continuous states of excitation than those located more deeply in the cerebral mass [VII:684]. Hence, Comte believed, without any recourse to a doctrine of original sin, a physiological rationale could be given for what he took to be the principal practical problem of human community, i.e. the perennial conflict between personalité (the egoistic instincts which ‘alone motivate lower beings’) and sociabilité (which ‘in higher animals is joined with it’ [VII:691]). The worthier and less selfish the component motive, the lower its degree of physical energy, and the lower its immediate capacity to influence conduct. On the other hand, the contiguity of the highest affects with the intellective faculties gives them the greater power, when roused, to ‘direct and stimulate the intelligence’, just as egoism itself has less need of intelligence to define the object of its own desire [VII:693]. Overall, then, ‘the imaginary conflict between nature and grace’ is both explained, and rendered soluble; for it is ‘replaced by the real

provisoirement l’incompatibilité radicale du monothéisme avec l’existence naturelle des penchants bienveillants, qui poussent toutes les créatures à s’unir mutuellement au lieu
opposition between the posterior mass of the brain, the seat of the personal instincts, and its interior region, where there are distinct organs for the sympathetic impulses and the intellectual functions. Now at first sight, and with respect to the inner harmony of the individual organism, this motivational order does not necessarily present a problem. A well functioning interchange between sentiments, thought and action might well be imagined on the basis of the primacy of the lower instincts. This indeed is the typical condition of 'lower beings' [VII:691], just as it also characterized the situation of humanity during its long état préparatoire. Indeed, 'these lower exigencies continue to dominate our own species, at least indirectly...when everyone is living for others. For if basic conservation did not arouse any personal needs, our collective direction would be as deprived of fixed... direction as each individual life'. However, two considerations suggested that a psychological order organized around a pervasive égoïsme — in Comte's sense — could not be perfectly harmonious. First, the egoistic impulses themselves

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73 'La lutte fictive entre la nature et la grâce fut dès lors remplacée par l'opposition réelle entre la masse postérieure du cerveau, où résident les instincts personnels, et sa région antérieure où siégent distinctement les impulsions sympathiques et les facultés intellectuelles' [XI:237].

74 'Dans chaque existence complexe, l'harmonie générale ne peut résulter que d'une suffisant subordination de toutes les impulsions spontanées à un seule moteur prépondérant. Or ce penchant dominateur est égoïste ou altruiste: d'où dérive ma distinction antérieure entre les deux modes qui comporte le consensus vital' [VII:700].

75 'Au fond, ces mêmes exigences inférieures continuent à dominer notre propre espèce, mais suivant un mode indirect, qui tend au régime opposé, lorsque chacun vit pour l'autrui. Car, si la conservation fondamentale ne suscitait aucuns besoins personnels, notre existence collective serait autant d'épourvue de direction fixe et de caractère déterminé que chaque vie individuelle' [VII:692].
are a cacophony of pressing and inconsistent promptings [VIII:10]. One psychological interest can clash with another. Gratifying the desire for power or approbation requires curbing more immediate appetites, while it is apt to provoke conflicts with others which might even place survival needs at risk. The instinct for improvement implies deferral of immediate consumption, while the latter may be at variance with the ‘maternal instinct’ and with species interest in successful biological reproduction. Overall, then, the egoistic self is intrinsically incoherent. In satisfying its appetites in relation to *le dedans*, it has an ongoing need for prudent psychological self-management. But on what basis? If instinct X is stronger, how can instinct Y, at a higher but weaker level, direct the intelligence and the active character so as to regulate it and defer its lower gratifications? Such a personality is not, then, self-sufficiently stable. Its stability, and performative success, depend on the growth of a self-disciplining force that is constantly at variance with the immediate promptings of impulse, and which must nevertheless find some principle (but on what fixed basis?) in terms of which to regulate their fluctuating play.

However, this is not the only difficulty. The assumption that the moral, spiritual or psychological nature of even the egoistic individual can be comprehended as if it were an a-social monad is impossible to sustain — not only in principle (Comte’s human being, even *qua* biological organism, is always already socially implicated), but as soon as we take cognizance of the fact that all three cerebral regions must be developed for there to be any organized

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76 *Les instincts inférieurs dirigent la conduite d’après des motifs purement internes, dont la multiplicité et la variation ne lui permettent aucune marche fixe, ni même aucun*
personality at all. For this assumes, *inter alia*, intelligence, ratiocination etc, and therefore (at the least) language, which is a wholly social product. Furthermore, with the possible exception of the instinct for physical survival — *l'instinct nutritif* — the very concept of egoistic instincts presupposes a social environment of some kind in which these instincts are deployed. Each succeeding egoistic impulse in Comte’s ‘positive classification’, in fact, has a higher social component than the one before. The instinct for species survival follows that of individual survival. Instincts of improvement succeed those of interest, wherein the pacific conquest of nature follows the aggressive conquest of fellow Man. Beyond these, finally, the instincts of ambition — defined as crucial intermediaries, in the ego’s ascent to sociability [VII:698] — intrinsically concern the articulation of individuals to the social orderings of social power and status. In all these cases, and to an increasing extent, the play of self-interests already presupposes the implication of the egoistic individual in a social nexus entailing some degree of social co-operation. Which in turn, on Comte’s assumptions about the social tie, presupposes that the social instincts (in a similarly ascending scale of sociability) are themselves already actively in play.

But if even the dominance of egoistic instincts presupposes, at least indirectly, that the contrary social ones are to some degree active, then the regulating function of the purely egoistic ego is

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*caractère habituel, sauf pendant les exigences périodiques des principaux appétits* [VII:700].

77 ‘...il s’agit de décomposer peu à peu, d’abord la personnalité, puis la sociabilité, en penchants vraiment irréductibles, dont la succession totale développe entièrement la progression où je viens de poser les deux termes extrêmes, entre l’égoïsme complet et le pur altruisme, il faut intercaler les diverses affections intermédiaires, en procédant toujours dans décomposition binaire’ [VII:692-3].
significantly complicated. For, as the guiding principle for thought and action, it is placed in contradiction with these same social instincts [VII:692]. Whence 'le grand problème humaine: a split individual, part beast, part angel, in a continual state of internal civil war. This indeed, is how Christian moralists from St. Augustine to Kant had always seen the matter. But for Comte, you cannot be just a little bit social. Once on the road to sociability, real harmony ('harder to realize than egoistic unity, but far superior in plenitude and stability' [VIII:9]) can only come into being when the altruistic instincts themselves become dominant within the affective apparatus; at which point it would be these, rather than self-interest, which would drive thought and action, and regulate the expression of all the other affects.

It is just here that the Comteian requisites of social and individual perfection converge. The higher instincts can only dominate the lower ones if they are strengthened through exercise [VII:92]. And this could only be the case if the social tie had developed to the stage, beyond family and patriotism, where particular attachments had become subordinate to general ones78. But the exercise of altruistic instincts, and their enhanced power vis-à-vis the egoistic ones, and indeed the predominance of benevolence itself within the altruistic, could never be sufficiently guaranteed by the mere existence of society in its highest form -- i.e. that formed by individuals out of their generous, selfless and voluntary cooperation. The system of instincts within the individual, like that of individuals in society, is entropic79. The highest instincts, because of

78 'L'état social tend toujours vers cette inversion radicale de l'économie individuelle, parce qu'il développe nécessairement le plus faible instinct et comprime le plus énergique' [VII:692].
their lowest bio-individual intensity, must be elicited and exercised all the time. Hence, once again, the supplementary need, implicit in the sociological ideal of perfection itself, for the organized social intervention of religion, with all its strenuously demanding practices.

This still leaves us, though, with a puzzle. How, in practice, could the organismically spontaneous relation of instinctual forces — *l'économie individuelle* — be harmoniously reversed? What happens to the lower instincts, and their force, when they are subordinated to higher ones? Even granted the muscular analogy according to which exercise can increase strength, where is the enhanced *energy* of the latter to come from?

One possible answer to this last question is, from a common source. This would be the case in a model which conceived all the instincts as drawing upon, and channeling, a common store of energy distributed throughout the body. Certainly Comte seems to be working with such an economic notion in his emphasis on the 'vegetative' as a basis for higher order mental and affective functions [VII:594 *et seq*], and in his implicit assumption that closing off one instinctual channel would make psychic energy available for active expression through another. Articulating this would have permitted him to formulate a theory of sublimation. However, he develops no such concept, holding rigorously to the hypothesis of a separate physiological locus for each of the ten instincts, and thus to a schema that bars the way to any suggestion that higher instincts are in some sense energetically derivative of lower ones. There is no

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79 This is stated as a general biological law, according to which 'tous appareil animal se développe par l'exercice habituel, et s'amoindrit, ou même s'atrophie, d'après la désuétude prolongée' [VII:608].
theory of a larger Desire — nor for that matter of Lack — whose vicissitudes component instincts would all express.

Still less is there a Comteian theory of repression. Shutting down the valve on, let us say, the sexual instinct, has no direct implication for the rise to power of ‘benevolence’. Nor does its progressive diminution and displacement in the psychic economy of the sociated individual cause any distress or perverse secondary effects. If deprived of stimulus and opportunity, greed and lust simply atrophy, while the increasingly regular exercise of loving instincts can steadily enhance their motivating power. For Comte, then, unlike Freud, the extreme altruistic self-regulation of individuals in the ‘normal’ state of advanced industrial civilization can be perfectly harmonious, without any troubling rise of aggression or inner discontent.

I have already mentioned some instances of the institutional lengths to which Comte’s social program would have gone in procuring and sustaining the requisite instinctual training ground. In the positive re-inforcement of the best, private prayer would consume at least two hours a day in the schedule of each Humanist faithful⁸⁰, and this is not to count the weekly, monthly and annual rituals of the ‘public cult’, nor the round of domestic ‘consecrations’ which accompany the sacraments that mark each stage in the life-course. In diminishing the worst, a rich tapestry of images, beliefs and prohibitions would have ensured that the sexual instinct in

⁸⁰ Consisting of one hour in the morning, half an hour at midday and fifteen minutes in bed while falling asleep (to be repeated in the event of waking up in the middle of the night) [XI:111]. For Comte, the time thus spent on ‘l'intime amélioration journalière’ would substitute for time currently wasted in ‘lecteurs viceuses et les divertions inutiles ou funestes’ [XI:112].
particular was given the most minimal and disdainful play. Priests, to be sure, in almost Lutheran fashion were commanded to marry. But this was not just to prevent immorality by channeling sexual desire within the restraining responsibilities of marriage and parenthood. Still less was it a moral ratification of sexuality itself. Marriage was solely to bring the male priest under the uplifting influence of his wife; wherein the ideal relationship would be one based entirely on the loving sentiments of *attachement, vénération* and *bienveillance*, which would exclude lusts of the flesh altogether.

As Comte proudly confesses, in the dedicatory preface to the *Système*, this was precisely the height to which he had been led in his own relationship with the saintly Clotilde. In the inspiring cult of her blessed memory, he had been happily able to sustain the sublime love she called forth, together with the coincident overcoming (or atrophying) of bodily desire.

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81 *Outre que l'éducation positive fera partout sentir les vices d'un tel instinct et suscitera l'espoir continu de sa désuétude, l'ensemble du régime final doit naturellement instituer, à son égard, un traitement révulsif plus efficace que les austérités catholiques* [X:286].

82 *Tous sont obligés au mariage, du moins subjectif, afin de subir dignement les influences affectives* [X:255].

83 The 'superior perfection of a chaste relation' is celebrated in a special *fête* during each second month of the year, dedicated as whole to *le lien conjugal dans tous ses modes* [X:138].

84 The 'purity' and 'nobility' of the relationship are stressed at every turn. It is summarily generally characterized as *une sainte intimité, a la fois fraternel et paternel* [VII:iii].

85 Pickering [1993:490-1] cites a letter from Comte to Clotilde in which he relates that his sexual relations with Massin came to an end as early as 1834, a year after another manic-depressive episode. Massin had complained in a letter to Blainville in 1839 of relational problems with 'physical causes that I would not dare to write or even or even say to a doctor'. Comte claimed to have conquered his strong sexual impulses at the age of thirty,
argument that Comte considered confirmed by personal experience we might prefer to decode as a rationalized hysteria. Be that as it may, what Comte’s encomiums to Clotilde also dramatize is the crucial importance of gender to the ultimate coherence of his instinctual theory, and indeed of his social theory as well.

When we look at his scale of instincts we can see that the question of gender difference surfaces at just one small point. After the primal instinct for individual survival come two for the conservation of the species. All the other instincts are common to both sexes, but here the instinct divides into a male form, dominated by l’instinct sexuel, and a female form, dominated by l’instinct maternel, ‘of which the first is more energetic and less noble than the second’ [VII:696]. In procreation, then, there is a fundamental, and innate, asymmetry; which in turn provides a biological basis for a differential moral formation. The male desire for immediate self-gratification contrasts with a female desire for motherhood, a condition that demands self-sacrifice, family solidarity, and a subordination of the present to the future needs. And the converse is also the case: if men, ‘dispersively’ driven by sexual hunger, are not maternal, as an act of moral will; but Pickering speculates that he in fact became impotent as a combined result of his mental illness and of anxiety provoked by Massin’s open infidelities and general refusal of femininity as Comte defined it.

Kofman’s thesis is that Comte was defending himself against a female self-identification, and that the episode with Clotilde enabled him to switch from a ‘male’ scientific voice (that nonetheless masked a ‘female’ religious one) to the openly ‘female’ one assumed in his post-1847 priestly persona as serviteur de l’Humanité. From this angle, Comte’s oeuvre and his personal-sexual difficulties were all of a piece: a fantasmatiastic effort to become the perfect woman in giving birth, virginally, to a perfect child. ‘Ce que Comte peut à limite accepter est de donner naissance à une œuvre qu’il aurait seul à concevoir, dont il aurait été à la fois mère et père, une mère vierge, au-dessus de tout soupçon..., qui ne serait pas prostituée. Ce qu’il craint (désire) ce n’est pas seulement d’être pris
women can readily live without sex. When Clotilde, the abandoned wife, insisted on a 'pure love' and a 'chaste union', she may have been restraining Comte, but she was not being self-restrained. A-sexual tendresse and a devoted benevolence were supreme moral qualities she had just by virtue of being une femme.

Comte's dichotomization of male and female psychological character is hardly original. His importation of it into his instinct theory served only to buttress the emphatic support he gave to the high Romantic culte de la Femme. In historical context we may only marvel at the extravagance, and revived medievalism, of his version. A decade after libertarian Saint-Simonians were journeying East to make contact with the ancient cult of Isis and proclaiming 'the rehabilitation of the flesh' [Manuel:151-157], and a decade after the founding of the American women's movement at Seneca Falls, Comte's contribution to thinking through what he, like others, called l'emancipation de la Femme, was a retrograde attempt to synthesize

pour une femme, c'est d'être assimilé à une de ces femmes qui ne peuvent se montrer au grand jour, à une putain, comme l'était sa propre femme' [1978:29].

At least, not to the same degree [VII:235]. There is, in fact, an inconsistency in Comte's account with regard to the presence of these two instincts in the two sexes. Women, like men, are assumed to have a sexual instinct, though in their case it is much weaker. On the other hand, there is no reference to men having the equivalent of an instinct maternel, except as a socially developed derivative of le bienveillance. This lacuna provides symptomatic support for Kofman's thesis [v.s.] about Comte's repressed female self-identification.

For Comte, of course, 'emancipation' did not imply the 'anarchical dream' of gender equality, but the freedom of women to develop according to their own (essentially affective and domestic) nature [VII:244]. In which respect the key development for him was in the late middle ages, with the rise of chivalry and courtly love: 'Ainsi, le moyen âge, en émançipant la femme, fournit la base générale de l'organisation propre au mouvement moderne où cette influence radicale, qui, quoique passive, était universelle et continue, préserva l'ordre moral d'une entière dissolution' [IX:516].
the profane tradition of chivalry\textsuperscript{89} with the sacred one of Maryolatry, improbably grasped through the twin lenses of contemporary science and the \textit{Imitatio Christi}\textsuperscript{90}.

What needs to be emphasized, though, is not the curiosity value of Comte’s gender theory, but its crucial place in his whole conceptualization of moral-instinctual perfection. Woman appears in the story as a \textit{dea ex machina}. She is the crucial ‘intermediary between men and Humanity’ [X:67]. What permits Her to play this role is that for women the maternal instinct is, precisely, after hunger, the lowest and strongest. It includes, at the same time, a strong propensity for selfless nurturing. That is: for \textit{bienveillance}, which is the highest form of love, and thus the highest instinct of all. In the case of women, then, the most altruistic impulse is directly

\textsuperscript{89} There was indeed to be a new chivalric order, recruited from the patriciate, to serve as the special protector of the weak. ‘\textit{Ceux d’entre eux [les patriciens] qui se sentiront animés d’une générosité équivalente à celle de leurs héroïques prédécesseurs, consacrer, non leur épée, mais leur fortune, leur activité, et, au besoin, toute leur énergie, à la libre défense de tous les opprimés. De même qu’au moyen âge, cet office volontaire s’exercera surtout envers les classes spécialement exposées aux persécutions temporelles, c’est-à-dire les femmes, les philosophes, et les prolétaires}’ [VII:256-7]. The protection of the new chivalric order parallels the principle that \textit{l’homme doit nourrir la femme}, itself coupled with a similar obligation placed on \textit{la classe actif} towards \textit{la classe contemplatif}. The gender coding is consistent throughout. The male principle (the temporal/active power) materially supports and protects the female principle (the spiritual/affective power) which in turn transfigures the former through love.

\textsuperscript{90} Its primary religious expression was the \textit{culte de la femme}, which was the cornerstone of the private, as opposed to public, system of Positivist worship. It accorded with ‘\textit{l’aptitude naturelle de chaque digne femme à représenter l’Humanité... Tous les vrais serviteurs du Grand-Être sont plus ou moins susceptible de le représenter, chacun suivant son principal attribut. Mais la femme, où prévaut la sympathie, source essentielle de l’unité, doit fournir la meilleure personification d’un ensemble fondé sur l’amour}’ [X:108-9]. The ‘normal’ private female embodiments of \textit{l’Humanité} were \textit{les anges gardiennes} of mother, wife, and sister. It should be noted, at the same time, that the public cult personified Humanity exclusively through male \textit{serviteurs}. For they alone were
stimulated\(^{91}\) by one built into their very egoism [XI:234]. In the case of men, on the other hand, this 'most disruptive of egoistic impulses' [X:287] is taken to have no redeeming moral feature at all. Nor, setting his face firmly against the contrary Platonic view, can eros sublimate into desire for transcarnal unity. Eros is immoral, not divine. Men, then, are morally inferior. To become benevolent they have to ascend the whole scale, while for women a raw form of benevolence is natural even in a socially rudimentary context\(^{92}\). It follows that men learn to love through women. In Positive religion, it is through Woman that Man is saved. Hence the crucial mediating influence accorded to women in Comte's vision of a perfected social body -- not only in the englobing cult of Positive Polity's final state\(^{93}\), but also in day-to-day practice. Only women, restored and revered as a moral force, can counter the egoistic

suitable to represent the march of progress effected by the public activity whose proper province was that of men [XI:143].

\(^{91}\) The maternal instinct for Comte is nonetheless not to be confused with altruism itself, in that that they each have their own distinct siège in the cerebral apparatus. In the least morally developed women indeed, motherhood can be entirely selfish. 'On reconnaît que l'enfant peut constituer directement pour la mère, autant que le père, une simple possession personelle, objet de domination, et souvent de cupidité, plus qu'une affection désintéressée' [XI:234].

\(^{92}\) 'En effet, l'énergie supérieure des instincts personnels peut ainsi servir à compenser la langueur naturelle des instincts sympathiques, par une impulsion originale que ceux-ci n'auraient pas spontanément. Une fois surgie, l'affection persiste et grandit d'après son charme incomparable, malgré la cessation de ce grossier stimulant. La supériorité de votre sexe le dispense souvent d'une telle préparation, en le disposant à aimer aussitôt qu'il trouve des objets de l'amour, sans y cherchant aucune satisfaction personelle. Mais la grossièreté masculine ne peut presque jamais passer de ce préambule indirecte...' [XI:235].

\(^{93}\) 'Toute l'existence de l'Être-Suprême étant fondée sur l'amour, qui seul réunit volontairement ses éléments séparables, le sexe affectif constitue naturellement son représentant le plus parfait, en même temps que son principal ministère' [XI:105].
rebellion of head over heart that has characterized the metaphysical upheaval; only they, through the affective re-education of men, can make possible the constructive way out. 94.

Love and the other

Comte's model of the instincts leads him to identify as a supremely felicitous trend in industrialism the ever more sublimated, but also unhappy, course of kultur depicted by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* [1949:121-2]. For Comte, the advance of civilization is likewise built on love and renunciation. But the former has no direct ties with sexuality, and the latter is a matter of affective training which can reduce les penchants inférieurs without remainder. Thus, in the final stage of human development, duty and happiness harmoniously combine in a moral perfection which, on the basis of bodily health, but also on the basis of vanquishing the body’s socially superfluous demands, reveals the highest sentiments to be the true source of *le bonheur suprême* 95. Today we would find implausible both the historical realism of Comte's model (advanced capitalism, if with ongoing cultural conflict, has

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94 The regenerative role of women is discussed in chapter 3 of Volume of *Politique positive*, especially VII:205-213. Its twin pillars are the role of women in marriage, where they are to play privately a morally moderating role on male, and the *culte de la Femme*, primarily private, but also celebrated in leap years through a *fête générale ses saintes Femmes.*

95 'Notre bonheur consistera surtout à aimer; et nos sentions que l’amour, plus qu’aucune autre affection, se développe par un exercice qui, chez lui seul, peut également conduire à tous les les individus à la fois, en s’accroissant avec un tel concours' [VII:353]

'Confondant le devoir et le bonheur, la religion positive les fait irrévocablement consister dans le perfectionnement moral, source exclusive de la véritable unité' [X:324].

'Centres respectifs de l’âme et le corps, l’amour universel et l’instinct conservateur instituent le bonheur et la santé d’après l’unité résultée de leur harmonie' [X:284].
‘repressively desublimated’ [Marcuse:1966]) and its idealization. Besides its neuroses, a Freudian would say, the psycho-social ideal Comte imagined as the apotheosis of Love would be disturbed in practice by undischarged aggression and the devitalizing effects of having hyper-repressively diverted libidinal energy from Love to Death. ‘After sublimation, the erotic component no longer has the power to bind the whole of the destructive elements that were previously combined with it, and these are released in the form of inclinations to aggression and destruction’ [Freud 1950:80].

But this is not the only problem with Comte’s conceptualization of love and the social tie. There is a further flaw in his theory of affects, especially as it enters into an attempted synthesis between individual-organismic and social determinations. This is that the three species of love, like all the instincts, are figured, purely and exclusively, as forces which emanate outwards from psyche to world. Love, whether its object is personal or general, is like a beam from a lighthouse. Neither the direction nor the strength of the light is the slightest bit affected by the object it illuminates. There is no ‘between’, no mutual implication, which might connect, other than mechanically, the terms which it binds together. Curiously, then, Comteian love is not social in its substance but only in its effects.

This is why attachment occupies the lowest rung in his ladder of love. The mere liking of individuals for one another is conceived as the least altruistic social affect, and the weakest basis for the social tie. And so it is, considering what Comte’s narrowly objectivizing thematic of love as a one-way emotive force permits him to leave out. In his conception of the direct affection of one individual for another there is no taking the place of the other, no
identification, no sympathy. The ego is neither pierced, nor does it reach out, in response to their concrete, mortal existence. The Other for whom we live may always be represented (normally in memory) by an individual face; but it does not presence as 'face'\textsuperscript{96}. Nor does it make any difference to the sentiment itself if affection is returned. Mutual \textit{attachment} has no intersubjective dimension, indeed no interaction through which a bond of mutual sympathy might be forged, and even grow. There is no dialectic of recognition. Not only, finally, is Comte’s analysis of attachment short on the subjective side of human interactivity, it also lacks attention to the objective aspect of group dynamics. If De Maistre’s theory of sacrifice and substitution [1971:291-298] pointed the way to an analysis of gifts and counter-gifts, Comte’s instinctualist conception of love and the social tie displaces any lead he might have followed. Thus \textit{attachment} cannot build or strengthen through give and take. There is no symbolic exchange, no bonding through (or conflictual politics of) \textit{reciprocity}.

\textit{Attachment}, then, is a weak affective tie, even in the most intensely personal case. It only has deep bonding power, in fact, in so far as it provides a framework within which the two higher forms of love -- veneration and benevolence -- might flourish. The male-female couple, when properly role-divided, provides the paradigm for such a possibility. It is as if a hydraulic

\textsuperscript{96} This is to say, in Levinasian terms, that there is no (absolute) alterity in Comte’s \textit{autrui}. ‘The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is encompassed...The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our \textit{nature} and developed by our existence...[T]he ethical relationship which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates form the other’ [Levinas,1969:194-5]. Comte’s \textit{autrui} is a thematised totality; Levinas’s is an unthematisizable infinity.
principle is at work. To have higher social bonding power, love must be drawn upwards, in worshipful respect and service, or else it must flow down, as from parents to children, or from Humanity, through her faithful servitors, towards all her children. The altruism Comte exalts is not only unilateral, but thrives on the difference in magnitude between the terms it connects.

From which, considered as an attempt to delineate a positively based ideal of human community, two unfortunate consequences follow. First, Comte's normative ideal of a perfected social-individual harmony downplays both the instinctual basis for, and the strategic significance of, direct individual ties with the living in favour of anonymous ties with a general Other which projects into the future and gathers up the memories of the dead. Within this generality of affection, the most exalted ties to the social love-object are deflected away from the present. The gratitude for gifts received, which suffuse the sentiment of benevolence, connect one generation with another, rather than this generation with itself. To which extent, secondly, the gift, in Comte's social ontology, is always one-way. We can never repay Humanity for the benefits of life, self, and social milieu. Insofar as we might aspire to, by a life of service, the Humanity from whom we have received the gift is already passed into subjectivity, while the Humanity our benevolence might benefit in future is in no position to

97 'Il faut que la population actuelle s'y sente toujours placée entre l'ensemble de ses prédécesseurs et celui des successeurs, afin de développer la continuité fondamentale qui la domine par les uns pour les autres...Nous devons donc entrevoir avec les morts, et même les non-nées, un commerce plus suivé, quoique moins spécial, qu'avec nos propres contemporains' [X:24].

98 The real destination of our objective existence, declares Comte, is 'transmettre amélioré à nos successeurs l'héritage progressif que nous avons reçu de nos prédécesseurs. Ainsi conçu dans son ensemble, le service de l'Humanité devient essentiellement gratuit. Car,
give back. As a result, and however freely it flows, benevolence is all obligation. The highest form of love is expressed as an ethic and ethos of selfless service. As agents of the Humanity we cherish and revere, we have duties but can claim no rights.

For all these reasons -- the relatively weak instinctual basis for solidarity as against continuity, the privileging of the non-living Other, and the selflessness without reserve implied by the social debt -- Comte’s normative ideal of social-instinctual perfection is full of moral coercion. And it is so not only because of an instinctual theory which presupposes that the gratification of the lower impulses is at radical variance with gratification of the higher ones (it is a surplus repressive model of a surplus repressive economy), but because of that theory’s instinctually uni-directional character. The perfected social order which positive religion had to re-bind, then, was not quite as perfect, even in Comtean terms, as he supposed. It was at once insufficiently solidary in itself -- and so required the supplements of continual worship and

_choque gérénation doit rendre gratuitement à la suivante ce qu’elle-même reçut gratuitement de la précédante_ [VIII:71].

99 _Dans l’état positif... l’idée de droit disparait irrévocablement. Chacun a des devoirs, et envers tous; mais personne n’aucun droit proprement dit_ [VII:361; emphasis in original].

100 _[W]hile any form of the reality principle demands a considerable degree and scope of repressive control over the instincts, the specific historical institutions of the reality principle and the specific interests of domination introduce additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association. These additional controls arising from the specific institutions of domination are what we denote as surplus-repressive_ [Marcuse, 1955: 34]. Gad Horowitz [1977] has considerably refined and developed this notion. The surplus-repressive character of Comte’s social theory occludes itself not only in his socio-morally reformed capitalism (an order in which domination is ‘only’ of the whole with regard to its parts), but also in a hierarchical conception of social and instinctual order which, at both levels, is irreducible given the functional requirements of the bio-organism.
sacerdotally supervised public opinion — and peopled by individuals so walled up in themselves that they were incapable of sympathy in anything like an intersubjective sense.

Comte was not wrong in imagining that industrialization implied a deep transformation in the character of social relationships, that it rendered problematic pre-existing modes of group integration, and that thinking the good and bad possibilities of this required an understanding both of what Althusser called ‘ideological reproduction’ and of what Freudians call ‘libidinal economy’. In this respect his thinking has an exemplary significance in the history of social thought. His intellectual madness, however, consisted in his attempt to rationalize as perfectly, and constitutively ‘social’ an abstract benevolence which was split off both from libido and from any engagement with concrete-historical human beings.
CHAPTER SIX

THE PATH TO PERFECTION

For Comte, the coincidence of individual and collective perfection in the formation of a social body harmonized by love occurs only at the end of a long history. Nevertheless, this *summa bonum* is more than a regulative ideal because, as in other grand narratives of progress, it finally *does* arrive, making visible, indeed, the logic of the process that had propelled it into being. Positivist principles, however, abjured explanation in terms of final causes, and indeed explanation through causes at all. For Comte, then, demonstrating the necessary actualization of social perfection required an inductive basis. It was a matter of ‘institution a true *liaison* between the historical facts’ [V:8], together with the structural concomitancies by which these were always mediated.

This did not exempt Comte’s construct from the charge by Durkheim, for example, that it was itself metaphysical, identifying ‘historical development with an idea he already had of it’, so that ‘the facts seem to have reality only through the ideas which are their germ’ [1964:19-20]. At first sight, Comte’s story about how *l’homme* becomes *l’Humanité* is metaphysical in an almost classical sense. It seems to unfold as an absolute idealism in which the logic of history is the logic of (the maturation and coming into self-possession) of mind itself. In his first version, in volume five of *Philosophie positive*, pride of place is given to the Law of Three Stages¹. Here, the motor of social progress is the drive for knowledge as humanity’s growing activity on, and in, ‘the theatre of the

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¹ ‘*Ma loi fondamentale d’évolution [sociale] fixe...le principal attribut et la coordination générale de ces diverses phases, en les rattachant toujours à l’état correspondant, théologique, métaphysique, ou positif du système philosophique élémentaire des conceptions humaines*’ [V:21].
terrestrial globe' [V:12], increasingly pushes the species to grasp and modify it as a law-ruled externality. In the second version, elaborated in the third volume of Système de Politique Positive, the logic of intellectual development is complemented by one of moral development. Here, the dominance of modal personality types by increasingly 'social' instincts correlates with social expansion and similarly crosses a ruptural threshold in which, pari passu with the passage from theologism to synthetic positivity, the predominance of egoistic instincts is superseded by altruism.

If the first version tells the human story as essentially cognitive—the progress of knowledge—the second tells it as instinctual/affective, as the awakening and elevation of the harmonizing power of love. But in both cases, the evolution dwelt on is inner. All proceeds as if subjectivity determines being and society is a super-subject, propelled towards an identity of essence and existence through the unfolding logic of its own mental and moral nature.

No doubt this is a metaphorics from which Comte never completely freed himself. Nevertheless, it is by no means his whole story. Intelligence may be constrained by its own static and dynamic laws to develop along a particular path, but the growth of knowledge was itself stimulated by, and always tending to harmonize with, the panoply of 'effective needs' [VI:634]. These latter, moreover, were not simply given, but generated in the interplay between physiological impulse and

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2 While the basic design remains the same after l'opuscule fondamentale, the correlation in the first synthesis, of intellectual with social development (i.e. with the phased progression from fetishism-tribes-nomadicity to industrialism-global society-positivism), is more prominently and systematically interwoven in the second with that of affectivity as a (religiously crucial) third term. Hence, as outlined in Volume IX, chapter one, Comte's three fundamental laws of social dynamics: nous devenons toujours plus intelligents, plus actifs, et plus aimants [IX:72]. Comte never ceased to emphasize, though, that the last of these is dependent on the other two, so that strictly speaking affectivity has no independent logic of its own. 'Quant au développement affectif, il ne comporte point une loi logiquement distincte; son explication n'exige que le principe général sur l'acroissement d'unité, lorsqu'elle est assez préparé par les deux autres études du mouvement humain' [IX:10-11].
the external *milieu* within and from which the human organism lived. This interplay itself occurred as a social process. The prevailing mode of knowledge and related level of technical capacity shaped the prevailing institutional order which in turn provided an associational medium (of advancing complexity and scale) for the moral/instinctual formation of individuals. The prime mover of social and moral progress, in these terms, was neither intellect nor affect, however crucial their conjoint transformation to the final harmonic result. It was, rather, the third of Comte’s categories of (human) existence, *l’activité*, ‘which continually modifies the external world in accordance with the fundamental exigencies of our internal, corporeal and cerebral, constitution’ [IX:55]. From this angle, the key element in the narrative of human perfection is the steady rise of organized, knowledge-based production—*l’industrie*—with its cumulating power to modify the physical milieu. The Positive transformation becomes possible, and necessary, when industry, made ever more powerful through natural science, becomes a predominant social power in its own right, thereby displacing military rule, and promising the day when a united humanity will finally claim the wholly known earth for the satisfaction of its fully developed needs³.

Comte’s ascent of Humanity, in short, not only unfolds against the background of the limits and possibilities of the cerebrum as the directing centre of the human organism. It is determined throughout by a social logic which is itself inscribed within a developing, and at root biologically prescribed⁴, relationship between Man and Nature. It is to these mediations, then, that we must turn

³ Or, in socio-theological terms: ‘Voilà comment le Grand-Être, dans sa pleine maturité, prendra possession de son domaine planétaire, en y développant toutes les améliorations compatibles avec l’ordre universel, d’après la subordination continue de l’activité spéciale à l’unité générale’ [X:61].

⁴ ‘[L]’ordre moral de toute association humaine repose nécessairement sur son organisation intellectuelle, et celle-ci sur sa constitution matérielle. Or, cette dernière resterait, à son tour, sans fondement systématique, si elle était conçue isolément du milieu spécial qui lui correspond. Destinée surtout à le modifier continuellement pour
if we wish to probe the apriorisms that deflect Comte’s ‘scientific’ account of social development towards the good end he devoutly wished history to consummate.

Of course, Comte’s account is vulnerable on many scores. A centering of world history on its ‘Western’ genealogy (Egypt, Greece, Rome, feudal and industrial Europe), with Paris as the pinnacle of that development and the spiritual capital of the perfected civilization to come [X:373], will seem hopelessly parochial today5. Nor did Comte even suspect the labour of comparative civilizational analysis that Weber, for example, saw as necessary if such Eurocentrism was to be established as more than that6. What interests me here, though, is not the dubiousness of Comte’s claim of universality for the Western série sociale, but the form of his argument, particularly as that bears on his attempt to delineate a post-theistic moral ontology. In this respect, three linked features of his schema are especially worth examining. The first concerns the place of violence and l’instinct déstructeur [VII:697] in the development and perfecting of the social totality. The second concerns the implications of Humanity’s growing puissance modificatrice for its destined place in

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5 At the outset of his consideration of social dynamics in Volume 5 of Philosophie positive Comte states as a primary ‘logical restriction’ that the analysis will essentially concentrate ‘sur une seule série sociale, c’est-à-dire...exclusivement le développement effectif des populations les plus avancées, en écartant, avec une scupuleuse persévérance, toute vaine et irrationnelle digression sur les divers autres centres de civilisation indépendante, dont l’évolution a été, par des causes quelconques, arrêtées jusqu’ici à un état plus imparfait...Notre exploration historique devra donc être presque uniquement réduite ou l’avant-garde de l’humanité, comprenant la majeure partie de la race blanche ou les nations européennes, en nous bornant même...aux peuples de l’Europe occidentale’ [IV:3].

6 Whence the question that inaugurates Weber’s classic study of the relation between ‘the Protestant ethic’ and ‘the spirit of capitalism’: ‘A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think)
the cosmos. The third concerns that wider order itself, as the object of Positive Religion's highest love. As we shall see, if Comte's analysis surrounding these points is enclosed within its guiding religious idea, that idea nonetheless goes through a remarkable mutation in his effort to bring it into consistency with what he took to be the reality principle actually at work.

The question of violence

Recorded history, as Comte well knew, has resounded with the clash of arms. For him indeed, *la vie guerrière* is a primary fact, a self-evident starting-point for tracing both the dynamics and the moral direction of progress.7

From the start, the expansion of society from families to tribes, cities, empires, right through to the proto-Ecumene of Christendom and the modern system of nation-states, had been a military process. 'In fact,' he notes, 'although human association cannot completely extend itself except through work, the initial development of this presupposes the existence of big societies [*grands sociétés*], which war alone can found'8. This expansion was not just a quantitative matter. On the one hand, because of what Comte assumed to be the initial prevalence of the most egoistic instincts,

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7 *La constitution cérébrale et l'économie corporelle concourent donc à faire prévaloir l'activité guerrière sur l'activité pacifique, au début de tout association humaine* [IX:57]

8 *En effet, quoique l'association humaine ne puisse s'étendre complètement que par le travail, le développement initial de celui-ci suppose l'existence des grandes sociétés, que la guerre peut donc seule fonder. Or, cette formation décisive s'accomplit naturellement, d'après la tendance spontanée de l'activité militaire vers l'établissement d'une domination universelle* [IX:59-60].
the coerced unity of military regimes had been necessary to ensure performance of the work required for collective material advance. On the other, it was an indispensable historical preparation for a mode of industry that could finally be motivated from within. The widening aggregations founded on force tended to create ever more universal circles of sociability, which themselves became transformed into moral institutions by the sentiments they elicited and strengthened. 'Even in a rudimentary state, reduced to simple brigandage..., warfare cultivates mutual attachment, veneration of leaders, and even benevolence towards inferiors' [IX:56]. That same movement also transmuted the terms of conquest, which for Comte was the normal aim of war. The enslavement of prisoners replaced their execution [IX:187], and the abolition first of slavery, then of serfdom, prepared the way for free labour. With la vie industrielle now firmly established, all that remained was the 'civic incorporation' of the proletariat [IX:82-4], since the 'intimate morality proper to free exchange tends to efface itself completely when the contrast between work and conquest seems reduced to the replacement of violence by fraud'.

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9 '[L]a conquête systématisée constitue le résultat normal de l'activité militaire, convénablement développée. Elle détermine naturellement deux transformations connexes, également nécessaire à notre préparation, l'extension de la société parmi les vainqueurs, et la prépondérance des habitudes industrielles chez les vaincus' [IX:59].

10 While Comte 'appreciated' ancient slavery 'toujours normale tant que la production resta nécessairement subordonnée à la conquête', he excoriated modern slavery -- l'esclavage coloniale -- as not even 'une rétrogradation...Soumettant le travail à l'entrepreneur, il dégrade également l'un et l'autre. Il ne put jamais constituer qu'une monstruosité sociale, émanée de l'infâme oppression que la race intelligente exerce sur la race aimante, en abusant une puissance que l'humanité développa pour leur commun bonheur d'après leur digne concours' [IX:576].

11 '[L]a vie industrielle commence par être essentiellement personnel, ou du moins purement domestique. Ce caractère égoïste y persiste même quand l'industrie a pris un vaste développement, comme on le voit trop aujourd'hui. De là résulte le principal obstacle à la systématisation normale de la vie pacifique, tandis que l'aptitude morale de l'existence militaire rend celle-ci facilement susceptible d'une pleine organisation...L'intime moralité propre à l'échange volontaire tend même à s'effacer
Under the growing impress of both practical and ideological needs, that intellectual development itself, summarized in the law of three stages, coincided with the development of society’s military character. The period of fetishism, which culminated in an organized ‘astrolatry’ [VIII:88], saw inter-tribal warfare overtaken by that of the city-states, and then, as these too militarized and extended their range of conquest, by that of military empires. The polytheism that flourished with the latter expressed the reduction of fetishism’s manifold of spirits to relatively ordered hierarchies of locally important cults, and the emergence, under the aegis of astronomy, of notions of fate and cosmic law. Monotheism, as the logical culmination of the abstractive operation that had led from fetishism to polytheism, was associated with the full development of the latter’s sacerdoce into an intellectual and moral power independent of the military state [VIII:89]. Under monotheism too, the temporal power, increasingly preoccupied with the management of wealth, softened into a ‘defensive’ (i.e. feudal) form. It was this regime, finally, which had come into crisis with the rebellion of the urban ‘communes’, the disintegration of the monotheistic synthesis and the decisive rise of industry and science. All told, then, there were three main phases in social development: active militarism, defensive militarism, and industrialism. With the onset of the latter, the conditions had been finally prepared for society as a whole to take the path of improvement through

entièrement quand le contraste entre le travail et la conquête semble réduit à remplacer la violence par la fraude’ [IX:58-9].

12 ‘En effet, l’existence inaccessible des astres, leur régularité spéciale, et même l’universalité de leur spectacle, constituent autant de motifs d’y rattacher tous les phénomènes terrestres qui ne s’adaptent pas facilement aux personnifications polythétiques. Ainsi se forme graduellement la première astrologie, fille d’astrolâtrie et mère d’astronomie, en exagérant spontanément la subordination réelle de la terre envers le ciel’ [IX:153].

13 ‘L’existence humaine commence, en effet, par être essentiellement militaire, pour devenir enfin complètement industrielle, en passant par une situation intermédiaire où la conquête se transforme en défense. Tels sont, évidemment les caractères respectifs de la
production rather than through plunder, so that the energy hitherto invested in conquering other peoples could be redirected into conquering the planet. The pacifying effects, indeed, would extend to the entire animal kingdom.

Every animal species tends towards exclusive dominion on earth, just as each human population aims to dominate all the others. But these two struggles necessarily cease at one and the same time. When the true Great Being is sufficiently constituted, according to the mental and moral harmony of all its essential organs, its universal preponderance brings to an end the particular conquests of every other race. Animal unity thus tends to establish itself in the same way as human unity, by extending membership to those open to rallying themselves to the central organ, and by the extinction of those that are not.

One thing should already be clear. As the objective incarnation of the Good, l’Humanité is an emergent product of social history. On the other hand, that history itself has a morally mixed character. To be sure, all along the way, the social totality embodies at least a rudimentary form of love, just as it always bears a potential for the highest form of sociality which is Humanity itself. But in preliminary stages of social development altruism was severely restricted in range, and subordinated to an egoism and aggression it could only partially rein in. Humanity, then, as the divine end of human history, emerges through a process not just of perfection—as if whatever

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*civilization ancienne, de la sociabilité moderne, et de la transition propre au moyen âge* [IX:331-2].

14 ‘Chaque espèce animale tend...à l’empire exclusif de la terre, comme chaque population humaine à la domination sur toutes les autres. Mais ces deux luttes simultanées cessent nécessairement à la fois. Quand le vrai Grand-Être est assez constitué, d’après l’harmonie, morale et mentale, de ses diverses organes essentiels, sa prépondérance universelle pose un terme irrévocable aux conquêtes spéciales de toute autre race. L’unité animale tend ainsi à s’établir de la même manière que l’unité
socially existed was already nascently good—but of purification, in which, once the requisite intellectual, practical and moral resources are historically assembled, a founding barbarity—the Hobbesian world of appetite channeled into warfare, conquest and slavery—is shaken off. But how is this shaking off to be understood? What happens—has happened—to the violence through which Humanity, in all its emergent perfection, has been born?

In part this is a sociological question, a matter of comprehending the real process in which a society based on force evolves into one based on positive social attachment and cooperation. But for Comte it is also a doctrinal question. If the Great Being of Humanity is to replace God as the true subject of divine predicates, as the real fount of our ‘interior moral perfecting’ [X:39], it must be wholly and sublimely good. To become wholly good, and worthy of being worshipped as such, the vitiating sources of the earlier violence must have disappeared. But if so, how? And in any case, what was it? At stake is the question of evil and the related one of original sin. *Ex hypothesi*, Comte was bound to reject both any notion that evil was a real force in nature—only a good cosmos could naturally evolve towards the good—and any version of original sin, whether that sin was social (as with Rousseau) or (as in Christian belief) lodged in the dark side of the human heart\(^\text{15}\). At the same time, however, Comte could not recuperate the cruel history of warfare and oppression simply through a privative concept of evil — violence as deprival or frustration — since

\[\text{humaine, par l'extension des membres susceptibles de se rallier à l'organe central et l'extinction des parties indisciplinables'} \text{[VII:617].}\]

\(^{15}\) Comte never discusses the doctrine of original sin directly, but only as conveyed by the formula of grace versus nature, a doctrine whose chief error for him is its denial of the innateness of altruistic sentiments [VIII:115-116]. By placing the weight of his critique on that point, however, he accepted its more general framework, thus avoiding any consideration of the view that the species was inherently flawed in a sense that went beyond the irrepressibility of selfish motives. The latter of course, as his whole bio-social analysis of *égoïsme* attests, could be admitted, without it implying the former.
this would have been at variance with his instinct theory and forced him to reconsider the coercion and repression palmed under his own card of the Good. The question, then, could not be ducked.

One kind of answer is given by the reconciliationism implicit in Comte’s historical method itself. In Positivist historiography, (scientific) reason, enlightened by love for Humanity, retroactively refigures the miseries that the history of social violence has inflicted on its victims into necessary means of human advance.

This spontaneous tendency to comprehend and celebrate the whole of the past constitutes the most characteristic property of positive philosophy, whose always relative spirit could alone procure at last for historical concepts an indispensable plenitude. Under the religion of Humanity, history becomes the sacred science, as devoted directly to the study of the Great Being’s destiny.

Unlike in Condorcet’s Esquisse, then, the barbarities of the past are not simply to be condemned from the moral heights of a later progress. They are to be assessed for the advance they represent over what has gone before, and for the way they prepare for advances to follow. Except that Comte treats as actual the historical path he can only predict—Minerva’s owl flies in 1927—his ‘appreciative’ account of the preparatory stages of history, and of the indispensable role played by conquest and repressive social rule, is similar in spirit to Hegel’s ‘true theodicy’. Indeed, Comte’s

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16 ‘Cette aptitude spontanée à comprendre et célébrer l’ensemble du passé constitue la propriété la plus caractéristique de la philosophie positive, dont l’esprit toujours relatif pouvait seul procurer enfin aux conceptions historiques une indispensable plénitude. Sous la Religion de l’Humanité, l’histoire devient la science sacrée, comme directement vouée à l’étude des destinées du Grand-Être’ [IX:xxiv].

17 ‘Il [Condorcet] a condamné le passé au lieu de l’observer; et pas suite son ouvrage n’a été qu’un longue et fatigante déclamation, dont il ne résulte réellement aucune instruction positive’ [Xapp:114].
justificatory operation goes further\textsuperscript{18}. There is no irrecoverable loss, no tragic dimension\textsuperscript{19}. In venerating the Great Being that unfolds its potential through human history, the past, in all its salient moments, is simply to be celebrated in acts of grateful worship. In the Positivist Calendar, the fifth month is named after Julius Caesar and is dedicated to the commemoration of ‘military civilization’ [XI:335]. History itself is \textit{la science sacrée}\textsuperscript{20}. Nor is this just because, as the story of Humanity’s becoming, the narrative as well as the narratee is to be regarded as sacred. It is also because the subject of the story exists in time as well as space, and the affective ties that bind the present to the past—its \textit{continuité}—are an essential constituent of what it is. The past, then, must be ‘constructively’ recuperated for \textit{l’Humanité} to exist at all. This recuperation is itself, in fact, a purifying process. Just as the posthumous incorporation of worthy individuals into Humanity purges their memory of all but the exemplary qualities which they can represent and inspire, so too, in the sublimating selectivity of collective memory, the ‘slaughter-bench’ of history [Hegel, \textit{PhG}, 1953:26-27]. For a discussion of the tragic dimension in Hegel’s philosophy of history see Kaufmann 1966, esp 25-255.

\textsuperscript{18} Comte offers no such qualification to the path of reconciliation as does Hegel. The following indeed might justly have been aimed at Comte himself: ‘Without rhetorical exaggeration, a simple, truthful account of the miseries that have overwhelmed the most noble of nations and polities and the finest exemplars of private virtue forms a most fearful picture and excites emotions of the profoundest and most hopeless sadness, counterbalanced by no consoling result. We can endure it and strengthen ourselves against it only by thinking that this is the way it had to be — it is fate; nothing can be done. And at last, out of the boredom with which this sorrowful reflection threatens us, we draw back into the vitality of the present, into our aims and interests of the moment; we retreat, in short, into the selfishness that stands on the quiet shore and thence enjoys the distant spectacle of wreckage and confusion’ [Hegel, 1953:26-27]. For a discussion of the tragic dimension in Hegel’s philosophy of history see Kaufmann 1966, esp 25-255.

\textsuperscript{19} In a very different sense, and against a view that would assimilate Comte, via scientism, to the Cartesian tradition, Macherey [1989:122] argues that Comte’s thought can nonetheless be regarded as ‘\textit{dans l’horizon d’une philosophie tragique}’. This was because outside the self-imposed closure that equates the world with the human world, it evokes ‘\textit{l’infini pascalien}’.

\textsuperscript{20} ‘[L]’histoire deviendra bientôt la science sacrée, conformément à son office normal, l’étude directe des destinées du Grand-Lièvre dont la notion résume toutes nos saines théories’ [IX:2].
1953:27] gets no mention, collective miseries like slavery are transfigured by their place in the general advance and, as concerns remembered individuals, only the good — *les vraiment assimilables* — survive.

Thus Comte is able to sidestep the issue of the objective status of evil by shifting its consideration to the subjective mode of being in which his ‘Humanity’ largely exists. Both in *la science sacrée* and in the ‘normal’ process of generational turnover, the bad is purified away in the passage from what has happened to what is remembered — a transformation which in the Positive Polity is systematized, and presided over by the Positivist priesthood with its special philosophical relation to *la science sacrée* and its supervision of the cult of the dead. However, the ‘subjective existence’ of *l’Humanité* does not exhaust what it is. Humanity also exists objectively in the concatenation of social ties and sentiments whose rise to ascendancy within the social whole is the very condition for its having a subjective existence at all. So what happens to evil on the plane of the ‘real’?

Here, Comte’s account interweaves three logics. First, a dialectic of war and social development spirals towards love and harmony via the way conquest creates unities which engender psychic forces that transmute an egoistic economy into an altruistic one. Secondly, there is a dialectic of war and production in which *la vie guerrière* helps prepare the conditions for its supercession by *la vie industrielle*, so that the common goal of planetary modification comes to replace the divisive one of conquest as the self-consciously collective path of material self-improvement. To which, thirdly, there is an instinctual correlate. Within the scale of egoistic instincts, affective motor number five (‘improvement through construction, or industrial instinct’) rises in exercised intensity at the expense of affective motor number four (‘improvement through destruction, or military instinct’).
The addendum is ingenious. For, through it, violence, at first sight given a leading role, is summoned onto the stage only to be conjured away and redefined as something else. On the one hand, that is to say, the path of war and the path of industry are distinguished, even motivationally, only with respect to the 'choice of means' [IX:239] with which they pursue the same reasonable aim of material self-improvement. On the other hand, both instinctually and functionally, destructiveness is never for its own sake. The force applied, and the will to apply it, is always instrumental, closely bound up indeed with a constructive intent. Thus Comte can identify the social violence of warfare, plunder, conquest and enslavement with the destructiveness involved, 'even for herbivores', in the removal of 'obstacles' without which no animal 'would know how to subsist' 21. To be sure, the larger motive of self-improvement is both egoistic in itself, and, in preliminary stages of social development, it is colonized by a general preponderance of egoism, including the collective egoism of tribes, cities and nations [VII:69]. In that context, whether industrial or military in form, l'instinct du perfectionnement was linked to greed, and bound to produce a struggle for dominance. Hence conflict and warfare. As well, even at a higher stage of development, the balance between the constructive and destructive components of 'improvement' always had to be watched, given the instinctually greater energy and universality of the latter 22. With regard to political action, it

21 'Cette amélioration s'obtient de deux manières très-différentes, quoique souvent coexistantes, par la destruction des obstacles ou par la construction des moyens. Loin que le premier mode soit particulier aux carnivores, il est, au contraire, plus universel que le second, comme étant à la fois plus indispensable et plus facile. Aucun animal, même herbivore, ne saurait subsister sans détruire beaucoup d'objets, et souvent d'autres êtres animés, sans excepter ses semblables, surtout dans les luttes sexuelles' [VII:697].

22 The closest Comte comes to the thought that destructiveness can, in principle, become psychologically detached from its natural aim of perfectionnement is in a remark he makes
was precisely such an imbalance, marked by the continuing dominance of 'metaphysics', which the constructive path of 'positive politics' set out to correct. However, *l'instinct déstructeur*, precisely by being assimilated to a wider *instinct du perfectionnement* [VII:727], is not subtended by any irrefragable aggressivity or will to dominance *as such*. There is no room for a purely malevolent impulse on Comte’s entire cerebral map.

Even in these terms, though, the productive activity which militarism fosters through social pacification, and which ultimately replaces it as the path to self-improvement, has a curious ambiguity. *L’industrie* is touted as the basis for social peace. At the same time, *l’industrie* enables the Great Being to conquer the earth, and if it brings social peace it does so, in effect, by shifting the object of aggression from man to nature. The externalized violence of such a

while surveying the positive contribution of the various instincts to the perfecting of *l’existence active* (in chapter 4 of *Politique positive*’s last volume). ‘Néanmoins, cet instinct exigera toujours une surveillance spéciale, parce qu’il ne cesserà point de participer à nos opérations quelconques, même mentales, qui supposent la destruction continue des obstacles qu’éprouve la construction graduelle des moyens’. But he immediately adds that ‘le penchant détruire, même quand il dégénère en médiasance, peut être spontanément contenu, d’après l’ensemble des habitudes résultées de l’éducation positive’ [X:287]. On the macro level, the dissolvent animus of ‘metaphysics’ in its post-Revolutionary phase exhibited precisely the danger of *l’instinct déstructif* overshooting what had initially been its indispensable, obstacle clearing, role. Comte, in his own political *prise de position*, had personally experienced the shift from this mode to that of ‘the construction of means’, which for him, of course, was the crucial axis of contemporary political choice.

23 A similar consideration entered into Comte’s ‘positive theory of (material) property’, which treated violent forms of ‘material transmission’ as imperfect means to attain constructive social ends. ‘D’après leur dignité et leur efficacité décroissantes, nos quatre modes généraux de transmission matérielle doivent être rangés dans cet ordre normal, qui est aussi celui de leur introduction historique: le don, l’échange, l’héritage, et la conquête.’ [VII:155] He goes on to explain that private inheritance is a form of gift, and that conquest is effectively a ‘forced’ mode of exchange, in which the one party receives life and the other their property. Of course, free exchange is more morally advanced than
project had, indeed, been foreshadowed in food production from earliest times. 'Without the vast destruction of animals accomplished by hunting peoples, and without the analogous ravages exercised by pastoral populations against vegetation, we would never have entered into possession of our planet.' Seen this way, the difference between l'instinct conservateur and l'instinct déstructif is not as great as it would seem. Correspondingly, in shifting means from one to the other, there remain not one but two aspects of continuity between warfare and industry. Both, in Comte's terms, aim at material self-improvement; but both also entail the forceful subjugation (and where necessary, annihilation) of their object. Of these, Comte emphasizes only the former. In moving from divisive military warfare to the unifying scientific-industrial domination of the earth, the Baconian formula about obeying nature in order to command her is retained without comment, so self-evident does the necessity of such commanding seem.

In each of these ways—functionalist recuperation, selective memory, instinctual excision, subsumption into the instrumentalities of 'improvement'—the violence that Comte projects as having founded les grands sociétés and which is diverted, by the beneficent unfolding of human capacity, into the collective exploitation of Humanity's milieu, loses its immoral sting. In the march of progress, it is finally superceded in a transformation that leaves no trace. What is saved, thereby, is the coherence of a historical model which purports to show the determinate possibility of collective self-perfection conceived, like the model itself, in the image of a frictionless harmony.

forced exchange, but there is no allusion to the possibility that conquest may be driven by motives darker than the desire for material improvement.
Accordingly, while Comte’s model resembles Hegel’s—not surprising considering their common desire to reconcile liberal and conservative viewpoints within an immanentist master-framework that owes a great deal to Aristotle and Leibnitz—its logic is more dogmatic than dialectical. It is not so much that disharmony turns into harmony, and force into love, as that order imposes itself from the outset, while the violence that persists into the Humanist heaven of industrialism is exnominated. There is no negation of the negation. Indeed, since violence is never taken to have any blindly inhuman side there is no negation to negate.

Comte’s bad other is not, in any case, violence, hatred or lust for power but chaos and disorder. The negative pole is characterized by such terms as dispersif, pertabateur, anarchiste. To ward off such tendencies is the essence of politique positive itself. And how is this to be done? Not just by centrally applied force, since the perfection of order entails its becoming cooperative and voluntary. Required, rather, is a combination of ‘rallying’ and ‘regulating’ in which the force of the whole, imbued with l’amour universel, is exercised against its recalcitrant, egoistic parts. Thus, as la vie militaire gives way to la vie industrielle, state power becomes softened[^25^], legal sanctions become less brutal, and, in the fully Positive state, civic and domestic order are primarily maintained not by the coercive force of law, but by moral pressure. Of course, as under ‘monotheism’, a refashioned spiritual power will play a pervasive supervisory and counseling role. A penal code (with capital

[^24^]‘Sans les vastes destructions des animaux accomplies par les peuplades de chasseurs, et sans les ravages analogues que les populations pastorales exercent ensuite sur les végétaux, nous ne serions jamais entrés en possession de notre planète’ [IX:103].

[^25^]‘La répression temporelle devra plus fréquemment employer une autre classe de mesures matérielles, fondée sur l’institution civique de toute propriété réelle, et consistant dans la privation, temporaire ou définitive, des capitaux humains, quand leur dépositaires deviennent indignes. Mais envers les choses comme pour les personnes, quoiqu’à un moindre degré, le sacerdoce conseillera toujours au gouvernement de préférer les moyens positifs aux voies négatives, en récompensant les uns plutôt que punir les autres; ce qu’ignore entièrement notre brutale législation’ [VIII:419].
punishment for murder, dueling and suicide [VII:491]), will also be retained for the most obdurate and anti-social elements. But the principal mechanism for ensuring proper conduct will eschew the use or threat of force. It will, indeed, be rooted, like Positive religion itself, in the revamped ‘moral order of domestic life’.

It is there that the fundamental maxim: Live for others (vivre pour l’autrui), receives its practical complement: live openly (vivre au grand jour), without which it would soon become insufficient, and often even illusory. Despite the self-interested precautions of metaphysical legislators, the western instinct would not be slow to regard a normal publicity for private acts as the necessary guarantee for true citizenship [civisme]...All who would refuse to live openly [au grand jour] would justly be suspected of not really wanting to live for others.

Comte’s blend of panoptical corporatism with a perfectionist repudiation of original sin exemplifies a certain form of modern totalitarianism. In which respect, Horkheimer and Adorno’s

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26 ‘Quelle que soit la réaction continue de la morale individuelle sur la morale publique, la morale domestique comporte une efficacité plus directe et plus décisive, en vertu d’une meilleure similitude, surtout quand elle se trouve socialement instituée. C’est là que la maxime fondamentale: Vivre pour autrui commence à recevoir son complément pratique: Vivre au grand jour, sans lequel elle deviendrait bientôt insuffisante, et même souvent illusoire. Malgré les précautions intéressées des législateurs métaphysiques, l’instinct occidental ne tardera point à regarder la publicité normale des actes privés comme la garantie nécessaire du vrai civisme...Tous ceux qui refuseront de vivre au grand jour deviendront justement suspects de ne pas vouloir réellement vivre pour l’autrui’ [X:312; emphasis in original].

27 Comte makes no mention of Bentham, but his mechanism of everyday social control bears a striking similarity to the latter’s panopticon, especially in Bentham’s extension of this principle from prisons to ‘work-houses, or manufactories, or mad-houses, or hospitals or schools’. In all these instances’, Bentham notes, ‘the more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose of the establishment have been attained. Ideal perfection, if that were the object, would require that each person be in that predicament, during every
stricture against Durkheimian sociology applies in full force to Comte. ‘What is done to all by the few, always occurs as the subjection of individuals by the many: social repression always exhibits the masks of repression by a collective’ [1989:22]. The same mystification has a psychoanalytic dimension, too. In his obsession with the horrors of entropic tendencies to disorder—death itself—Comte paid no attention to the extroversion of the death wish in the form of aggression, a punishing superego, and repetition compulsion. He therefore split it off from possible consideration as such, and blinded himself to its own operation in his own mental activity.

Even if denied or reinterpreted, however, there is a remainder of violence within Comte’s vision of a perfected human order. In fact, there are two. There is the lingering project of domination that migrates from warfare into the conquest of nature; and there is the social violence that remains in his system just by virtue of its being, so emphatically, a system. The latter symptomatizes an irremediable weakness in his social thought, particularly in its effort to think human collectivity in the image of the divine. He is not able to think the first person plural as a non-repressive ‘we’. More importantly, perhaps, he does not even suspect the possibility of the question. The sociological issue, moreover, discloses a theological one. For it touches both on the aptness of l’Humanité to fill the vacated place of the Judaeo-Christian God, and on the character of the divinity at issue in the transfer.

The first occlusion, however, is less straightforward. Comte offers no reflection on the limitation of a viewpoint that has not critically reflected on the project of ‘possessing’ and ‘exploiting’ the planet.

instant of time. This being impossible, the next best thing to be wished for is, that, at every instant, seeing reason to believe as much, and not being able to satisfy himself to the contrary, he should conceive himself to be so’. From a letter of 1787, in Bentham 1995:34. For Comte, the principle of vivre au grand jour entails not just that everyone is
But his elaboration in such terms of the Man/Nature relation, and of its positive-industrial transfiguration, stretches the Baconian paradigm to the limit. In so doing, a crucial, if contradictory, qualification is entered into its religiously constitutive anthropocentrism. Love culminates not in love for Humanity but for the ‘universal order’ to which Humanity must always submit, and of which it is a dependent part [X:64]. Which leads Comte—who had rediscovered the force of fetishism in the regression of his manie—if not to a revision of the Adamic mandate as Lord of Creation, at least towards the Humanist incorporation of more ancient deities than ‘God’.

**Humanity and Nature**

As I have been at pains to emphasize, despite the crucial place of ideas both for the formation of a cooperative consensus and for the ‘consecration of authority’ [IX:14], and despite the world-historical importance Comte attributed in that context to his own intellectual work, he by no means held to the sovereign autonomy of the intellect. ‘Despite the abstract independence dreamed by the pride of theoreticians, all our mental revolutions emanate ... from the successive exigencies of our practical situation. The activity which our instincts inspire, according to our needs, always rules the general exercise of our intelligence’28. Whether individual or collective, Comte makes clear, this action is to be understood as in the world. Its object is always the modification of the milieu in line with experienced needs [XI:211]. Theory itself is to be regarded as a form of action in that its

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28 *Malgré l’indépendance abstraite rêvée par l’orgueil des théoriciens, toutes nos révolutions mentales émanent donc des exigences successives de notre situation pratique.*
results modify subjective existence just as material production modifies objective existence. Moreover, as the whole symphony of affective motors is successively brought into play, the needs which 'inspire activity' themselves change in line with socio-historical conditions. The species changes itself, then, by changing 'the material order which dominates it'\textsuperscript{29}.

Again, there are striking parallels with Marx. This is not to say that Marx's pivotal notion of \textit{praxis}, as elaborated in \textit{The German Ideology} [1947:6-15] and summarized in the 'Theses on Feuerbach', is identical with Comte's \textit{pratique}. They are situated in different problematizations of the social. Comte's reference to 'our practical situation' assumes an inclusively collective historical subject whose hierarchical structure does not \textit{per se} make its subjective unity into an illusory cover and justification for the partial and particular interests of a dominant class. This is related, as well, to a profound difference in their conception of what Marx calls the social relations of production. Hence their counter-posed programs for the cooperative re-organization of industry itself. The social division of labour, including mental/manual, and as between managers and workers, is something that Comte would perfect by extending. Marx, at least in his early works, would break it down. Nor, finally, does Marx equate the progress of human needs with a de-emphasis on the physical ones to make room for the rise of an angelic love. He is anti-puritanical and emphasises, rather, the rich manifold of capacities and satisfactions which history reveals once the basic ones are served.

\textsuperscript{29} The interaction between organism and milieu is introduced as a general biological principle in the \textit{Philosophie positive} [III:230 et seq]. In \textit{Politique positive}, the idea is considerably developed with regard both to the impact of the material order on individual and society, and to the human capacity to modify 'the modifiers'. See especially chapter 7 in Volume II, \textit{‘Théorie positive des limites générales de variation propres à l'ordre humain’}, on which much of the discussion in the present section is based.
Beyond necessity lies the realm of freedom, at the furthest extension of which is the 'purposiveness without purpose' of art and play [Marcuse:162-3].

Nevertheless, in their valorization of 'modern industry', Comte and Marx equally subscribe to the enlightenment program of dominating nature through the application of science to serve human needs. Both see in this the key to overcoming the conflicts of scarcity and the establishment of social peace. Both regard the rise of the productive forces as the prime cause of other forms of progress. And both see a glorious destiny not only for Humanity as Lord of the earth, but for the earth itself as humanly transformed. In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts Marx wrote: 'This communism ['as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man'], as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between man and man, between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution' [1964:135]. Substitute positivism for communism, and l'ordre universel for 'nature', and we have a credo not inconsistent with that of Comte.

30 'With [man's] development the realm of natural necessity expands, because his wants increase; but at the same time, the forces of production, by which these wants are satisfied, also increase. Freedom in this field cannot consist of anything else but the fact that socialized mankind, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with Nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power. ...Nevertheless this always remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human potentiality for its own sake, the true realm of freedom, which however can only flourish on the basis of the realm of necessity as its basis' [from Vol III of Capital, cited/tr in Bottomore and Rubel, 1963:260]. Comte, by contrast, spiritualizes Marx's 'realm of necessity' by making necessity itself, le destin, the object of l'amour universel.
In Comte's formulation, the ever-enhancing modifying power of the human species puts it in a unique relation to nature. All forms of life carve out a niche and so modify (at the level of 'secondary phenomena') the immutable order around them. It is this activity which defines the essential difference between l'ordre vital and the rest of the cosmos [VII:586]. But only in the hands of the human animal does that power have the capacity to increase, a capacity that begins to develop so soon as the ability to communicate and remember is aided by the production of signs. Linguistic capacity, in turn, enables know-how to be transmitted, and, through abstract reasoning, to accumulate from generation to generation. In consequence, 'no other being can worthily work for itself except Humanity, whose objective servants return to the future part of its existence the products drawn from materials owing to that of its past.'

The first stage of terrestrial domination involved establishing the ascendancy of humankind as a life-form. Predators are killed. Edible prey are hunted down, before they and usable by-products are more systematically farmed. This, in turn, brings a fundamental shift in mode. As farming replacers hunter-gathering we move from simple appropriation to cumulative modification [IX:104]. In which respect, agriculture itself provides the model—after the long interval during which the physical sciences have wrested the secrets of the material universe—for the vastly expanded productive powers, beginning with energy sources, of modern industry. The horizons thereafter

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31 In its social function, language, with its capacity to accumulate and transmit the results of collective work, is compared directly with the institution of material property. 'Sous cet aspect social, l'institution du langage doit être finalement comparée à celle de la propriété...Car la première accomplit, pour la vie spirituelle de l'Humanité, un office fondamental qui équivaut à celui qu'exerce la seconde envers la vie matérielle. Après avoir essentiellement facilité l'acquisition de toutes les connaissances humaines, théoriques ou pratiques, et dirigés par notre essor esthétique, le langage consacre cette double richesse, et la transmet à de nouveaux coopérateurs' [VIII:254].
unceasingly expand. The vast engineering projects inspired by the Saint-Simonians, including the Suez Canal, are well known. Comte has his own list of techno-dreams. While silent about transport and unaware of the technological implications of contemporary advances in electricity, communications, photography etc., he envisages two other developments of breath-taking scope. The first is climate control. Here, beyond continuing measures ‘to gradually diminish the influences accessible to our intervention’ as well as to preserve us ‘from those which remain inalterable’ [VIII:461], he conceives—though just as an inspiring fiction—the fantastical project of ‘correcting’ the earth’s elliptical orbit. The second, flowing from the rise of the life sciences, is bio-engineering, not just in food production, but in medicine where his most ambitious scheme, again presented as a fictive utopie33, was for artificial human reproduction. With such technical advances, we may note, a further line would have been crossed. Beyond mere dominion over plants and animals, the destiny of Humanity’s pouvoir matériel would have become powerful enough to modify the biological and astronomical determinants of human life itself.

Even in the earliest days of the industrial revolution, the Baconian program—‘increase human knowledge to the achievement of all things possible’—had its detractors. Rousseau’s counter-blast

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32 ‘Aucun être ne peut dignement travailler pour lui-même, sauf l’Humanité, dont les serviteurs objectifs rapportent à la partie future de son existence les produits qu’ils tirent des matériaux dus à la partie passé’ [X:327-8].
33 Comte offers other utopies positives, including the elevation of herbivores into carnivores. Their general rationale and place in the system is discussed in X:274-6]. ‘Cette théorie devient ici le complément de celle de la religion, en résumant l’unité réelle par une limite idéale, où viennent spécialement converger les voeux, les projets, et les tentatives propres au perfectionnement continu de nos triple nature. Pour mieux instituer ce ralliement, il faut lui spécifier un seul but, sauf à le renouveler quand il se trouverait atteint; ce qui sera toujours possible, vu l’immense domaine de la providence humaine, à peine achemée jusqu’ici, même envers le milieu’ [X:275]. The setting and realization of ‘limit-ideals’, which involves the interplay of poetic imagination and scientific-industrial advance, would make progress continue even beyond the attainment of the ‘final state’. It
against ‘progress in the arts and sciences’ identified the ‘faculty of self-improvement’ as the ‘source of all human misfortunes’ which makes man ‘at length a tyrant over himself and nature’ [1963:170-171]. Over the next European century, the aesthetic pain evinced, in the souls of the sensitive, by Manchester-style urbanization, the fouling of rivers and the industrialization of green sites, is recorded in the cult of the pastoral, the folkloric, the medieval and the picturesque, as well as in the romanticism that reaches its musical heights in Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn and Mahler.

The most far-reaching critiques of the domination of nature have come, however, in industrialism’s later stages. One strand of thinking runs from German kultur-kritik to the interwar pre-occupation with mechanization and ‘technics’, and enters classical sociology by way of Weber’s analysis of the irrationality of rationalization [Girth and Mills:281 et seq]. This lamented the rise of formal and instrumental rationality at the expense of substantive reason and thematized the cultural and philosophical crisis that beckoned. For Lukacs and the Frankfurt thinkers, such arguments, which resonated powerfully in the anti-modernist right, were inflected towards the left. The reign of factuality, instrumentalism and (small ‘p’) positivism (Weber’s ‘iron cage’) exemplified the reification effected by the ‘fetishism of commodities’ [Lukacs,1971:83-92]. It also left a vacuum in transcending social aims which ideologically delivered science and technology over to the established (capitalist) order. As a result, humankind itself was becoming part of dominated nature. In the ‘totally administered’ societies of the 1930s and 40s, ‘[t]he fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant’ [Horkheimer and Adorno:3].

These intellectual suspicions have been swelled, in our own times, by the nuclear threat, exponential population growth, the regression of bio-diversity, and a soured love-affair with automobiles, tower

clearly expresses the idea that Humanity, once fully existent as such, becomes the
blocks, and the whole Courbusier vision of a modernist technotopia. In that context the focus has moved away from rationalization, mechanization and the 'disenchantment of the world' towards concerns about limits to growth, and the gathering environmental crisis. Mainstream eco-critique (exemplified by the Brundtland Commission Report [World Commission, 1987]) has concerned itself with 'sustainable development'. This proposes to moderate the industrial project by counseling attention to reproduction and time. Deep greenery, on the other hand, questions not only the human benefits of industrial modernity, but anthropocentrism itself [Lovelock, 1979; Devall and Sessions, 1985]. Heidegger, whose postmodern revival has hardly been dented by political exposure, bridges between this latter tendency and the anti-instrumentalist critique. For him, the privilege of human being is to be the place where Being reveals itself. The demonic essence of modernische teknik is to enframe thinking in a technological gestell which makes such revealing inaccessible by turning all that is into mere raw materials, or 'standing reserve' [1977:23].

The relation, in principle, of Comte's version of pro-industrialism to these gathering objections is complex. Moderate environmentalism, which insists on inter-connectedness, negative effects, and the importance of material reproducibility through time, aims to enhance the prudential intelligence with which the technical exploitation of the planet is pursued. From a Comteian perspective, this could be considered just a friendly amendment. On the other hand, Comte's forthright insistence on a phenomenally based and instrumentalist practice of science, as well as on the legitimacy of extending such an approach to the human domain, leaves him vulnerable to the more fundamental challenges that can be generated from the side of Critical Theory. Horkheimer and Adorno's classic essay traces, from Odysseus to Bacon to mass culture and concentration camps, the dialectic of an enlightenment which turns the human domination of nature against humanity itself. An excursus on collective agent of its own history.
Comte would not have been out of place. Certainly, he does not shrink from the implication that the technological empowerment of the species can, indeed must, extend from control of its outer reality to social engineering, and even to biological remaking.

However, as with so much of Comte's thinking, matters are less simple than they appear. His endorsement of cognitive instrumentalism and technological power is by no means unconditional. He condemns as 'idiotisme' an empiricism pursued in abstraction from sentiment and subjectivity [IX:20]. Nor is his attachment to science-based power socially blind. As with Bacon himself, the techno-industrial project would be empty without a philanthropic spirit and 'the spice of religion'. Systematizing what this might mean, and demonstrating its realizable character, is the whole burden of Comte's theoretical and practical effort.

From the vantage-point of what he takes to be social science itself, most importantly, the predicted and advocated rise to ascendancy of the *puissance modifactrice* was inconceivable except in the context of a wider, socially perfecting, evolutionary step. For industrialism to triumph presupposed the completion of the scientific revolution, the fashioning of a new theoretical synthesis, and the establishment of a Positive Polity. Its very occurrence, then, was inextricably bound up with an institutionalized revolution in sentiments. In which case, the accompanying, decisive, passage from egoism to altruism would ensure that Northrop Frye's 'driverless train' of technology had not just a human driver, but one of matchless moral intent. There is a providential magic to this. The dangerously mighty power of modern industry gets placed in human hands just at the point where the impulse of individual and species self-improvement which it subserves is being transfigured by love. In hindsight, nothing of the sort has occurred. This does not address, though, what
Positivism champions. This is not simply the utilitarian domination of nature, but that project as Positively — and therefore morally — transformed.

The distinction is crucial, for the social and spiritual transformation Comte envisages would qualitatively alter the means-end schema within which industrialization proceeds. In contrast with the égoïsme which had deformed industrialism in its initial stages, the ‘normal’ form destined to emerge would be completely collective in spirit. In the Positive Polity, production would lose its private character, and industrial benefits would be pursued for the common good. Pursuing that common good, moreover, would entail the improvement of the species not just materially, but in the highest moral sense. Altogether, then, the altruism that Comte envisages as the spiritual principle of a reconstructed industrialism is not just incompatible with the logic of effective demand as driven by market forces. The good at which it aims also goes beyond any utilitarian identification of the desirable with the desired, and of any project of merely Paretian optimization with respect to the sum of individual utilities defined in terms of immediate needs. The good of all for whose sake human power is to be deployed, for example, includes obligations to the dead and the unborn. As its paramount value, it also includes what is good for what makes us an all. Which is not to say that the will of each is destined always to conflict with the general will, since in the ‘final state’ individuals come to desire this higher good as an expression of their own (religiously cultivated) need.

34 "Toute la régénération pratique peut se réduire à systématiser dignement les tendances spontanées de l’industrie vers le caractère collectif. La socratie doit, à cet égard, compléter la théocratie, en faisant sagement cesser une séparation provisoire, non moins irrationelle qu’immorale, entre les fonctions publiques et les offices privés. Une existence où chacun travail pour l’autrui devient mieux accessible au sentiment social que l’activité militaire à la quelle seule il convient d’abord" [X:57].
Comte's affirmation of the industrial project is integrally connected, then, to the moral self-transcendence of the subject-object conceived to be at the centre of the process. To which extent, Positivism with a capital 'p' may be objectionable as a totalizing utopia, but it would be a drastic simplification to understand it as just an early, and extreme, manifestation of one-dimensional, technicist thinking\(^36\).

This still leaves, however, a 'deep green' objection. Does not Comte's glorification of scientific-industrial development pro causa Humana manifest hubris on-behalf of the human species itself? Does it not uncritically arrogate for Humanity a kind of planetary right of the strongest? Worse: is it not idolatrous, revealing in the religious apotheosis of Humanity, an absolutism that is utterly careless of particularity—whether of trees or people—and thus as oblivious to the call of beings (Levinas's challenge) as to that of Being? The questions would seem rhetorical, but we should not be too quick to respond.

In Comte's fully Positivized social order, the industrial effort would be motivated by the highest form of love. Such love entails the selfless espousal of the highest interest of humanity as a whole. But what is this highest interest? Not happiness, certainly; although if moral well-being is the answer, happiness may providentially result from the ever more perfect harmonies achieved in its pursuit\(^37\). At the same time, this interest also exceeds that of present individuals and of the

\(^{36}\) 'En écartant les parasites de plus en plus exceptionnels, tous les praticiens deviennent, dand l'état positif, des serviteurs directs du Grand-Être envers le trésor matériel que sa providence transmet à chaque génération pour la suivante' [IX.58].

\(^{37}\) 'Dans toutes les classes, la principale félicité ressort de l'essor continu des instincts sympathiques, d'après une libre participation à l'activité sociale. Mais cette source
collective they temporarily comprise. If the Humanity we venerate is mostly in the past, the Humanity we cherish as the final end of practice is projected towards the future. The highest interest, then, is that constituted by the process of anthropological improvement itself. Hence the climactic place of progress in Comte’s guiding motto—l’amour pour principe, ordre pour base, progrès pour but. As we have seen, however, in seeking its ever more elevated definition of self-improvement, Humanity is driven not just to modify its milieu, but to change its very conditions of existence. At which point, the project of self-perfection crosses over to something still more universal. For the kind of collective self-changing Comte has in mind entails changing — and indeed for the morally better — aspects of that ‘universal order’ whose laws, scientists are bound to assume, rule the phenomenal world. Through an active, and not just resigned submission, to this order, humanity tends towards its normal attitude, as the supreme moderator of the natural economy, whose wise improvement becomes the continuous goal of its providential efforts, suitably helped by all the agents, organic and inorganic, which can cooperate38.

Three examples of milieu-modification Comte discusses will clarify the meaning of what Comte takes to be the character of this extraordinary leap. The first is an archaic development which initiated, and foreshadowed, the transfigured relation between humankind and nature which Comte

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38 “Une meilleure appréciation de l’ordre fondamental ennoblit donc notre résignation nécessaire, en la convertant en une soumission active. l’Humanité tend ainsi vers son attitude normale, comme suprême modératrice de l’économie naturelle, dont le sage perfectionnement devient le but continu de ses efforts providentiels, convenablement...
envisages. This is the domestication of animals [IX:140]. Through it, humanity enters into a limitedly free, rather than hunting/hunted, relationship with those of its fellow creatures (horses, oxen, dogs, cats etc) which actively subserve human needs. The practical result has been a gain in both the efficiency and effectivity of human power. But what impresses Comte is that through this step Humanity also extends its affectionate essence to that part of the life-world whose active co-operation it is able to secure. Dogs, horses etc are not merely tamed to be used. They become emotionally incorporated into the human *milieu*, both immediately and in a social sense. Solidarity extends to them, and in their dumb way *nos libres auxiliaires* reciprocate, and so elevate their own moral being [X:37].

Although it is certainly hierarchical, the relation Comte sees as having been installed in this way between humankind and domesticated animals, and thus more generally between it and the rest of the 'vital order', is founded on *attachement*, and brings into play the polyphonies of love. It is a first step, then, towards the incorporation of the 'vital order' into Humanity itself. One effect is that Humanity expands. It comes to consist not only of the species bearing that name but of all animals, whether human or not, who co-operate in the human endeavour. (To which there is a negative corollary. It is only co-operating humans, not 'unworthy parasites', who can properly be considered to be agents or (prospective) organs of the Great Being.) The domestication of

\[\text{assisté par tous les agents, organiques et inorganiques, qui peuvent y concourir [VIII:42-3].}
\]

\[\text{39 'Relativement à nos auxiliaires, la sympathie humaine peut et doit suivre un meilleur cours, en perfectionant, non-seulement leur situation, mais surtout leur nature, physique, intellectuelle, et morale, d'après le développement habituel de la vraie fraternité. Ceux qui sont herbivores se trouveront graduellement élevés, par le Grand-Étre, à la dignité de carnivores, pour devenir à la fois plus actifs, plus intelligents, et même plus douvoués, en s'améliorant davantage aux serviteurs directs de l'Humanité' [X:358-9].}
\]

\[\text{40 'On ne peut assez concevoir la constitution du Grand-Étre qu'en combinant notre espèce avec toutes les races susceptibles d'adopter la commune devise des âmes}
\]
animals entails new forms of symbiosis, and introduces harmony into relations which would otherwise be indifferent, or even antagonistic. All of which gave Comte warrant for thinking that the so to speak ‘unsympathetic’ conquest of the planet, as of fellow humans by one another, was itself redeemable by the moral improvements on both side of the relation it made possible.

The other two examples, which belong to Comte’s extravagant technological aspirations for the future, I have already mentioned. The first, through l’utopie d’une fécondation spontanée, held out the prospect of modifying that part of l’ordre vital to which the human animal itself belongs. By separating propagation from the ‘delirium and irresponsibility’ of the current method, a ‘systematic’ approach could be taken to this ‘most important of productions’. This would both facilitate population control [X:253], and make possible selective breeding (‘hereditary transmission’ would be ‘reserved for its best organs’) leading to a physiological improvement in the species as a whole [X:278]. But again, as with the domestication of animals, there is a dimension of moral improvement. Indeed, that was the primary aim. By eliminating the need for sexual activity in human reproduction, we could create the biological conditions for universal celibacy. The ennoblement of marriage through chastity would mark an institutional advance equivalent to that which had previously led from polygamy to monogamy [X:278]. For women, whose desire for maternity was in any case greater than their purely sexual desire, this would be no effort.

supérieures: Vivre pour l’autrui....Le positivisme pouvait seul la systématiser, en incorporant au Grand-Être tous nos libres auxiliaires animaux, tandis qu’il en écarte d’indignes parasites humains’ [X:37; emphasis in original].

41 The technical means Comte envisages are vague, and limited of course by current misconceptions about reproductive biology itself. He implies both artificial insemination, on which he is silent, and the artificial production of le fluide vivifiant. About the latter he only notes: ‘On conçoit ainsi que, chez la plus noble espèce, ce liquide cesse d’être indispensable à l’éveil du germe, qui pourrait artificiellement résulter des plusieurs autres sources, mêmes matérielles, et surtout d’une meilleure réaction du système nerveux sur le système vasculaire’ [X:276].
Motherhood itself, naturally, would remain — indeed, in the positively renewed image of *La Vierge-Mère*, it would be sanctified. As for men, ‘education and opinion would easily make prevail the need to conserve *le fluide vivant* for its normal destination’ [X:277-8]; this being to ‘simulate the blood’ so as to ‘strengthen all the vital operations’ [X:276]. The satirical possibilities of Comte’s proposal, even without the religious trappings, are evident. (They have been deliciously explored in Vonnegut [1968]’s short story ‘Welcome to the Monkey House’.) It may be noted, though, that Comte’s preoccupation with virtue and saving women from sex at least deflected him from the growing Victorian flirtation with a purely racist eugenics. The main purpose was indeed not just species-wide but oriented to the purifying effects on the means of biological production at least as much as on the quality of results.

The third example is Comte’s flight of fancy about improving the orbit of *la planète humaine*. The idea is alluded to in a passage of the *Catéchisme positiviste* where he is explaining his conception of ‘modifiable fatality’, and the mental attitude (resigned but active) which it implies. ‘[I]n proportion as the knowledge of the natural order extended’, the priest tells his catechumen,

> it was regarded as essentially modifiable, even by man....At present this idea extends even to the order of the heavens, its greater simplicity allowing us more easily to conceive

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42 Besides the inevitable fête with which the ‘utopia’ of *la Vierge-Mère* would be associated, it held a symbolically central place in Positive religion. In deed was destined ‘à procurer au positivisme un résumé synthétique équivalent à celui que l’institution de l’Euchariste fournit au catholicisme’ [X:279].

43 In opposition to ‘the irrational notion of races’ Comte held to a Lamarckian theory (credited to ‘a happy insight of Blainville’) according to which ‘les plus prononcées et fixes de ces différences vitales...paraissent dues à des influences locales, lentement accumulées par l’hérédité, jusqu’à produire le maximum correspondant de variation organique’ [VIII:49]. The frankly hypothetical nature of the theory is acknowledged, although it is still being prescribed for *la saine philosophie...tant que les faits certains et nombreux ne le démentiront pas* [ibid].
improvements, with a view to correcting a spirit of blind respect, though our weakness in regard to physical means for ever precludes our effecting them⁴⁴.

The idea is more specifically sketched out in the introduction to Synthèse subjective, where too its ‘utopian’ status is underlined. It would be as if the Earth itself ‘could develop its physico-chemical activity so as to perfect the astronomical order by changing its own coefficients’. We are to imagine this occurring through a series of ‘explosions like those that gave rise to the comets’. The effect would be to ‘make the orbit of our planet less eccentric, and thenceforth more habitable’ [XII:10].

Once more, what is striking is less the actual technology envisaged than its moral intent. Giving the planet a circular orbit would modify the climate. But why do it? Convenience and comfort are only part of the answer. In fact, as Comte makes clear in the discussion of modifiabilité which closes the ‘statics’ section of Politique positive [VIII:461], what is at stake with regard to all the technical measures that can be taken to correct for natural climatic conditions, from clothes and gas heating to the ultimate dream of orbital correction, is the cultural impact of geography on human difference.

Climate belongs to a larger list of ‘sources of social modification’ [VIII:443]: the ‘dynamic’ modificateurs associated with the role of individuals, and with the impact of (national) societies on one another, plus the ‘fixed’ ones of climate and genetic inheritance. Each represents an altering, but also alterable, aspect of the human milieu. Each is also destined to become progressively less influential as collective power augments, and as a fully developed harmony between organism and

⁴⁴ ‘Mais à mesure que s’est développé la connaissance de l’ordre réel, on l’a regardé comme essentiellement modifiable, même par nous...Cette notion s’étend aujourd’hui jusqu’à l’ordre céleste, dont la simplicité supérieure nous permet de mieux imaginer l’amélioration, afin de corriger un aveugle respect, quoique nos faibles moyens physiques ne puissent jamais la réaliser’ [XI:54].
world comes to be established. What diminishes the effect of ‘dynamic’ modifiers is both the global convergence towards industrialism, and the growing importance of continuïté in the ‘normal’ unity of the human ensemble. In the case of climate and race, the stabilizing and unifying effects of Humanity’s ‘aging’ are re-inforced by the ‘rise of civilization’ itself. Material advances which have enabled the species to spread out over the earth have increasingly smoothed out environmentally conditioned differences between group cultures. As the example of the lowered menstrual age in heated Russian cities seemed to show, technical compensations for natural differences in group conditions of life could even homogenize what were thought to be physiological differences between peoples. The overall effect of humanity’s growing capacity to modify the ‘involuntary’ modifiers was to reverse, at the very summit of its social expression, the tendency of complex orders of reality to become ever more differentiated. If the ‘law of increasing complication’ operated unchecked in the human sphere the question of social order, and with it that of morale as such, would have been insoluble. The correctives made possible by the growth of Humanity’s modifying power were therefore crucial. They eliminate ‘at first spontaneously, then more and more systematically’ sources of disunity which stemmed from ‘fundamental imperfections in the universal order’.

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45 Quoique tous les modifícateurs deviennent de moins en moins intenses, la réaction du Grand-Être sur la fatalité qui le domine augmente sans cesse. [VIII:464].
46 Il ne faut pas croire que cette source de croissante de régularité tienne seulement, ni même principalement, à l’heureuse transformation de notre activité collective, désormais industrielle au lieu de rester guerrière. Elle provient surtout de l’ascendant progressif que la continuité subjective acquiert nécessairement sur la solidarité objective. Devant cette prépondérance des morts, toutes les perturbations des vivants se dissipent de plus en plus [VIII:463].
47 None of the four ‘influences modificatrices...ne pouvant conserver toujours la même intensité à mesure que notre existence se développe, il me reste à déterminer la loi commune de ces changements nécessaires. Il en résultera bientôt l’heureuse démonstration de la régularité croissante de l’ordre humain, due surtout à notre réaction
perfecting moral unity of Humanity is drawn towards the ‘improvement’ of the fatalité modifiable of the Universe itself.

The ideal of an objectively perfected cosmos which Positivism subjectively installs at the heart of production is no doubt still human-centred. In the first instance, the measure of that outer perfection is the human perfection it would make possible. Beyond that, the ideal also transfers onto non-human reality criteria of value—harmony, benevolence, unity—which immanently arise as ideals for humanity with regard to itself. On the other hand, an industrialism dedicated to such an end would certainly not be subordinating the appropriation of nature to egoistic motives such as greed, powerlust and vainglory. Nor, indeed, would it serve only to perfect what the human species is in itself. For not only, in Comte’s vision, does the Positively reconstructed project of industrialism assign to humanity a cosmic mission to ‘improve’ on the pre-given material world. It does so as the most sublime expression of human love. Moreover, that same motivating sentiment—which Comte calls l’amour universel [VII:91]—is altruistic in the fullest sense. It is not just a love of each for all, of self for Self, of subject for Subject, but an affection which suffuses the whole world which humanity touches. It extends to the non-human Other. It even reaches beyond the world which is immediately and actively humanized. It moves outward to embrace not only everything in the range of the human senses, but the order of things as such48.

48 ‘Ainsi liée directement à l’ordre universel, l’Humanité se trouve pleinement dégagée de la tutelle fictive par laquelle son initiation dut spontanément suppléer l’absence de guide extérieur. Le Grand-Être inaugure irrévocablement sa providence universelle en appliquant l’ensemble des lois...à l’appréciation générale de son avenir et de la transition qu’il exige....Toutes les spéculation s’y tendent à consolider l’amour
At the culminating stage, then, of the positive transformation of intellect, action and sentiment, the human love for the human promises to transcend even the collective \textit{amour propre} that any humanism, however exalted, risks retaining. Cognitive humility was Bacon’s first principle for a new science. For Comte, as for Bacon, this meant more than just adopting an epistemologically limited, but practically powerful, inductivism. It meant basing practice on a recognition of the supremacy of immutable laws of nature. That recognition, however, clashed with the metaphysical inflation of reason; and this itself, in the perspective of Comteian sociology, reflected the moral disorder of an overweening individualism. Positivism’s ‘unanimous and continuous love’ for ‘the universal order’ [VIII:368] resolved the antinomy. For it would entail not just grudgingly accepting, but cherishing and revering, the unsurpassable limitations which subordinate the Great Being of Humanity to the whole natural order—an order on which not just brute existence but even its ‘modifying power’ totally depends. With this moral step towards an affectively saturated humility, \textit{le destin} itself (positively comprehended as ‘the ensemble of known laws’ [IV:191]) would be embraced.

\textbf{Systematic fetishism and \textit{l'amour universel}}

The \textit{amor fati} which crowns Comte’s logico-historical account of the triumph of love in a curious way fulfills Saint-Simon’s earlier gropings for a moral principle which would connect a scientific understanding of cosmic order to St Paul’s dictum that ‘God is love’. Saint-Simon speculated that Newton’s law of gravity, converted into a thesis of ‘universal attraction’, might provide the requisite
link. In similar fashion, the 'destiny' which Positive Religion enjoins and prepares us to love is conceived not just as a sobering corrective to human pride, but as Love itself writ large. Destiny soars on the wings of la sympathie universelle, both because le destin is imagined to be benevolent towards us, and because l'ordre universel which it brings to perfection through us is an analogue of the moral Good to which Humanity historically tends.

However, Comte's conception of 'universal sympathy' departs from Saint-Simon's in two important respects. First, the benign character of the laws which rule the Comteian universe — its natural tendency towards the perfection of order — abstractly derives from the homeostatic properties of dynamic systems [I:602] rather than from the mutually attractive energetics of matter. Secondly, its scientific status in Comte's system is crucially different from the place it held in Saint-Simon's. For Comte, an absolute objective synthesis of the kind Saint-Simon sought as the axiomatic basis for a demythologized 'terrestrial morality' was ruled out of court. The Positivist synthesis was 'relative', and that meant relative to the standpoint, impulses, and requirements, of the evolving human observer. By the same token, it could only be 'subjective', both in the sense of aligning its founding principles with a frankly human standpoint, and in being achievable only through, and in the form of, a certain blend of feeling and thinking. The sociolatric belief that universal sympathy without mirrored universal sympathy within was not given directly by reason,

[X:524-5].

Saint-Simon's notion that the law of gravity might provide a 'law of laws' is outlined in his 1813 essay 'Sur la gravitation universelle', an extract of which is translated in Markham, 1952. For Comte, the law of gravity had an exemplary simplicity and generality, since it had 'radicalement liée toutes les notions célestes, à un degré dont la sociologie offre seule l'équivalent' [VII:512]; but it otherwise held no special place in his system.
nor could it be justified by the strict operations of a phenomenal science. It involved an attribution, inspired by faith, whose effects were moral and whose cognitive status was emphatically fictif.

It is in just this context that Comte undertakes his most extraordinary maneuver: the proposed resuscitation, in suitably reconstructed form, of that elemental religious mode he called fétichisme. Not only, in fact, does he introduce it into his system as a necessary doctrinal supplement to the religion of Humanity, one that would complete l'ordre légal with l'ordre volontaire [XI:7]. In the Logique positive he begins to reconfigure Positivist worship itself into an updated and ‘systematic’ form of fetishism. The effect on his attempt to think the religious requirements of industrial society was to push the search for une foi démontrable to the point of complete contradiction. On the one hand, by securing, in an explicitly subjective mode, the final closure of his system, he risked reducing it to a social solipsism. On the other, by expanding the Positivist cult to include adoration of the whole ‘universal order’, he risked diminishing or even dethroning the divinized Humanity that was its focal object.

Comte, like Marx in the first chapter of Capital, took his conception of fetishism from contemporary writings on religion which hypothesized the animistic worship of material objects as

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50 Hence the order to be pursued by Positivist education, which would only initiate its pupils into the sciences by way of the subjectively synthesised seven sciences, preceded by a course in ‘first philosophy’. ‘En effet, le dogme fondamentale de l’Humanité...ne caractérisent pleinement que les lois morales, sans pouvoir assez manifester les lois intellectuelles, et surtout les lois physiques. Il faut donc que celles-ci deviennent le principal objet de l’initiation abstraite, qui conduira graduellement à concevoir le Grand-Étre comme le résumé nécessaire de l’ordre dont il constitue le meilleur élément’ [X:193]. To proceed directly into scientific education risked ‘dessécher le coeur en détournant du but synthétique par des préoccupations analytiques’ [X:192].
its original form. The ‘evidence’ for this supposition was provided by imperial European contact with aboriginal cultures in North America, Africa and Polynesia. What were thought to be common elements in the religions of les sauvages were abstracted into an ideal type and projected back in time in order to complete the developmental sequence that could be traced from antiquity through medieval Christianity to the science and enlightenment of modern times.

Comte’s appropriative re-evaluation of fetishism proceeded through a series of increasingly sympathetic refinements to the initial assessment he had made in *Philosophie positive*. There, with the accent on the problem of knowledge, and against the background of a maturation model of cognitive development, he had balanced his epistemological critique of fetishism as an illusory form of knowing with a ‘constructive’ appreciation for its historically necessary role. On the first score, fetishism’s causal hypothesis that entities were inhabited by spirits whose willful activity (which we might influence through ritual or prayer) ruled the phenomenal world was taken to be the matrix for every kind of ‘theological’ belief in ‘fictive beings’. Scientifically speaking, it was an error. Indeed its combination of spiritualism with anthropomorphic projection was the fundamental and defining characteristic of pre-scientific thought, up to and including the abstract essentialism of ‘metaphysics’ itself. On the other hand, and in opposition to the Enlightenment’s (and of Christianity’s) purely negative judgment of primitive superstition, humanity’s fetishist origins were was not simply to be dismissed with a ‘smug disdain’. Both for individuals and for society as a whole, starting hypotheses, however fantastic, were essential if knowledge was to advance at all [V:50-51].

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51 According to Manuel [1962:186-7], the term fetishism, derived from Portuguese, was invented by Charles de Brosses in his *Culte des dieux fétiches*, and came to Comte via Benjamin’s Constant’s use of it in *De la Religion*.

52 Fetishism always consisted of supposing ‘les corps extérieurs, même les plus inertes, animés des passions et de volontés plus ou moins analogues aux impressions personnelles du spectateur’ [V:29].
Retrospectively considered, then, and even as we took collective pride in the distance humanity had traveled since this ‘miserable original condition’ we should accord fetishism—like childhood—the utmost respect as an indispensable and preparatory first step in the progress of the human mind [V:16].

But already, this still somewhat condescending qualification was re-inforced by an additional consideration. This was fetishism’s role in the education of the (moral) sentiments. Besides providing a ‘provisional’ system of socially unifying belief, the specific hallmark of fetishism was that it combined a general preponderance of ‘passions over reason’ with a projection of such feelings into its personifications of the external world. To be sure, the ratio of feeling to intellect was (as in those momentary fits of emotionalism which affect ‘even the best minds’) excessive [V:37]. This made impossible that freedom from dogma necessary for a field of phenomena to be investigable in a fact-oriented manner. Moreover, while commerce with spirits sustained an illusion of human power, and so stimulated ‘the first rise of human activity’, the fetishization of ‘most external bodies’ interdicted ‘all serious environmental modification’ so that the development of that activity was extremely slow [V:56-7]. Nevertheless, its taboos had been responsible for moderating the destruction of fauna and flora and paved the way for that great advance represented by the domestication of animals [V:55]. In its mimetic and imagistic forms of communication, fetishism had also developed a mode of representation that combined concept, percept, and feeling [V:38].

Overall, in fact, fetishism’s ‘spontaneous consecration’ of le dehors had the singular merit of presenting the world as in ‘perfect harmony with the spectator’, a harmony which provided ‘a full satisfaction’, and which has never since been able to be retrieved53. Fetishism, in short,

53 *Tous les corps observables étant ainsi immédiatement personnifiés, et douées de passions ordinairement très puissantes, selon l’énergie de leur phénomènes, le monde*
foreshadowed the subjective harmony of humanity and world which positivism alone was able to place on a scientific basis.

In *politique positive*, this argument is taken still further. The fetishist peopling of sensuous reality with living evinced a venerative love towards *le dehors* and thus secured the voluntary subordination of inner impulses and impressions to what was experienced as coming from the world outside. It thus laid the basis for a humility which was essential for the rise of both knowledge and social life. In this respect, indeed, and for all its intellectually untutored enthusiasm, fetishism was morally superior to the more advanced forms of 'theologism' which succeeded it. This was not to deny their own contributions. The rise of the gods had coincided with the rise of *civisme*, and the monotheist priesthood, at its Catholic best, had given a powerful impetus to the development of *altruisme*. However, the theological apotheosis of the divine absolute had alienated humankind from its most elevated sentiments in dealing with its own *milieu*. Fetishism imagined that all entities were moved by feeling and willfully active. The Greek and Roman pantheons were still full of nature gods, though limited in scope and power by a pitiless Ananke. Monotheism, however, imagined the cosmos to be both dead and inert. All willful activity was reserved for a hidden God who sat

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*extérieur se présente spontanément, envers le spectateur, dans une parfaite harmonie, qui n'a pu jamais retrouver ensuite au même degré, et quit doit produire en lui un sentiment spécial de pleine satisfaction, qui nous ne pouvons guère qualifier aujourd'hui convenablement, faute de pouvoir suffisamment l'éprouver, même en nous reportant, par la méditation plus intense et la mieux dirigée, à ve berceau de l'humanité [V:36-7].

34 'Pour qu'une telle conclusion acquière toute sa force sociologique, il faut la rattacher directement au principe universel de la logique positive: subordonner convenablement le subjectif à l'objectif, en construisant toujours la plus simple hypothèse qui puisse représenter l'ensemble des observations. Or cette soumission fondamentale de l'homme au monde se trouve instituée autant que possible par le fétichisme, puisqu'il la pousse jusqu'à l'adoration de la matière, d'après les affections et les volontés qu'il attribue au corps extérieurs' [IX:91-2].

35 This had epistemological consequences as well. 'En renonçant ensuite à rien connaître au delà des lois réelles...on écarter ce rapprochement entre la mort et la vie, comme
outside phenomena and intervened (whether miraculously or as a continuing first cause of natural law) from a netherworld beyond the merely actual one given by our senses.

Here then was a reason not just to praise the historical contribution of our ancestors’ first religion, but in some form or another to restore it. The fetishist imaginary offered a corrective to the withdrawal of affect from the natural world, a withdrawal which had become chronic during the transitional epoch of metaphysics when a superfetated intellect had rebelled against all fideistic restraint. For Comte this rebellion had been historically necessary. The monotheistic synthesis had to be intellectually overthrown for a better, science-based one, to arise. For that very reason, however, it had also become necessary to repair the subjective split between head and heart — a split which had produced such otherwise diverse pathological symptoms as the inflation of signs over images and sentiments\(^{56}\), the reductive arrogance of algébristes [VII:471], and the inattention of revolutionary légistes to the subjective dimension of the society they would reform.

To achieve the requisite restoration of balance between intellect and sentiment it was immediately necessary to institute the religion of Humanity. But Comte’s renewed appreciation for fétichisme, \(\textit{incompatible avec la régularité supérieur de l’ordre matériel. Mais la division fondamentale de la science physique en cosmologie et biologie maintient partout l’activité spontanée, après l’élimination des attributs humains que le fétichisme y joignait. Sans une telle activité, seulement plus intense et variée chez les êtres vivants, l’ensemble de l’ordre naturel deviendrait unintelligible}^\text{IX:88}.\)

\(^{56}\) An error compounded, for Comte, by a metaphysical theory of language which exaggerated the arbitrary character of conventional signs. \(‘\textit{Les vrais signes ne sont jamais arbitraires}’^\text{[VIII:221]}.\) It need hardly be said that Comte’s positive theory of language — which emphasised the function of language in ‘fixing habitual links between the inside and the outside’ — not only insisted on its socially produced character but also privileged the spoken over the written. \(‘\textit{Le langage visuel, qui d’abord prévalait, finit par devenir un simple auxiliaire du langage auditif}’^\text{[VIII:230-231]}.\) One notes, though, that this is connected to a historical thesis according to which human language began through gestural imitation, and thus — unlike in romantic versions of phonocentrism (that stress the
particularly in its difference from succeeding forms of theistic religion, had brought him to realize that this was insufficient if it terminated only in the re-affecting of the human and social milieu. Happily, of course, the subjective and altruistic turn effected by the culmination of the scientific revolution in the moral science of man did not terminate there. Sociologizing the episteme transformed all the other sciences, making it possible to reconceptualize their objects of knowledge as objects for us, and not merely in the instrumental sense. From astronomy to biology, the domains of positive science, as reconceived from the vantage point of la science finale, were objects of affection, just as their human subject was not just a disembodied brain but a socially implicated and subjectively co-ordinated centre of thinking, acting and feeling. With the establishment of the doctrine of humanity, the Positivist synthesis directly combines the notion of the human order with that of the universal order, in representing the one as the necessary summary of the other. At the same time as this intimate connection procures for the artificial order the spontaneous consistency of the natural order, it makes us love the one as the basis for the other, in such a manner as to renew, under a better form, fetishist affections57.

But what was this ‘better form’? And how could a renewal of ‘fetishist affections’ be achieved at all without violating scientific reason? The Politique positive had only posed these questions. It was

authenticity and originality of the voice) --- was more visual than phonic in ‘the primitive state’.

57 ‘Le doctrine de l’Humanité...se trouve assez exposé déjà pour que je puisse ici l’ériger en unité complète de la synthèse positive...Il combine directement la notion de l’ordre humain avec celle de l’ordre universel, en représentant l’un comme le résumé nécessaire de l’autre. En même temps que cette intime connexité procure à l’ordre artificiel la consistance spontanée de l’ordre naturel, elle fait aimer celui-ci comme la base de celui-là, de manière renouveler, sous une meilleure forme, les affections fétichistes’ [VIII:368].
not until publication of the *Logique positive* that Comte directly makes the case not just for ‘appreciating’ fetishism (for example in the memorial festivals devoted to it in the Positivist Calendar’s seventh month) but for expanding Positive Religion—and its godhead—so as to incorporate elements of fetishism into the cult of Humanity itself.

Comteian sociology, as outlined in the *Politique positive*, had already indicated that the need to break from anthropomorphism and animist magic in scientific practice by no means eliminated the irreducible functions which these might play at another level—for example in the social production and reproduction of morale. To which, in the opening section of the *Système de Logique Positive* he now added that even at the cognitive level the fictive explanations of fetishism would always have their place. The ‘fundamental sciences’ produced only formal, nomothetic, knowledge. As useful as this was for predicting and manipulating the external milieu, it could never fully satisfy our need for a unified understanding of *le dehors* because formal knowledge only offered a limited handhold in grasping the always evanescent plenum of the real. ‘In considering that each group of phenomena can not ever be entirely fixed, one recognizes that the immutability of natural laws cannot be squared with composite events, and remains limited to their irreducible elements’58. To imagine, then, that the complexity of events was benignly directed by phenomena themselves would enable us, beyond the limit of positive knowledge, to close the gap of explanation, while obviating any slide into resentment or despair that might otherwise be projected into this gap.

Nevertheless, archaic forms of fetishism could not just be wrenched from their socio-historical context and imported holus-bolus. If ‘the domain of fiction’ was to complement rather than

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58 ‘*En considérant que chaque groupe des phénomènes ne peut jamais être entièrement fixe, on reconnaît que l’immuabilité des lois naturelles ne saurait convenir aux événements composées, et reste toujours bornée à leurs éléments irréductibles*’ [XII:7].
contradict a positivized worldview it had to ‘become as systematic as that of demonstration, in order that their mutual harmony may conform to their respective destinations’ [XII:12]. In the most general terms, and following the logic of a schema in which the highest order of existence possessed not just ‘life’ but the attributes of thinking, acting and feeling, the universe could be imagined to consist of three orders of being. At the coordinating apex, L’Humanité alone was to be understood as possessing not just feeling and activity but an intelligent will. In a second category was the physical order of external reality, most proximately centred on la planète humaine. This order was not sentient. However, ‘[in] dissipating the theological prejudices which would represent matter as entirely inert, science tends to lend it the character of activity, which fetishism had spontaneously consecrated’59. The ‘final wisdom’ of Positivism makes such consecration systematic, treating all activity ‘as led by love towards universal harmony [XII:10]’ It thus ‘conceives the world as aspiring to support man’ — both in an everyday sense, but also through such fictions as orbital self-correction — ‘in order to ameliorate the universal order under the impulsion of the Great Being’ [X:12].

These first two orders grouped together all the concrete phenomena treated by the fundamental sciences. The first category included the domains of la morale and sociology. The second that of physics (further divided into terrestrial and celestial). Biology was included in the first according to the ‘dogmatical division’ between cosmology and sociology and in the second according to the ‘historical division’ between external reality and the social and moral order. But there remained a third category consisting of the ‘abstract’ or ‘fundamental’ order in which were assembled those

59 ‘En dissipant les préjugés théologiques qui représentaient la matière comme essentiellement inerte, la science tendit à lui rendre l’activité que le fétichisme avait spontanément consacrée’ [XII:9].
universal laws which pertained to 'the forms of existence common to all things'\textsuperscript{60} [Pos Cat App Table B]. This was the domain of mathematics. It dealt with the most general laws of nature. But by the same token it was also the domain of the 'unmodifiable', and thus of that 'supreme fatality' which positivism's reconstructed morale invested with all the majesty of a benign power standing over the universal order in the very process by which, through the actions of 'the Great Being' it was brought to perfection. This most abstract yet most fundamental dimension of being was to be conceived as pure sentiment. As the 'general milieu in which things accomplish themselves', it was 'animated only by universal sympathy, without action as without reflection' [XII:23].

The practical point of Comte's trichotomy was to bring within the orbit of an altruistic affection the entirety of the cosmos in which Humanity is placed. But this required that its principal elements not just be conceptualizable as such. They needed to be rendered into a symbolic form through which they could be grasped by the sentiments as well as by the intellect. And indeed, not just casually, but systematically, so that they could serve, and be affectively re-inforced, as objects of worship. For this, evidently, not just the abstract language of science was needed but those forms of sentiment-laden representations which Comte called 'images'.

The iconic representation of Humanity itself presented no problem. With the image of Clotilde ever before his mind's eye, the individual 'servitor' and 'agent' could serve as a metonym for that larger whole, which in deference to the completeness of its existence, and its aptness to stand in for the personal(ised) deity of the monotheists, Comte dubbed \textit{Le Grand-Être}. In its greater amorphousness, the second was more difficult. To represent the physical, or 'cosmological', order

\textsuperscript{60} See Table B, 'Theoretical Hierarchy of Human Conceptions: or synthetical view of the universal order' reproduced in the appendix to the English translation of the Positivist Catechism.
La Terre was what humanly mattered. In the days before space photography, however, this Grande Fétiche could hardly be pictured, so Comte urged recourse to the poetic and artistic imagery that surrounded the idea of le Monde [XII:18] The real difficulty, however, concerned the third term in the series. It was wholly abstract and lacked a physical site. Comte's brilliant but eclectic solution was to fuse a Western mathematical idea—the geometers’ and logicians’ ‘space’—with the traditional Chinese worship of Heaven. The latter provided the signifying materials through which the purely ideational reality of the former could be symbolically invested with the spiritual force of l’amour universel. Space was not just emptiness, a universal container, but the generative medium in which we might imagine the most general laws of existence taking shape. ‘In order that sympathy can be sufficiently developed, it is necessary to idealize not just the objective world, but also the subjective milieu in which we place all external phenomena'\(^{61}\). Altogether, then, in the figure of a transcendent and fecund emptiness, the most abstract order of reality, its ordering as such, is identified first with sentiment purified of activity and intelligence, then with fate, and finally with the logico-mathematical notion of an all-englobing Espace.

Not the least striking aspect of this third member of the trinity is that it brings Comte close to suggesting that nothingness is the ground of all being. Comte is drawn in that direction by a phenomenalism that had always regarded the category of being as suspect and insisted that events not existences were the proper topic for scientific inquiry. Unlike Nietzsche and Heidegger, however, through whom the negatively theological, or in the case of Mark Taylor [1984] ‘a/theological’, implications of this thought have entered into contemporary

\(^{61}\) ‘Afin que la sympathie soit assez développé, il faut idéaliser, non-seulement le monde objectif, mais aussi le milieu subjectif où nous plaçons tous le phénomènes extérieurs’
postmodern discourse, Comte’s rendition of it was firmly inscribed within a realism of the social. Priority is always given to what he takes to be the moral, reproductive, unifying and self-perfecting requirements of the social body. Thus his encounter with nothingness is never abyssal. The Space he would have us worship is filled with an edifying and harmonizing content. Immediately following his enthusiastic proposal for this cult, indeed, he softens its potentially disturbing negativity still further. The ‘full’ properties of *l’Espace*—as the loving seat of *l’ordre universel*—are identified with those of the ‘ether’, which the popular astronomy of his day was wont to place in stellar space in consistency with the old dictum about nature abhorring a vacuum. ‘Abridging the interval which the World, that is to say the Earth, fills between Space and Humanity, we can directly connect the two extreme elements of the supreme trinity, in attributing to *le fluide générale* the objectivity of the most abstract laws’62 [XII:25].

The categories of Positivism’s expanded godhead in any case remained firmly *fictif*, and their ultimate justification was the greater human unity which they might make possible. From the beginning, indeed, Comte’s synthesis had intended to provide the basis not only for harmonizing individual minds. It aimed to be culturally ecumenical, both with regard to the past, so as to maximize its effects on social continuity, and internationally so as to maximize its potential for solidarizing humanity on a global scale. Completing the ‘Catholicism minus Christianity’ of his scientific Humanism with the cultus of *le Grand Fétiche* and *le Grand Milieu* was conceived, _inter_
*alia*, as a cross-cultural syncretism which would bring such unifying efforts to a climactic fulfillment. 'Rallying the elite of the white race with the majority of the yellow and the whole of the black, only the incorporation of fetishism into positivism can consolidate the universal religion' [XII:23].

Such arguments, however, in all the chimerical, not to say imperializing, guise in which they now appear, should not divert us from critically scrutinizing the evolving socio-theology that remains at their core. Now that the main elements have been assembled, it is possible to consider that core more fully as a response not only to the theoretico-ideological requirements of the religious crisis Comte diagnosed, but also in the light they might throw more generally on the post-Nietzschean situation, and especially on the problems that arise when attempts are made to fill the nihilist void with divine or quasi-divine valuations of the human collectivity. I will turn to these questions in the next chapter. For the present it will be enough to point out that Comte's final writings complicate any simple dismissal of his position as unthinkingly technological, or even as 'humanist' in the banally anthropocentric sense criticized by Heidegger in his 'Letter on Humanism'63. Which is not to say at the same time that Comte's final position is completely unassailable in such terms. His supplemental injunction to worship *la Terre* side-steps, rather than frontally addresses, the

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63 *...the thinking in Being and Time is against humanism. But this opposition does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane, and deprecates the dignity of man. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough. Of course the essential worth of man does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the 'Subject' among them, so that as the tyrant of Being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly bruitied 'objectivity'. Man is rather 'thrown' from Being itself into the truth of Being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might appear in the light of Being as the beings they are...in accord with this destiny man as ek-sisting has to guard the truth of Being. Man is the shepherd of Being' [Heidegger, 1977:210].
man/nature contradiction which Rousseau detected in the proto-industrial movement of modernity and which Marx envisaged as soluble, if at all, only through the abolition of private appropriation. To worship le Grand Fétiche, while directing aggression away from warfare towards its useful exploitation, implies an aesthetic desecration at odds with just such a sacralizing movement. Comte avoids thinking about this by focussing on the 'universal love' implicit in the natural order itself, an order which is ultimately abstract and located beyond la planète humaine in any concrete and practical-sensuous-sense.

In the end, then, Positivism only avoids an idolatry of Humanity by idolizing order as such. The proposed cult of l’Espace makes evident that apotheosis of unity, and of the subordination of parts to the whole, of the ontic to the ontological, which pervades every aspect of Comte’s system. At the same time, in making this move, the divine principle that begins to migrate in the Synthèse subjective from Humanity as such to a certain human idea of the cosmos becomes doctrinally lodged within subjectivity. On the face of it, this violates the defining principle of Positivism’s foi démontrable, namely that le dedans should always subordinate itself to le dehors. In loving the universal order which the positivized soul projects into the universe, that faith remains wrapped up in its own subjectivity. Far from finding its intellectum in a fully scientific self-understanding, the faith that seeks it finds only itself. Indeed, if we question what Comte takes for granted — the identification of moral and physical perfection with one another in the idea of a perfectly harmonious formal system — the whole System dissolves into the arbitrary.
CHAPTER SEVEN
HUMANITY AS 'LE VRAI GRAND-ÊTRE'

Comte's trinitarian formula for the Positivist godhead discloses the same general tension as appears throughout his system. That is, between a this-worldly, and anti-metaphysical, demythologization of the kind attempted more maximally by Nietzsche, and a re-mythologization designed to buttress a new and, this time unassailable, foundation for re-establishing intra-and inter-individual subjective unity in the face of the anarchy he feared was terminal. What resolves the tension is that the latter consideration is always given the upper hand. The 'sufficient incorporation of fetishism into positivism' [XI:7] leads neither to perspectivalism, nor to an unsettling infinitude, nor to a real plurality of gods. It produces a hierarchy in which La Terre and l'Éspace, in their guise, respectively, of Grand Fétiche and Grand Milieu, are completely dependent for their religious meaning on the Grand-Être they make possible, and whose worship heads the list. If they are...

11 It should be cautioned though that Comte’s ideas on this subject had undergone a major change since writing the Catéchisme positiviste, and that the religious implications of ‘incorporating fetishism’ into Positive religion were not fully worked out by the time Comte died. The emotionally invested categories of le monde and l’espace first make their appearance in the last volume of Politique positive. It comes in a general discussion of the place of art in positive education. To supplement its scientific side, and as a more general project, he proposes the establishment of une poésie positiviste, employing ‘un nouvel ordre de moyens poétiques, que suscite la fusion normale de la fétichité dans la positivité...Par une telle incorporation, la maturité de l’art rentre en possession du monde extérieur...En développant ce domaine initiale, la poésie positive devra l’étendre autant aux phénomènes qu’aux substances, d’après l’essor abstrait partout accompli depuis le fétichisme. Or, ce nouveau champ exige l’institution préalable des milieux subjectifs...[L]’espace offre le premier exemple, et jusqu’ici le plus complètement, d’un tel artifice logique’ [X:53]. These hints grow into the full-scale trinity presented in the first chapter of the Logique positive two years later. This discussion confines itself, however, to matters of doctrine — the theoretical constitution of the synthèse subjective, and within...
themselves to be regarded as sacred, it is only symbolically, as a projective extension of
l'Humanité or, more precisely, of the 'universal sympathy' engendered in and through us
as its constituent agents and organs. The viability of the whole construct continues to
hinge, then, on the move which in some sense made Humanité itself into a god.

This viability had strict conditions. What Comte sought — and thought he had found —
was a god which, unlike the 'fictive beings' of the 'theological stage', would be
intellectually in tune with the principles of positive science while still being able to play the
authoritative and centering role for the individual and for society as a whole which had
formerly been played by the 'God' of supernatural religion. In previous chapters I have
tried to show how shaky the scaffolding was on which this whole edifice is built.
However, as I have also argued, even as a flawed endeavour, Comte's attempt to replace
'God' with l'Humanité is more worthy of examination than has usually been thought. The
divinization of humankind, whether symbolically explicit or not, goes to the heart of
progressive, post-theistic attempts to re-think modernity's ideological situation, and the
very contradictions by which Comte's positivist theology of the human are beset belong to
what has long been problematic in that situation. Indeed, if we read Comte's project in
this way it can acquire a fresh relevance to contemporary social thought — even as that
thought grapples with the ethical and political implications of the groundlessness which it

that of mathematical philosophy or logic. The implications for organized worship, le culte,
are left out of consideration, though presumably the new categories would have had to
find a place within at least le culte publique. Given the latter's already crowded, and
multiply systematized, Calendar of festivals, it is here, perhaps, that Comte might have
been led to address the potential contradiction between his Sociolatry and a growing
(pantheist?) inclination to worship l'ordre universel as such, and as a whole.
claims as its own, and which has swallowed up every kind of 'grand narrative' including that of the socio(-theo)logy that descends from Comte.

**Faith after 'God'**

Nietzsche wrote little directly about Comte. Yet from scattered comments and allusions it is evident that the discoverer of the Eternal Return considered the founder of Positivism one of the few modern thinkers of the first rank. In *Twilight of the Idols*, the rise of phenomenalism makes its appearance, after the long night of Greek and Christian metaphysical idealism, as 'day break — the first yawnings of reason' [1990:50]. *Daybreak*, the book, places Comte himself at the summit of the scientific spirit's emancipatory movement. He is 'that great honest Frenchman besides whom, as embracer and conqueror of the strict sciences, the German and English of this century can place no rival' [1982:215].

At the same time, there is no question of following Comte into his religion of Humanity. Like others who found something to admire in the early Comte, Nietzsche thought that the *Grand-Prêtre de l'Humanité*, with that self-identification, had gone off the rails. The chiding, though, is gentle. The later Comte exhibited the weariness of approaching old age and death. Past a certain point, Comte — like Plato — had just stopped thinking. He had surrounded himself with uncritical acolytes through whom he sought only to monumentalize himself, and had infused the courageous and astringent 'work of his life' with 'enthusiasms, spices, poetic mists and mystic lights' [1992:215]. Comte's decline
into a rigid and lachrymose religiosity was in any case a secondary matter. It represented
the extreme expression of a moralism which Nietzsche objected to fundamentally, and
which, just as much as 'the embrace and conquest of the exact sciences', had been at the
heart of Comte's project from the start.

Only in its exaggerations, moreover, was Comte's apotheosis of the social sentiments
particularly idiosyncratic. Teachings about 'the sympathetic affects and of pity or the
advantage to others as a principle of behaviour' were 'the moral undercurrent of the age'.

Today it seems to do everyone good when they hear that society is on the way to
adapting the individual to general requirements, and that happiness and at the
same time the sacrifice of the individual lies in feeling himself to be a useful
member and instrument of the whole; except that one is at present very uncertain
as to where this whole is to be sought, whether in an existing state or one still to
be created, or in the nation, or in a brotherhood of peoples, or in new little
economic communalities... but there is also a wonderful and far-sounding
unanimity in the demand that the ego has to deny itself until, in the form of
adaptation to the whole, it again acquires its firmly set circle of rights and
duties....[1992:83]

Such teachings 'have shot up with a mighty impetus everywhere' Nietzsche notes, and
'every socialist system has placed itself as if involuntarily' on their common ground. As
for the French case, where the chasm between freethinking and an unreconstructed Church
was deepest:
The more one liberated oneself from dogmas, the more one sought as it were a justification of this liberation in a cult of philanthropy: not to fall short of the Christian ideal in this, but where possible to outdo it, was a secret spur with all French freethinkers from Voltaire to Auguste Comte: and the latter did in fact, with his moral formula *Vivre pour autrui*, outchristian Christianity [ibid].

Comte, then, was a Janus figure, his thought an arrow pointing backwards towards 'declining' values as well as forwards towards transvaluation. The error of his way had been to seek a synthesis between Christianity’s 'moral residuum' and the scientific outlook -- rather than, as Nietzsche himself attempted, to use the force of the latter to hammer the former to pieces.

Both Nietzsche and Comte claimed that their radically divergent positions were not only in tune with a scientific approach to human realities, but flowed directly from the rupture in thought which the adoption of such an approach entailed. In view of this, it is at first sight surprising that Nietzsche avoids an engagement with Comte’s insistent linkage of the scientific to the moral via sociology and a science of Man. Pragmatically, perhaps, he felt no need to. In place of Comte’s ‘cerebral physiology’ and ‘sociology’ he was simply operating with a different batch of special sciences -- including classical philology, his own version of a corporeally based psychology, and a cultural hermeneutics historiographically extended into a ‘genealogy of morals’. With these he proceeded directly to his own ‘scientific’ reading of the contemporary European ‘moral’ situation. It was left to others (above all Foucault), immersed in a further century of social scientific development, to argue that Nietzsche’s conception of the terrain covered by the *sciences humaines* --
asymmetrically distributed between the vectors of life, language and labour [1970:351] -- was more in line with the development these sciences came to mark out; and to argue, more importantly, that, both because of this distribution and because of the paradoxes of linguistic mediation, a scientific approach to the human precluded the very category of Man which emerged at the centre of Comte’s construction as its transcendental referent and foundation. Thus, we might say, a Nietzschian engagement with the ‘anthropologism’ underpinning Comte’s moralism was (philosophically) possible, but (social scientifically) postponed.

But we must also add: Nietzsche did not ‘hear’ Comte’s sociological argument for and about altruism in the first place because he had no place in his thinking for social ontology at all. It is not just that he rejected a hypostatized collective subject, as for example in the

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2 ‘To imagine for an instant what the world and thought would be if man did not exist, is considered to be merely engaging in paradox. This is because we are so blinded by the recent manifestation of man that that we can no longer remember a time -- and it is not so long ago -- that when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not. It is easy to see why Nietzsche’s thought should have had, and still has for us, such a disturbing power when it is introduced in the form of an imminent event, the Promise-Threat, the notion that man would soon be no more -- but would be replaced by the superman; in a philosophy of the Return, this meant that mad had long since disappeared and would continue to disappear, and that our modern thought about man, our concern for him, our humanism, were all sleeping serenely over the threatening rumble of his non-existence’ [Foucault, 1970:322].

3 With regard to Nietzsche’s political thinking, Daniel Conway has challenged the conventional interpretation that he was a ‘failed radical voluntarist’, arguing that Nietzsche was attempting to reopen the ‘founding political question’, that is, ‘the justification of humankind itself, the warrant for its future as a viable, thriving species’ [Routledge, 1997]. Conway’s reinterpretation does not challenge, though, his more general assimilation to a paradigm which combines a voluntarist understanding of ‘institutions’ with a biologically framed understanding of ‘peoples’. An investigation into Nietzsche’s social categories, or lack of them, might start by looking precisely at his category of ‘institution’, as in: ‘Our institutions are no longer fit for anything: everyone is unanimous about that. But the fault
'new idol' of the state [1961:75-8]. For him, the movement of knowledge from the domain of individual strivings to the plane of social reality, however conceived, involved no shift in optic, no epistemological break. There was no specifically social reality to know. All he could do, then, with Comte's 'outchristianing of Christianity', or indeed with the many senses the word 'social' acquired in nineteenth century social-ism, was to deconstruct it as the determinate expression of a reactive illusion.

Nor, for the same reason, did Nietzsche have anything to say about the content of Comte's religious turn. Its content: not its weary tone of 'poetic mists and mystic lights', nor its punctilious prescriptions, but its very precipitation, out of a sociologically transformed moralism, of a new deity. *Ecce Homo* [1969] concludes with the challenge: 'Have I been understood? -- Dionysus vs the Crucified'. But if the Christian God was dead, was not The Crucified also? To which extent, as Nietzsche himself argued, the crucial fault-line in the modern ideological field was no longer between Christianity (Reformed or Counter-reformed) and everything he meant by Dionysus, but between the latter and Christianity's enlightened secular after-life, including social-ism in all its (not necessarily left-wing or even anti-capitalist) forms. Comte's signal contribution to this divided post-theistic matrix was to push the idea of the social all the way. Society was to be worshiped -- not only because of the functionalities of establishing industrial order, but because it is the genuine

lies not in them but in *us*. Having lost all the instincts out of which institutions grow, we are losing the institutions themselves, because we are no longer fit for them' [1990:104].

4 'My objection to the whole of sociology in England France is that it knows from experience only the decaying forms of society and takes its own decaying instincts with perfect as the norm of sociological value-judgment' [Nietzsche, 1990:103].
source of all that is sacred. More: that the ‘Supreme Existence’ constituted by humanity collectively is now -- as it latently was all along -- *le vrai Grand-Être* [VII:354] in whom we live, move and have our being. Nietzsche’s dictum could accordingly be re-written: Dionysus vs *le Grand-Être*. But not by Nietzsche. Such a divinity is hard to acknowledge even as an illusion from a perspective that rules out the possibility, objectively and subjectively, of any kind of ‘we’. When radical humanists lament that ‘God is not yet dead because Man is not yet alive’ [Gardavsky, 1973] latter-day Nietzscheans can only reply with a shrug. The small ‘s’ subject and the big ‘S’ Subject constitute one another (Althusser [1971:170-77]), the unitary ‘we’ and unitary ‘I’ are equally imagined in the image of a transcendental absolute, and if God is indeed dead, so too, his face in the sand erased by the sea, is Man (Foucault [970:387]).

Even among those nineteenth century thinkers who were sympathetic to the religio-moral dimension of Comte’s project, there was a tendency to ignore, or explain away, the full force of what he came to affirm. Lévy-Bruhl, for example, whose *Philosophy of Auguste Comte* emphasized the underlying continuity between the *Cours* and *Politique Positive*, assumed that Comte’s use of a theological vocabulary in reference to the subject-object of social science was only tactical. Positivism had always been a ‘faith’, and it remained one that was distinctive in being ‘demonstrable’. As for the apparent contradiction in Comte’s very notion of *une foi démontrable* [X:267], this ‘lies merely on the surface’.

The number of men with sufficient leisure and enough culture to examine the conclusions and go into their proofs will always be small. The attitude of the others must be one of submission and respect. But, differing on this point from the
religious dogmas which humanity has known till now, the new faith will be ‘demonstrated’. It will contain nothing which has not been established and controlled by scientific methods, nothing which goes beyond the domain of the relative, nothing which at any moment cannot be proved to a mind capable of following the demonstration. [1973:26-7] ...Faith therefore signifies here not indeed a voluntary abdication of the intellect in the presence of a mystery which surpasses its power of comprehension, but a submission to fact, which in no way encroaches upon the rights of reason [29-30].

The weakness of Lévy-Bruhl’s gloss lies not so much in the distinction drawn between esoteric and exoteric doctrine — for which there is ample warrant in Comte’s emphatically hierarchical conception of religious as of every other dimension of social organization — as in his differential rendering of the word foi. On the one hand, in old-time religion, we have dogma and foi révélatoire, on the other une foi démontrable. Even the faith of the unlettered Positivist follower is of the latter type. In effect, however, this is to confuse two distinctions. One distinction is between the first-hand faith of those who know by some kind of immediate intuition, and that of those who accept — ‘on faith’ — second-hand accounts of what is to be believed. The second — less self-evidently absolute than Lévy-Bruhl assumed — contrasts ‘revelation’ and ‘demonstration’ (based on ‘fact’) as alternative bases for religious faith. As a result of this conflation, ‘revealed’ religion is assumed to be wholly dogmatic and of the ‘follower’ type, Positivist followers are absolved of all credulousness, and at the summit, where faith and scientific knowledge supposedly converge, Comte’s own faith is assumed — as pure ‘submission to fact’ — to
be so far from the leaps and projections of revealed religion as to have nothing fideistic about it.

Quite aside from all the difficulties surrounding the identification (and construction) of factuality (if facts are always ‘relative’ how can they elicit ‘submission’?), this understanding of Comte’s credo relies on a reduced notion of religious faith as itself just a species of strongly held opinion. In accordance with that, it depreciates the revealed quality of the old monotheism which rested, in its living core, not on dogma but on testimony (however mythic and distorted we may take it to be). It equally ignores the presence of a directly experienced quality in Comte’s own religiosity, glossing over such things as his emphasis on (private) prayer. The habit of prayer is enjoined not just for the Positivised masses, who must school themselves to obey, but for the whole Positivist priesthood. But why should scientists and positive philosophers pray? More to the point: to what or to whom? Not to address that question is to misconstrue the character, for Comte himself, of his ‘demonstrable faith’. To be sure this ‘faith’ accorded with what Comte took to be scientific certitude (concerning, for example, the necessary moral and material dependence of the individual on Humanity as a whole). But it also proceeded from, and registered, a subjective encounter with the Great Being itself — an encounter which the prescribed devotions of Positive Religion were intended to reproduce as a continuing, and inspiring, experience. Nor indeed could the objective and subjective

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5 That is, after 1847. In effect, Lévy-Bruhl’s attempt to show the continuity in Comte’s work goes too far, by not recognizing the modified conception of Positivist faith — as crucially supplemented by love — which Comte outlines in chapter one of Positive politique’s second volume. See especially, VIII:7-59.
dimensions of such a faith wholly coincide. The Great Being, *qua* the social dimension of humankind, might be ‘real’, in the Positivist view, but in its vastness and historicity it could never be a pure object of the senses. The subjective apprehension of Humanity was necessary as a complement to objective knowledge about it. At the same time, the effort to apprehend it imaginatively (with eyes closed) could not but overflow, sublimely, even a mind ‘capable of following the demonstration’.

To insist that Comte’s deificatory construal of Humanity be taken seriously, both as an idea and as an experience, is, in the first instance, an interpretative point. But an appraisal of Comte’s religious move, and more particularly of the *Grand-Etre* on which it pivots, also opens up questions with important practical ramifications concerning, first, the arising of a new religious *dispositif* – post-Christian and humanist – that Comte was among the first to explore, and secondly the place in this *dispositif* of the political. If it is historically correct to say that we still live ‘amidst the dereliction of Nietzsche’s idols’ it is also true that secularized moralism about the human, the social, the collective etc. continues to anchor, or at least animate, both discourses of state (and jurisprudential) legitimacy and discourses linked to projects of liberal or transformative reform. To which extent, even though Comte’s particular theoreti-co-ideological assemblage may be irretrievably obsolete, critically reflecting on it may help to clarify some features of what such a commitment entails, at least in the thinking of those who would embrace what can be salvaged from the enlightenment but are radically dissatisfied with the current historical drift. But in order to broach these questions we must first clarify Comte’s anchoring
category of l'Humanité itself. How, and how coherently, was it conceptualized? In what sense did Humanity have a divine character? And what — along the continuum, let us say, of real to fictive — was its status as an existent?

The meaning(s) of l'Humanité?

One might imagine that the concept of 'Humanity', which serves multiply as the focal point, foundation and telos of Comte's system, is clear and distinct. In part because of this same multiplicity, however, it is a good deal less so than Comte himself imagined. 'By a happy ambiguity of language', he observes,

> the same expression is used to designate the widest exercise of this highest affection [l'humanité] and also the race in whom it exists to the highest degree. And as in this fullest sense it is incompatible with any feeling of hatred towards other races, there is little inconvenience in using the term as the expression of the largest and most universal form of sympathy. The reader will therefore understand how, in my cerebral table, I was led to apply the name of Humanity...to the best type of vital unity, which, as the foregoing remarks will have shown, tends more and more towards dependence upon this instinct?.

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6 The phrase is Philippa Berry’s, from the preface to Berry and Wernick [1992:ii].
7 'Une admirable équivoque consacre, en effet, la même expression pour désigner à la fois la plus vaste expression habituelle de cette suprême affection et l'ensemble de la race où elle se développe le mieux. Comme une telle expansion est réellement incompatible avec la haine envers les autres espèces, il y a peu d'inconvénients à se servir de ce terme usuel pour caractériser davantage la sympathie vraiment universelle. Le lecteur doit donc sentir comment j'ai été conduit à désigner ainsi, dans mon tableau.
A happy ambiguity indeed. For it permits a conceptual slide from the human species considered generically, as a type of higher primate, to the same considered, collectively, as a (developing) life-form in itself; and a further slide from this to 'the best type of vital unity', itself secured through the harmonizing force of the highest form of (instinctual) sympathy which that totality comes to manifest the more it develops. Thus 'Humanity' is the highest love of which individual humans are capable, and which (replacing coercion) holds 'Humanity' emotionally together at the point at which it finally instantiates itself, in its fully mature stage, as 'Humanity'. Already we can identify at least four different senses of 'Humanity'. And, as we can also see, what enables Comte to read them all simultaneously, and without any sense of inconsistency, into the same word is not just a linguistic contingency but the coordinated relation they bear to one another within an entire conceptual apparatus.

For Comte, the key move in constituting this apparatus was to positivize the study of l'homme (a term which, to confuse things further, he replaced in later works with that of l'humanité, lower case, in referring generically to the species\(^8\)). But positivization with a capital 'P' was not innocent. As Durkheim remarked, rather than begin with the patient assembly and careful comparison of social facts, as his method required, Comte proceeded straightaway to practical conclusions as though 'he already knew in advance the laws' that

\[\text{cérébral, le meilleur type de l'unité vitale, qui tend toujours à dériver d'un tel principe, d'après l'ensemble des notions précédentes} \text{ [VII:703].}\]

\(^8\) After 1847 'la vague et irrationnelle notion de l'Homme', while continuing 'à servir l'unité zoologique' [VII:658] is generally dropped in favour of l'humanité lower case where its referent is biologically generic; l'humanité's upper casing (which had not
might connect them [1964:19-20]. At the same time, Comte's premature leap towards a completed knowledge of the social gave itself an elaborate justification. In no branch of knowledge was 'positive' science blindly inductive. Its consideration of 'relations of resemblance and succession' always unfolded in the light of pre-existing theory concerning both method and the nature of the object-field. Of course, if sociology was to be launched as already a positive science, its initial, and initiating, body of theory would have to be positivized in advance. But this operation belonged, in crucial part, not to the science in question but to what the positive study of the history of knowledge tells us about the relations between one basic field of science and another. In the 'encyclopedic scale' (which summarizes the results of such study) each successively higher order of knowledge bases itself on the one lower and (allowing for increasing complexity and restrictedness) adds additional laws of its own. The taken-for-granted-starting knowledge of sociology itself could accordingly be deduced from its place in the scale, on the basis of what could be induced from (1) the interrelation between the other sciences, combined with (2) what was (already) known about the lower (and chronologically prior) branch of knowledge on which it immediately rested.

Comte's primary assumption was that because of its historical and logical place as the crown in the tree of knowledge, sociology had to be a life science (its highest branch). As such, he further assumed, it not merely complemented (human) biology by adding the social dimension to our knowledge of the individual species-member, but this social

appeared before 1847) connotes its explicitly religious usage, that is, Humanity's identification as le vrai Grand-Être.
dimension was itself to be understood as a form of life. And if this was so, while *la société* had unique properties, which empirical investigation would have to establish, we could be sure that the laws of life which obtained in lower (less complexified) species also applied to it. Prime among these, at least according to contemporary biologists, and particularly the Montpellier school from whose understanding of the very distinction between life and non-life he took his cues [Canguilhem, 1994:237-9], was the axiom that the life of any organism whatever depended on a ‘vital consensus’ between elements and functions. Without it the former would be inert and the latter would evaporate.

To this there was a further correlate. While the non-life-sciences could proceed analytically, from the parts to the whole (the theory of dynamic systems was the last branch of mathematical physics to be developed), the life sciences had to proceed synthetically, from the whole to the parts. Without a prior consideration of the living organism to which they belonged, organs and tissues would be unintelligible from a biological point of view; and *mutatis mutandis* for sociology. Paradoxically then, as scientific knowledge advances, coming ever closer to the knowledge of human reality itself, the taken-for-granted pre-theory of the positive sciences does not diminish, as we might expect from a process which, at every step, has to dismantle ‘anticipations of Nature’ for scientific ‘interpretation’ to advance: it expands. What needs to be emphasized, though, is not simply the self-justifying circularity of Comte’s importation of

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9 Indeed, not only did the general ‘vital organization’ of an organism have to be theorized prior to that of its forms and functions, but also the whole ‘series’ of organic life needed to be established before scientific knowledge of particular life-forms was possible. *Leçon 41* of the *Cours, sur la philosophie anatomique* [III:384 et seq] elaborates this point.
the bio-organismic metaphor into sociology, but the fact that for Comte it was not metaphorical at all. The biological model was the lynch-pin of his whole construct. By way of the notion of ‘vital consensus’, it enabled him to conjoin a scientific understanding of the social-historical totality taken to comprise human life on the planet with a spiritual apprehension that Humanity -- in actuality as well as ideally -- subsists in love. If love is the essence of humanity, and if humanity embodies love to the highest possible degree, then the ‘h’ of humanity could be written, reverentially, in upper case.

In two respects however, this bio-social construct still leaves the religiously elevated meaning of Humanity ambiguous. To be noted first is the stress it placed on the equation Comte wished to make between *humanité* (small ‘h’) as the widest exercise of altruism, and *Humanité* (big ‘H’) as the fully developed form of the organism bonded by it. The universal benevolence which provides (according to *Politique positive*) ‘l’esprit de l’ensemble’ in the specialized scientific-industrial order that represents Humanity’s final stage of self-development may be crucial to its harmonious well-being. But it is only one of three dimensions of such harmony, and could neither function nor persist independently of the other two. At both the individual and social levels, the ‘vital consensus’ which ‘normally’ prevails in that perfected state entails not only harmony of sentiment (‘sympathy’) but harmony of intellect (‘synthesis’) and harmony of action (‘synergy’) as well [XII:9]. That being so, ‘the best type of vital unity’ exceeds the moral-instinctual feeling Comte calls *l’humanité*, and cannot be straightforwardly named by it.
Lyotard, implicitly setting Comte against Comte, insists that if there are natural forces making for 'complexification, negative entropy, or more generally, development' in the dynamic equilibration of growing systems, social or otherwise, these forces belong to the category of 'the inhuman' [1991:5-6]. Comte himself, in his final writings, went in exactly the opposite direction by broadening the positivist godhead so as to include *le Grand-Fétiche* and *le Grand-Milieu*. Into the latter, as we have seen, he projected the enlarged sense of unity proper to *le Grand-Être* in its final stage by considering *l'Éspace* as the seat (*siège*) of natural propensities to harmonious development in all its dimensions. This allowed him to have his cake and eat it too. For while his broader theory of social unity, with its irreducible triplet of thought, action and sentiment, made it impossible to regard 'humanity' (the moral-instinctual *sentiment*) as the unifying essence of Humanity (the realized bio-social entity), his fetishization of *l'Éspace* restored humanity-the-sentiment to ontological centrality by universalizing it -- at least *fictively*, in the completed subjectivity of positive religion and science -- as the benevolent principle that tends, throughout the cosmos, towards harmony as such.

If the first ambiguity surrounding the meaning of 'Humanity' concerns the (non)-identity between 'the largest and most universal form of sympathy' and 'the best type of vital unity' it helps constitute, the second concerns the social organism whose unity it is. To

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10 'Since development is the very thing which takes away the hope of an alternative to the system from both analysis and practice... the question I am raising here is simply this: what else remains as politics except resistance to this 'inhuman'? And what else is left to resist with but the debt which each soul has contracted with the miserable and admirable indetermination from which it was born and does not cease to be born? -- which is to say with the other inhuman' [1991:7].
put it sharply: is the Humanity we are to acknowledge and worship as the Great Being the human species as such, taken throughout its history and considered at any one time in light of whatever condition of (dis)order, (dis)unity and (un)development it happens to be in? Or does it mean humankind only in its final, Positive, pacific, and truly globalized stage? If the latter, how could there have been ‘serviteurs’ of Humanity — all those saints in the Positivist Calendar for example — before it came into being? If the former, what would be the qualitative difference between the ‘vital consensus’ proper to Humanity and the considerably less perfect forms of order that prevailed during the militarily based epoch of inter-tribal and then inter-national warfare that preceded it? Or, again, is the divine referent a virtual Humanity, one scientifically reconstructed along the generalized and abstract lines recommended by Condorcet? But then how, except subjectively, could it be considered ‘real’? (The same issue, we may note, does not arise as sharply from the vantage point of a humanism of the Feuerbachian type. There, it is the generic essence of each individual human being — the infinite impulses to love, knowledge etc within each and everyone — which makes humankind god-like as a species. But a humanism that holds that infinitude to be not just shared but a product of sharing, an emergent property of association as such, is confronted with more than one social totality, with regard to space-time and degree of virtuality, which might properly be sacralized in this way. Hence Nietzsche’s comment, cited above, that ‘one is uncertain as to where this whole is to be sought’. )

Comte did not, and could not, avoid the issue, though he was hampered (certainly in expression) by an insufficiency of terms for the various wholes in play. If we reserve the
collective term *l'homme* for the species, as it concretely unfolds through its history, and 
*l'Humanité* for its mature, final stage, then we could say that Comte's Great Being is not 
only the latter but also the former, but only in so far it is grasped as always already tending 
to develop towards its maximal pole. Humanity, as the name of that Being, is the 
becoming-Humanity of Man -- it being understood that even in the Positive polity where 
the Great Being is finally acknowledged as the real and only god, Humanity, as the 
perfection of the human, is a limit condition asymptotically approached, but never fully 
reached.

The concept is undoubtedly teleological. Comte did not, however, think it through, still 
less try to validate it, by recourse to an explicit metaphysics of essence and potentiation. 
His account of the becoming-Humanity of Man was sociological. We are already familiar 
with the story. Each expansion of 'society' -- from families and tribal groups to national 
societies, all the way to a globally cooperative industrial order -- creates a more 
differentiated order with a more developed basis of philosophical consensus. In so doing, 
it ratchets up both the level and modality of knowledge, and the affective-instinctual base, 
all of which prepares the way for the next developmental leap. But where, in this narrative 
figure, is its central character?

In one sense it transpires as a kind of (incipient) substance of which the social *qua* social 
consists. From that angle, *l'Humanité* can be located in the widening, universalizing
development of affectively bonded social groups (*sociétés*). In a more structurally inclusive sense, it can also be identified with the objective social totality, taken in all its instances and dimensions, and considered from the perspective of this totality's historical and geographical movement towards unity and harmony as a truly planetary society. Thus, underneath the first duality, between Humanity as actual and potential totality, we discover a second (local/global) which itself articulates with a further difference between the 'morphology' (i.e. techno-institutional structure) and 'physiology' (i.e. vital functioning) of the particular *sociétés* of which the Great Being is composed. The duality of *l'Humanité* as a term referring both to the developing quality of the social tie and to that of society's general (i.e. technical, institutional, political, intellectual, religious etc) form is reflected in the calendric organization of Positivist worship. Through one sequence of festivals, the faithful express gratitude for all the domestic, civic, and humanity-wide ties and institutions, together with the rising scale of social sentiments on which these rely. Another ritual sequence does the same for the march of civilization from tribalism to industrialism. On each side, each step of progress, whether considered historically or in terms of its continuing (but rearranged) place in the culminating result, is

11 Each 'partial association' could be considered to represent the Great Being, since it always at least partially instantiated its essential elements. *'Chacun d'elles, après avoir fourni le noyau, réel ou virtuel, de l'Humanité, restera toujours propre à faciliter sa notion spontanée. En effet, les deux attributs essentiels de l'existence collective, solidarité, continuité, retrouvent nécessairement dans ces mondes dégrés, où, sans être aussi complets, ils deviennent mieux appréciables. Voilà comment la Famille et la Patrie ne cesseront jamais d'offrir, à l'esprit autant qu'au cœur, les préambules nécessaires de l'Humanité.* Indeed, stretching the same argument still further, and viewed in light of its ultimate bio-organisational potential, every animal species could be so regarded. *'Toute espèce animale constitue réellement un Grand-Être plus ou moins avorté, par un arrêt de développement dû, surtout, à la prépondérance humaine'* [VIII:229].
'appreciated' for what it prepares and contributes, until both series come together in the Feast of the Dead and the annual round begins anew.

Three features of *le Grand-Être*, as Comte thus conceived it, are immediately apparent. (1) It is only at the scientific-industrial stage of actual development — with the establishment of a federated world society based on voluntary cooperation and universal altruism — that these variously distinguished senses of what 'Humanity' is begin to coincide. Until the positivization process is complete (and even the Positive stage — like Marx's socialism — is a long period of transition), *l'Humanité* really is an ambiguous reality: instantiated both in the substance of affective sociation and in the structure and movement of the wider social totality within which that substance is embedded. (2) Diachrony inheres in the concept. What is sacralized as Humanity is not the (always imperfect) form assumed by the human collectivity at any developmental conjuncture, but the convergent movement towards Humanity (in both senses) to which it belongs. Humanity, that is to say, is not a static absolute, but the coming into being of a superior (way of) being\(^\text{12}\). As such it is a process as much as a result. Indeed the former is implicated in the latter — much as Hegel's *weltgeist* included all the moments which logically preceded its realization. However, if Humanity's being includes its becoming (and in this sense exists prior to its actual arrival as cooperative world society etc), then

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\(^{12}\) As supplemented, that is, by the round of 50 festivals prescribed in the *Tableau Sociolatérique* [X:159].

\(^{13}\) *Notre Grand-Être n'est pas plus immobile qu'absolu; sa nature relative le rend développable: en un mot, il est le plus vivant des êtres connus. Il s'étend et se compose de plus en plus par la succession continue des générations humaines...De la conception normale du Grand-Être, nous passons donc à l'histoire de sa formation continue, dont l'ensemble résume tous les progrès quelconques* [VII:335].
(3) it can never be fully present in the phenomenalist way in which Comte wished to restrict the meaning of the 'real'.

It is just here that the religion of Humanity steps in to supplement what would otherwise be an ontic lack. As a present reality, the becoming of Humanity can only exist subjectively — that is, as represented (and loved) by the mind that apprehends it. Correlatively, the representation of Humanity (through symbolism, and above all through the cultivation of memory) cannot be regarded as just an attempted duplication of the real. Comte's sociological analysis told him that organized religion, which secured the unity of group orientation and strengthened the altruistic impulses, was essential to the unity of every kind and level of society. And indeed, the wider the group, and the more refined (i.e. higher but weaker) its affective ties, the more important to its constitution and maintenance religion was in an organized form. To which extent, in the Positivist epoch, sustaining the representation of Humanity, together with the liturgy and pastoral practices surrounding its worship, was indispensable to the continuing existence — i.e. effective presence for individual humans — of Humanity itself.

But this is not all. What was represented in the Great Being was itself, as I have stressed, a becoming-being. To grasp it as such at any point along the locus of its unfolding meant grasping that present (the 'statics' part of sociology) not as a monad but as including both

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14 Fetishism, lacking a priesthood, and worshipping 'specific bodies', was the least organized; Catholicism, with its independent priesthood, the most organized. The extrapolation into industrial society of this linearly regarded institutional development was already elaborated in Comte's 1826 essay, *Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel* [X:176-215].
its protensions (opening towards the telos that organizes the optic) and retentions (the appreciatively grasped panorama of the human story up to now, with the present as its provisional result). To grasp the entire process of Humanity’s becoming, then, is to grasp all its moments in their mutual connectivity; and if the private imagining of this is socially coordinated and maintained, such a connective grasp, in turn, constitutes that connectivity as a subjective social fact. Before the scientific-industrial revolution, when Humanity (in the various senses of social totality identified above) does not coincide with itself, establishing the subjective, as opposed to objective, continuité of Humanity is both impossible and unnecessary. But once the rise of positivity has shattered belief in the old gods the situation changes. For at this point, because of the theoretico-ideological exigencies of the situation (which necessitated a new, coordinating synthesis), the objective continuity of Humanity, and thus its ‘vital unity’ as a living being, come to depend on the self-conscious maintenance of its continuity at the subjective level. Thus when the part and the whole finally come together (in ‘that day’ as the Psalmist put it ‘when we are all one, and His Name one’) we discover that Humanity only has objective being to the extent to which it becomes — through, and in, the hearts and minds of its mutually conjoined individual members — a being for itself.

The collective subject

We are almost at the point where we can examine what it might mean to maneuver this construct into ‘the God-shaped hole’ (Fuentes) left by the departed (Christian) divinity.
But there is one last dimension of ‘Humanity’, as Comte conceived it, which still requires comment.

In his study of modern social theory, John Milbank distinguishes between two broadly defined strategies for attempting to secure the transcendental (and misrecognisedly crypto-theological) foundations of ‘secular reason’\(^ {15} \). Both involve appeals to an *immanent* transcendental. The first finds it in a Providence reconfigured as scientifically knowable, and identified, in theories of progress, with the innate potential of natural materiality. The second, via notions of willed institution and *homo faber*, finds it in the human subject, a subject which posits itself (as will and reason) to be both its own author and the underlying sub-stance of all it knows and surveys. In the general movement of thought from early modern political science (Machiavelli, Hobbes) to nineteenth century sociology, Milbank argues, it is the first path which came to prevail. ‘Thus “humanity’s self-formation” gets gradually displaced by “the historical formation of humanity”’ [1990:28].

So far, and in line with Comte’s own *échelle encyclopédique*, I have been approaching his concept of Humanity from just that angle – that is, as a crowning reality that caps a

\(^{15}\) Milbank examines the ‘secular reason’ exhibited by political economy and sociology as a species of the ‘secular theology’ (of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, Hobbes and Leibniz) explored by Amos Funkenstein in *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* [1986]. The first, for Milbank, continues the themes and methods of the second, though in a more disguised (but equally fallacious) fashion. ‘The theme of the human construction of culture is...aporetically crossed in secular reason by the idea of the cultural construction of humanity. Where this moment is privileged, secular reason produces a privileged discourse about providence, which, unlike in medieval theology, violates the distinction between primary and secondary causes and invokes a final cause — ‘God’ or ‘Nature’ — to plug some supposed gap in immanent understanding. This kind of fusion of theological and scientific discourse has been proposed by Amos Funkenstein. However, he sees it as terminating with Kant. I see it as an element in political economy, and even as reinforced in the intellectual moves which generate ‘sociology’’ [1993:4].
cosmic movement of progress-in-order. In Comte’s version, this transcendental guarantor of meaning and value is at once the positivized knowledge object of social science, and a kind of super-organism which evolves to the point where, with Positivization itself, it becomes a self-conscious and self-transformative force for perfecting what, for it, is the ‘universal order’. Put this way, however, it is clear that Comte’s thematization of Humanity participated in both strategies identified by Milbank at once. The ‘Humanity’ which replaces the Christian, Jewish and Islamic God in Comte’s religious imaginary is an immanent product of the non-human. But, in this very act, its destiny is to double over as a (reflexively knowing) subject, to take charge of itself and its world, and thence to humanize, actively, everything on which it depends. When we try to pin down, then, what exalts Humanity -- objectively in nature, subjectively for (each of) us -- we can see that it acquires its paramount and anchoring status by way of the other would-be foundational route. On this side, Humanity is identified with the thinking, willing, and, finally, self-autonomizing human subject -- which, at least in left and liberal thought, and until the last few decades, has been secular reason’s main line of march.

The effect of projecting Humanity into the conceptual space of the post-Cartesian subject was not just to positivize this latter category, but to collectivize it. Where German philosophy developed an ever more abstruse philosophy of the individual subject (as thought reflecting both on itself, and on the ego it presupposed), Comte, following in the

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16 In giving Comte a ‘providentialist’ reading, Milbank emphasises Comte’s relationship with de Bonald, whose social ontology Comte ‘inverts’, and the dependence of De Bonald on Mallebranche’s occasionalism. All this, for Milbank, served to import into French
steps of Condorcet, insisted on a historical sociology of human thought which emphatically regarded it, and its expressions, as the collective results of a collective process. The development of the ego cognates towards self-consciousness was likewise translated into a socio-historical positivity: the destined emergence of a Humanity which (through the triumph of Positivism) comprehends itself as that.

The epistemological implications of re-thinking what was attributed to the individual subject of knowledge in terms of collective mentalities whose determinate development is traced out by the empirical history of the sciences were a centre-piece of Philosophie positive. Key, in this rethinking, was the self-limiting relativization of knowledge claims, which referred the meaning of 'truth' to the actually developing protocols of the specialized sciences on the one side, and to the felt/understood pressures of human needs on the other. But while this move generally placed Comte on the side of Kant's 'Copernican Revolution in thought' (the human subject as the inescapable centre of knowing, valuing and acting in a world which objectively had no centre), Comte did not examine the relation of his own de-absolutizing turn to that elaborated in Kantian critique. He was content, without getting caught in the coils of critical meta-reflection, to have subsumed traditional epistemology into the terms of a sociology of knowledge, with its law of three stages, encyclopedic scale, and theory of uneven development. In the event, it was Charles Renouvier and his circle, grouped around the anti-positivist Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale who introduced Kantian themes into moderate French

sociology a conception of social being which systematically confounded the difference between the transcendental and the finite. See Milbank, 1992:51-61.
Republican discussion about moral reconstruction, and so paved the way for Durkheim's compromise [Wallwork, 9-16; Giddens, 1971:65]. This saw Comte's socio-historical relativization of the practical *apriori* as a crucial improvement over Kant, and Kant's liberal pre-occupation with the autonomous rational individual as an equally crucial corrective which needed to be introduced into some better sociological account of the reconstructive requirements of post-Revolutionary France.

The question to be pursued here, however, concerns the ontological implications of Comte's collectivization of the subject. If Humanity as a whole is to be conceived not only as a kind of organism but as a (self)-productive and, increasingly self-aware, agent of thought feeling and action, how are we to understand its nature and functioning as such? How is this collective subject constituted vis-a-vis the individual subject? In what sense can it be conceived, in its collective manner of being, as a (singular) subject at all? Comte's answer is forthright, though easy to misread. Society may be an organism, but it is one like no other. On the one hand, he says, the individual human beings that make it up are only ever, whatever their achievements and self-understandings, *organs* of that larger being. Yet, at the same time, those individuals are 'the only active elements'\(^\text{17}\). Thus the collective subject only exists as such, i.e. as a consciously acting agent vis-a-vis its milieu, to the extent that it functions as a coordinated network of individuals. Structurally considered, then, 'the fundamental bond of sociality consists of a permanent

\(^{17}\) *Partout c'\'est vraiment le Grand-Être qui produit, mais toujours par les organes individuels* [VII:421]
conciliation between combination and independence. In early phases of social development this bond is restricted by particularisms, and is coercive in the face of egoistically dominated thought and conduct. The collectivity comprised by humankind as a whole at this stage is, correspondingly, only virtual. But even in the final state, when Humanity is instituted, religiously, politically, industrially, scientifically, as a collectivity, the unity with which it functions is an always problematic resultant of the voluntary cooperation of the independently thinking (and self-abnegating) individuals who make it up.

Such co-operation could not be just the product of isolated individuals. It presupposes that there is already, in some sense, a group. But if we then ask what primordially constitutes this group, and especially in a sociological sense, i.e. as something more than the sum of individual inclinations, the puzzle only deepens. For despite ontologizing the social ('Humanity can never be decomposed into individuals'), and endowing it with life, there is no pre-given and integral 'we', whether at the level of consciousness or even of sentiments. For Comte, once we are beyond the intimate 'union' of the family, the affective basis of intra-individual cooperation -- altruisme -- bonds the human group only indirectly; that is, by virtue of the way in which it connects each individual member to a connecting Third. In Philosophie positive this 'other' is conceived intellectually, as a body of commonly held ideas. In politique positive, it is l'Humanité, apprehended subjectively. Which means: the orienting and affectively charged image which each has internalized of

\[18 \text{'Une conciliation permanente entre le concours et l'indépdenance constitue le noeud fondamentale de la socialité, dont la religion seule peut instituer le dénouement, d’abord pas l’amour, puis d’après la foi'} \text{[X:34].} \]
the totality which, by virtue of this sharing, they together comprise. If we employ the typology developed by Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, then we can say that Comte's *société*, even in its most collective form, never surpasses seriality. Just as the members of a crowd at a bus stop are connected with one another only through their individual relation to the same externality, the collectivity comprised by Comte's Humanity consists in the last analysis in a concurrence of individual attachments. At most, i.e. as unified by religious adherence, it takes the form of a pledge group\footnote{Pledge-groups, in which all represent the group to, and over against, one another, are a special case of the series. The latter is constituted as a group only incidentally, through the mediation of an external 'common object'. 'N'oublions pas, en effet, que l'objet commun comme unité hors de soi du multiple, est avant tout le producteur de l'unité sérielle et que sur la base de cette double détermination qui se constitue la structure antidialectique, ou altérité' [1960:385n, emphasis in original]. The 'organicity' of a group, which may (interiorised) form a 'common object' which all are pledged to represent, is 'avant tout l'apparence, illusoire et immédiat, du groupe quand il se produit dans le champ practico-ineret et contre ce champ' [1960:381]. While he extends the notion of a pledge group to the kind of instituted organicity Comte wishes to restore and perfect, Sartre's paradigm case involves the mobilization not just of moral pressure, but, at the heart of this, of fear. In that light, 'La réinvention fondamentale, au coeur du serment, c'est le projet de substituer une peur réelle, produit du groupe soi-même, à la peur externe ... Et cette peur comme libre produit du groupe et comme action corrective de la liberté contre la dissolution sérielle...c'est la Terreur' [1960:448].}, whose self representation as an organism is itself designed -- and consciously -- to 'conciliate' its contradictory and inessential unity as *un être composée*. And this remain the case throughout the history of social development -- albeit that with its final stage, the mechanism is laid bare by social science, and the mediating Other through which this unity is achieved comes to be re-defined as *le vrai Grand-Être*, i.e. as the Positively apprehended idea of the ensemble thus constituted.
For all his insistently social critique, then, of the essentially private character of Catholic spirituality, with its moral psychodrama of individual salvation, the subjectivity to be fashioned by Positive Religion is cast in homologous form. This accords no doubt with his own formative religious experience -- the post-mortem extrapolation of his *amour désintéressé* for Clotilde\(^\text{20}\) -- and thus, too, with his deepest sense of what it would mean to become pervasively social. But the corollary is striking. In contrast with Durkheim's theory of 'collective effervescence' [1968:226] as the (ritually repeated) founding experience of modern-rational *civisme*, as of every other kind of socially established ideal\(^\text{21}\), the divine reality unveiled as Humanity is encountered not as the ego's emptying out into a 'we' but as a transcending symbol conjured up in the imagination of each

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\(^{20}\) Gouhier puts it thus: *Par sa pureté, par son désintéressement, par sa totalité, la passion qu'inspire Clotilde n'est pas de ces sentiments étirés qui rétrécissent l'âme à leur mesure et la séparent de son humanité: elle est l'amour qui rejoint tous les autres et qui veut être offrande d'une vie harmonieuse. August Comte n'a jamais mieux aimé l'Humanité comme il aime Clotilde: il faut donc aimer l'humanité comme il aime Clotilde. L'expérience a une valeur universelle: elle présente le parfait modèle du don que tout homme doit faire a l'Humanité* [1965:210]. Unfortunately Gouhier undermines the force of this quite precise characterization of Comte's (1846-7) religious experience by also asserting: *L'unité humaine est une communion. Aimer l'Humanité, c'est sentir cette unité et participer joyeusement à cette communion* [ibid]. This -- communion -- is precisely what Comte's version of religious humanism was *not*.

\(^{21}\) 'It is in fact at such moments of collective ferment that are born the ideals upon which civilization rests. The periods of creation or renewal occur when for various reasons are led into a closer relationship with each other, when reunions and assemblies are most frequent, relationships better maintained, and the exchange of ideas most active. Such was the movement of collective enthusiasm which...gave birth to Scholasticism..., the Reformation and Renaissance, the revolutionary epoch, and the socialist upheavals of the nineteenth century. At such moments this higher life is lived with such exclusiveness and intensity that it monopolizes all minds to the more or less complete exclusion of egoism and the commonplace. At such times the ideal tends to become one with the real, and for this reason men have the impression that the time is close when the ideal will in fact be realized and the kingdom of God expressed on earth. This illusion can never last because the illusion cannot maintain itself at such a pitch...All that was said, done and thought in
adherent. Neither in the theory nor the practice nor the experience of Positive religiosity, is there any ecstasy of the social. This is not necessarily to Comte’s discredit: the notion that a fusional communality is essential to social bonding and is the essence of the social itself -- its magmatic form -- can produce an even more repressive collectivism while falling further into the organicist temptation. But there is a highly consequential rider. The ‘we’ of the Humanity to which we each belong is not intrinsic to our being, nor a humbling discovery of being with others in the world. It is first and foremost a representation which, if it is to be felt and regarded as transcendent to the individual at all, has first to be subjectively produced. The religious practices of Positivism were bound, then, to involve an immense and continuous labour -- beginning with the daily labour of memory and prayer.

The divine status of Humanity

What does it mean, though, for Comte to speak of Humanity as ‘a new god’ [VII:342] and, indeed, as le vrai Grand-Être? What attributes read into the category I have been seeking to elucidate could justify its designation as divine?

It must be said at once that Comte’s use of god-language reflects a linguistic exigency. If the religious dimension of social life is irreducible, but theistic religion has historically

this period of fecund upheaval survives only as a memory....It exists as an idea or rather as a composition of ideas’ [Durkheim:1965:91-2]

22 ‘Of course it is only natural that the moral forces they [sc ‘religious images’] express should be unable to affect the human mind powerfully without pulling it outside itself and
monopolized the way in which that dimension is mapped, a certain amount of
terminological borrowing is hard to avoid. How else than by appealing to such terms as *le Grand-Être* (capitalized) could he have designated a reality which, while 'having nothing mystical about it', was destined to occupy (as he saw it) the same place in the psychic and social life of industrial society as 'God' did before? Yet the theistic designation was also precisely intended. In what Comte took to be intrinsic and crucial respects the new god was continuous with the old not just in its psycho-social function but in some of its substantial characteristics. It inspired and incarnated the highest form of selfless love. It was the ultimate source of moral authority. If not omniscient, it was both the subject and the limiting horizon of all knowledge about the world (as of ourselves). Like the old god, it was both transcendent and immanent (transcendent to the individual; immanent to the social as its highest possibility, and immanent to the individual as the potential for altruistic attachment). It was also a 'jealous god' and would brook 'no other masters among its servants' [VII:397]. Finally, Humanity not only *had* being, but it *was* one, in point of harmony and beneficence the most perfect there is. The wondrous and majestic secret of that being similarly revealed itself to us in the fullness of time, both objectively, as an essence made apparent in its existence, and subjectively as a matter of inner individual experience.

In other respects, however, the two beings were not at all equivalent. The Biblical God may make itself manifest here below, but its throne was infinitely distant in the above and

without plunging it into a state that may be called *ecstatic*, provided that the word be taken in its etymological sense (ek-stasy)' [1968:227].
beyond. *L'Humanité*, by contrast, was not in the least a supersensible entity. However virtual before the positivist transformation, and however imbricated in subjectivity after it, it was wholly within the world. Nor -- whatever the necessity of its guiding presence in the subjectivity of the scientifically knowing mind -- was it a Creator, or any kind of First Cause. At his most extravagant Comte speaks of the Great Being as the head of the terrestrial biosphere, the 'chief' of an 'immense league, with animals as voluntary agents and plants as material instruments', to which even 'inorganic forces join themselves as blind auxiliaries, to the extent that they have been conquered'²³. This is a god for us, and even for 'our' fellow creatures, but it is not a god over everything in nature. A Lord of the Earth perhaps, but not King of the Universe. What *L'Humanité* gained in 'realism' over the old god it therefore lost in eminence. In effect, *L'Humanité* lacked all traditional attributes of divinity except those related to morality and the setting of human ends. And even in this domain it was deprived of the supreme motivating power exercised over the individual by a deity who could redeem from death, being able to provide the individual with only the solace, and moral incentive, which might be wrung from expecting a 'subjective' prolongation of life as a respected, or treasured, private or public, memory.

By the same token, if the Great Being was mighty it was not omnipotent. Its modifying power extended only to its immediate external and internal *milieu*, and only then within the limits of modifiability proper to the lower, but more fundamental, orders of being of

²³ 'Alors, le Grand-Etre, intégralement considérée, devient le chef de cette immense ligue, avec ces animaux pour agents volontaires, et les végétaux pour instruments matériels: les forces inorganiques s'y joignent ensuite comme auxiliaires aveugles, à mesure qu'elles se trouvent conquises' [VII:617].
which that milieu consisted. Unlike the old god, its existence was ‘subordinated to immutable laws’, and ‘carried no absolute satisfaction, nor even security’\(^{24}\). Its knowledge, likewise, was limited by the finite powers and fixed location of the human knower. Its immanence and transcendence to the individual, finally, had nothing ineffable about it, but were just an effect of the individual’s location within society as a condition of its own material and psychological existence. In short, if Comte’s Humanity replaces the God in whom a scientific age is no longer able to believe, and whose most active partisans, even, no longer worship in good faith\(^{25}\), it does so not as ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’\(^{26}\) but as the only ‘living’ reality in the sensory world which is more elevated than our individual selves, and upon which, at the same time, we are each naturally and inescapably dependent.

So far, we might say with all secular, i.e. ‘this-sided’, forms of humanism. In whatever register, whether ethical or political, collectivist or individualist, radical or reformist or conservative, democratic or hierarchical, communitarian or anarchist, whether bio-social or cast in terms of rights or freedoms, any commitment which consciously and committedly places humankind at the immovable and fixed centre of the Good and the Ought, bears the same ambivalent relation of continuity and discontinuity with theistic faith properly so-called. Ideological balance and self-knowledge here is not easy to maintain. A humanism

\(^{24}\) ‘Quoique supérieur à tous les êtres connus, notre grand organisme reconnaît que son existence, subordonnées à d’immuables lois, ne comporte, sans aucun aspect, une satisfaction, ni même une sécurité, absolues’ [VII:354].

\(^{25}\) ‘Les plus actives théologistes, monarchiques, aristocratiques, où même démagogiques, manquent, depuis longtemps, de bonne foi. Leur Dieu est devenu le chef nominal d’une conspiration hypocrite, désormais ridicule d’odieuse...’ [VII:397-8]
which stresses too much its discontinuity with the old faith would forget the eminence attributed to its own central term. At the limit of such forgetfulness it would shade into lack of faith and cease to be a humanism at all. A humanism which did the reverse, however, and thought itself just to have found a better god, would forget the more overwhelming sense of eminence which has to be foregone when we switch allegiance from the one deity (but can we still use this word?) and the other. In Heidegger’s terms: for nihilism (i.e. the *destruktion* of the metaphysical idols) to complete itself through a transvaluation, the place of God must remain empty. To fill that placed with Humanity is not just ungodly — ‘never can Man put himself in the realm of God, because the essence of Man never reaches the essential realm of God’ [1977:100]. It would also restrict what counts for human value, by imprisoning consciousness within the walls of a new Absolute wherein questions not grounded in its facticity and functional demands are ruled out of court.

Comte, though, does not trouble himself with this. Precisely because of his sociological decoding of all gods as anthropomorphic, and of all religion as intrinsic to society’s ‘vital unity’, he took it that the place held by God in pre-positivist thought was not only fraudulently occupied but misconceived, a contradictory mixture of absolute power,

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26 The definitional starting-point for Anselm’s ontological proof of God’s existence. See Coppleston, 1962:183 et seq.
27 ‘Thought metaphysically, the place that is peculiar to God is the place of the causative bringing about of whatever is, as something created. That place of God can remain empty. Instead of it, another, i.e. a place corresponding metaphysically, can loom on the horizon - - a place that is identical neither with the realm belonging essentially to God nor with that of Man, but with which Man comes once more into a distinctive relationship’ [1977:100].
wisdom and goodness\textsuperscript{28} which reflected an increasingly strained attempt to sustain an 'absolute' synthesis in the face of advancing positivity and its own intrinsic impossibility as a project [VII:17]. The primary error of theology, an unavoidable, and even, in its time, useful effect of limited scientific and technical knowledge, had been to confuse God as that which names our highest value with God as ultimate cause. The cognitive focus of this insight leads him, however, to denegate (as 'mysticism') whatever sense of awe, sublimity, and infinitude associated with the idea (and experience) of divinity for believers can \textit{not} be reduced to the pure, but morally practical, benevolence of which the real Great Being consists\textsuperscript{29}. To this extent Comte falls under the Heideggerian stricture. By imagining that his 'Humanity', with all its pious trappings, could fully substitute in human consciousness for the deity it was designed, according to the best available principles of social engineering, to replace, he blinded himself to what horizons and senses of being such a restricted sense of transcendence might disallow from entering in.

\textsuperscript{28} 'Cette complète autocratie rendait la conception de Dieu profondément contradictoire, et par suite temporaire. Car un examen approfondi nous interdit de concilier une telle toute-puissance, soit avec une intelligence sans bornes, soit avec une bonté infinite... Si nous pouvions toujours nous placer dans les circonstances les plus favorables à nos recherches, nous n'aurions aucun besoin d'intelligence... L'omnipotence exclut donc l'omniscience. Son incompatibilité avec une parfaite bonté est encore plus évidente... Les volontés d'un être qui serait vraiment tout-puissant se réduiraient donc à de purs caprices.' [VII:408-9]

\textsuperscript{29} As religious 'aberrations' typical of monotheism, quietism and mysticism are often coupled together. Comte never evinces any interest in the content of such experience, simply dismissing all such preoccupation as an egoistic and morally useless indulgence '[une] dégénération affective qui dispose à négliger les œuvres pour ne cultiver que les inspirations' [X:93].
Such a critique, however, has its own limits. As Wyschogrod has pointed out, Heidegger's account of the occluded 'question of Being' takes for granted the indefinite continuation of that aspect of the life-world which is constituted by human association, which is precisely what, in his concern for the disruption of continuité in le grande crise, Comte problematizes. Not to see this might lead us to overlook what was in fact the most striking aspect of the new deity whose worship Comte sought to establish. If l'Humanité was 'real' and non-fictive, if it therefore had, so to speak, more being than the old god, it was also highly fragile. Unlike the eternal God of monotheistic religion, l'Humanité was finite not just in space but in time. Its place in the sequence of natural history was at the very end. Nor, more importantly, was it born an immortal. The 'security' of its existence was not guaranteed [VII:354]. It could fall apart and die. It was that very prospect -- the threat of social dissolution -- which propelled Comte into action in the first place. That mortality itself, furthermore, was not just a matter of chance, beyond our control. The objective and subjective existence of Humanity actually depends -- both as the necessary completion of its becoming and as the condition for its continuité -- on its being interiorized as the venerated object of belief, a belief whose persistence in turn required a vast social effort. 'Real love does not stop at welcoming the good, it impels us to realize it as much as possible. Prescribing the study and celebration of Humanity is not just for the sake of the sweet satisfactions this would inherently bring. The overall aim is to make us

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30 The argument is developed in the penultimate two chapters of Spirit in Ashes [1993] which, deal respectively, with Heidegger's concepts of Dasein and (modern) technology. The latter, she argues, in its mass-death producing form, undermines the 'everydayness' presupposed in Heidegger's account of 'authenticity' in the face of individual dying.
better serve the Supreme Being, whose conservation and improvement exacts a continuous activity.\(^{31}\)

**From religion to politics**

The point is vital. Comte’s positivized conception of religion, his insistence that Humanity should rightly occupy, socially and psychologically, the place previously filled by the monotheistic deity (just as it had replaced the gods of polytheism, and those the spirits of fetishism), was not simply a transfer of divinity onto a new term. The substitution simultaneously reorganized the space into which that term was inserted. His manner of deifying Humanity, together with his bio-social understanding of that category itself, redefined the transcendental signified at the centre of belief -- i.e. of affect-laden cognition -- by converting it into a phenomenally presenting Real which could only be that if those who ‘believed in it’ *practically accomplished its being*.

This amounted to the claim that in modern, i.e. scientific-industrial, conditions the sphere of religion -- once it has been humanistically and scientifically de-mystified -- comes into a new relation with the practice of politics, and indeed *vice versa*. In the light of social science, religion comes to know what it was, though till now confusedly, from the start. That is: a complex of practices which on the one hand maintains social unity (the

\(^{31}\) *Le véritable amour ne se borne point à souhaiter le bien; il pousse à le réaliser autant que possible. En nous prescrivant d’étudier et de célébrer l’Humanité, c’est pas seulement pour nous procurer les douces satisfactions inhérentes à la contemplation et à*
objective being of Humanity), and which on the other hand, through all the vicissitudes of its evolution, brings about progress (the realization of Humanity as a global condition). Religion discovers itself, then, to be political through and through. And the converse is also the case. Politics, conceived by Comte, as by Marx, on the model of artifactual production, that is as the practice of producing and reproducing social relations, discovers itself to be inextricably bound up with religion. This was not just because ‘religion’ provides the ethical foundation for praxis, gives it ends; but because with the socio-historically reflexive demystification of ‘God’ the realization dawns that such a transcendent, even if brought down to earth, is only ever real, or real in its effects, as the outcome of a work. Thus the highest aim of political practice is theogenic — to make the god. That theogeny was indeed indispensable. In its absence it would be impossible either to secure any stable orientation for political practice (without which politics would degenerate into the mere play of self-interest) or to secure its ontic ground, i.e. society as the site on which praxis occurs.

A comparable perspective is outlined by Marx in the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’. There, the ‘social humanity’ presupposed, in the ‘new materialism’, as the goal and touchstone of ‘critico-revolutionary practice’, is radically distinguished from the utopian horizon of idealist thought by the truth criterion in terms of which its propriety to serve as the guiding norm of political practice is claimed. ‘Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the ‘this-sidedness’ of his thinking in practice’ [1947:197]. The category of ‘social

l’expansion. Il a surtout en vue de nous disposer à mieux servir cet Être -Suprême, dont la conservation et le perfectionnement exigent de nous une activité continue’ [VII:362].
humanity', in other words, is capable of validation, but not absolutely, not as the product of an onto-theology. Its validity is demonstrated — or not — entirely at the level of practice, i.e. to the extent it is actualized in the course of political action driven (and striving) to bring it about. Comte's religion of Humanity shares with Marx's anti-religion of social humanity the praxological inscription of his founding category. In this respect, however, Comte goes one step further. The regime of voluntary cooperation destined (through the political intervention of workers and women led by Humanity's scientific and ideological vanguard) to prevail in Humanity's realized state by no means simply springs into being when we break the fetters which impede it. Nor, once in existence, and leaving aside Comte's different understanding of what these fetters consist in, can its maintenance as such ever be taken for granted. For the 'social humanity' or 'voluntary cooperation' that would spring forth, once industrial society had been properly re-organized, has to be reproduced as such at every moment, resting as it does on an (unnatural) preponderance of sociability over personality and on a subjective consensus of mind, heart and body which likewise requires a reproductive -- in Comte's terminology, 're-binding', i.e. religious -- practice.

Comte places his thesis concerning the (Positive) convergence of religion and politics in the context of a set of assumptions which are all open to challenge: that 'God' is a fiction, and now an impossible one; that I and we need to be attached to an equivalent (but in theoretically and socio-culturally updated form) in order to obviate the mental and emotional anarchy which would otherwise ensue; and that the requisite substitute actually exists, ready to hand -- it was indeed the real and rational core of what were called the
gods all along. Regardless of whether we accept these propositions, in his very insistence on the need for a religious -- and therefore pan-political -- humanism, Comte’s thematization of Humanity as divine or quasi-divine sharply illuminates some of the difficulties that arise when we try to think through the implications of founding secular political thought on any such basis.

Viewed from within the enlightenment critique of (theistic) religion, i.e. the tradition summarized and criticized by Marx in the *Holy Family* and other early works [1955:47-50;59-68], for humankind to make humanity its highest value was to attempt an end to religious self-alienation by way of a profound shift in attitude. At its most joyous and affirmative it appeared to those who first proclaimed it -- in the century between the French Revolution and the Victorians -- as a mental home-coming, an end to exile. It was an act of self-affirmation, in which enlightened humanity recognizes itself in its gods and draws the appropriate ideological conclusions. ‘Criticism’ note Marx approvingly in 1843, ‘has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man will wear the chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he will shake off the chain and cull the living flower....Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve round himself’ [Marx,1955:42]. Whence a *first* dilemma. If this collective self-affirmation merely sanctified the actually existing social totality, if it merely ratified the ontic, then humanism (as the name for this overturning) would fall prey to an idolatry that was all the worse for being both socially conservative and self-enclosed in currently prevailing thought and imagination. On the other hand, if Humanity is elevated not as what it happens currently to be, but as an essence behind the appearance, or as an
ideal to be realized, then we risk worshipping an abstraction. And such abstractions, if rendered into moral-political absolutes, can be manipulated, in the name of 'mending' what Gillian Rose [1992] calls 'the broken middle', to serve all manner of authoritarianisms.

Comte's developmental ontology aimed to resolve the contradiction. But this resolution -- which defined Humanity \textit{qua} the highest value as both actual and ideal through the mediating term of a humankind which (in the static and dynamic laws which regulate it) is always a becoming-Humanity -- meant that the god's existence was reliant, and in the final stage of the Positive Polity, consciously so, on a social practice that involved each and all of us. That involvement was immense, not to say heroic. To be sure, the final realization of Humanity, replete with all the practices which constituted it as society's sacred centre, was not a creation \textit{ex nihilo}. For Comte, the Great Being had always existed in an objective (if immaturesly developed) sense. The shift required by scientific and industrial progress concerned the need to complement its objective being with subjective being, which Comte envisaged as requiring the establishment of Humanity as a transcending figure within each individual, as the unifying and motivating basis for the voluntary cooperation which the objective being of Humanity would then become. For this to occur, moreover, required a long historical preparation -- for Comte, the period of transition stretched back five centuries to the ideological conflicts surrounding the rise of Aristotelianism in the high 'middle ages' of feudal Europe. Nevertheless, it required a massive injection of human agency, unprecedented in scope and extent. Through the installation of a Positive Polity, Comte envisaged the institution of a new, and continuing,
practice. If its immediate aim was to cure the current pathology of the body politic, its long-term one was to maintain the good health of society ever after. In the positive state, politics would at last be systematically subordinated to la morale, that is to the service of Humanity, and above all by providing ‘artificial support’ for the Great Being’s natural functions of progress and order. The religion of Humanity, thus conceived, becomes identical with the politics of social reproduction, itself regarded as the ongoing maintenance of socialité as such. Given the moral and material dependence of individual being on collective being, such care presents itself to Comte -- and, he insists, should present itself to everyone else -- as an historical imperative. Care for the social must become, now and forever after, the paramount and overriding human concern.

This, however, leads to a second dilemma. Humanism, whether Comte’s, or Feuerbach’s, begins with a postulate of human self-affirmation. In some sense or another, ‘we’ are taken to be our own highest value. However, if we escape the first dilemma (the actual vs the ideal we) by casting that commitment in essentially political terms, and if we further assert, with Comte, that the sustenance of Humanity (objectively or subjectively) cannot be spontaneously guaranteed, then this affirmation turns against those who make it. For in affirming the paramountcy of care for the social we must deny, or at least thoroughly subordinate, the needs and desires of the individual self. This is not just, as in John Stuart Mill’s principles of utilitarianism, a moral constraint on the latter wherever my rights to

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32 ‘C’est uniquement ainsi que la politique peut enfin se subordonner réellement à la morale, suivant l’admirable programme du moyen âge. Le catholicisme ne peut que poser vaguement cette immense question sociale...Pour y parvenir, il faut consister la politique
satisfaction collide with those of others, but a continual subordination of ego to *l'autrui* in the daily economy of human life. Collective self-affirmation thus turns into individual self-sacrifice — whose unhappy implications Comte is only able to cover up by a theory of instincts according to which altruism corresponds to an organismic need that can, with suitable education and moral training, subordinate all other needs to it. Marx obviated the same problem, but in a different way. In the *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts*, he asserted that the disalienation of labour through the complete abolition of private property, class domination and the forced division of labour, could in itself create the conditions for a permanent resolution (*inter alia*) of the contradiction between the individual and society [1964:44-7]. With the negation (of the conditions for human self-actualization) negated, the collective would cease to be hypostasized in the form of an objectified and coercive state, and with relative as well as absolute deprivation overcome through the all-round development of the productive forces ‘the free development of each’ as the Communist Manifesto puts it ‘would be the condition for the free development of all’ [Feuer:29].

We may grant Marx’s deeper understanding of what, in industrial capitalism, stood in the way of achieving a real community of interests. But even if we withhold the Freudian objection about the limits of culturation given the perversity of individual desire, the sociological consideration raised by Comte challenges any simple-minded understanding of what such a project might entail. If it is correct to argue that, from the most intimate sphere of association to the widest and most public, both a collectivist ethic and the

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*à servir l'Humanité, c'est-à-dire à seconder artificiellement les diverses fonctions, d'ordre ou de progrès, que le Grand-Être accomplit naturellement* [VII:361-2].
community sustained by it, require a continual practice of symbolic, ritual, intellectual and political maintenance, then it is hard to see how, even with the reduction in the working day, there could also be the leisure [Pieper, 1952] for re-founding human culture, beyond the ‘realm of necessity’, on the freedom of each and all. So, shifting humanity’s sacred centre from an external absolute to itself as its own relative absolute is by no means as straightforwardly emancipatory as it might seem. If it frees us from one set of heteronomous commitments, it draws us to take up others which promise to be even more onerous: the duty of perpetual involvement in that political activity (political even when it takes cultural or religious forms) which is needed to foster collectivity and, at the limit, to keep that collectivity socially and psychologically alive.

sociolatry and the death of the social

Comte’s faith in Humanity, I have been suggesting, has the peculiar structure of a belief in which the existence of that to which loyalty is given depends not simply on the belief itself (this was the cultural circularity of the old gods) but also on the activity of Humanity-making which that belief inspires and underwrites. Not just a fides quaerens intellectum, it was a fides quaerens agendum. Politics, of the socially reproductive yet historically developmental kind which Comte encapsulated as ‘order and progress’, was necessary to close his system.

The irreducibly political and thus indeterminate character of Comte’s social theory is at variance with its claims to a strict positivity. Its closure was not only ‘outside the text’ but
also in the future and thus outside any presentable reality to which evidential appeal might be made. It has its own coherence, however, and critical theorists in the tradition of Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School may find in this very inconsistency a welcome recognition of the essential difference between knowledge in the human and natural sciences which makes a pure scientism in the former both theoretically inadequate and practically undesirable. Furthermore, while Comte's 'scientific' stress on the requirements of order in the transformed dispensation is certainly more in tune with what Ernst Bloch called the 'cold current' of socialist thinking than with the 'warm one', the politics which, for Comte, is not only necessary to reach the historical summit from which the speculative gap between theory and reality is finally closed, but continues to be necessary, more than ever, once it is attained, is not incompatible with a certain (Gramscian) politics of the left. It is not only those whom Habermas has dubbed 'neo-conservative postmodernists' who have recognized that social relations need to be worked on if they are to last, let alone to improve.

Yet in the frantically organized and supervised 'circle of rights and duties' surrounding the individual in the Positive Polity there is still something symptomatically excessive. It is as

33 'The 'unmasking of ideologies ... and a disenchantment of metaphysics belongs to the most useful cold stream of Marxism. To the warm stream of Marxism, however, belong liberating intention and [a] materialistically humane, humanely materialistic real tendency, towards whose goal all these disenchantments are undertaken' [Bloch:209].

34 Pre-eminentally Daniel Bell. In his essay 'Modernity -- an unfinished project' Habermas distinguishes between the 'antimodernism of young conservatives' (From Bataille to Derrida and Foucault), 'the premodernism of old conservatives', and 'the postmodernism of neo-conservatives' (postmodern because 'according to one thesis science...becomes essentially meaningless for the orientation of the life world', while another 'asserts the
if, despite Comte's insistence on the irreducibly social character of human life, and on the inexorable movement towards the perfection of that sociability, his faith had a hollow centre.

On one point Comte is explicit. He had no confidence whatever in the possibility that the cross-national and even intra-national social ties necessary to cement the highly differentiated and specialised activity of industrial society would spontaneously emerge, even after the requisite institutional and intellectual reforms had eliminated the contradictions of transition between it and survivals from the ancien régime. But there is also a corollary, discussed earlier, which is both unstated and more startling. In the religious reform which Comte proposed to ensure the existence, and persistence, of those social ties, what is to be installed, in the first instance, is a drastically impoverished mode of association. In the Positivist Church, what holds together the body of adherents is the serial sociality of individuals joined together only by the coincidence of their beliefs in, and devotions, to l'Humanité. Of course this limited sociality is not seen as complete in itself, but rather as the subjective basis for voluntary cooperation, outside the sphere of religion, between role-divided individuals. It is that cooperation itself which Comte identifies – under the rubric of l'esprit d'ensemble – with the vital unity proper to industrialism. Nevertheless, and even with the added effects of synergie between the 'cerebral functions' of intelligence, sentiment, and action [X:56-60], the mere fact of such

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pure immanence of art, disputes that it has a utopian content, and points to its illusory character in order to limit the aesthetic experience to privacy' [Foster:1983].
cooperation is granted no power, not even a weak power, to sustain itself without the constant interventions of organized humanist religion.

Durkheim, who detected a contradiction within Comte's thesis concerning the need to complete the differentiating process while at the same time enlarging and homogenizing the institutional sphere of morality and religion, suspected here a fundamental defect in Comte's understanding of the affective dimension of the social tie. That is why his rethinking of Comte's diagnosis of industrialism's problem of order in *The Division of Labour* begins with a discussion of Aristotle's distinction between two kinds of friendship [1968:54-6]. On the one hand is that bonding which occurs between those who are alike, on the other hand (Durkheim had just married) the bonding between those who are complementarily different35. Comte had certainly seen the division of labour 'as something other than a purely economic phenomenon' [1968-62], but he had not sufficiently grasped the strong emotive, and solidarizing, bonds to which it could give rise. Thus the 'mechanical solidarity' held up by Comte as more crucial than ever in modern times was actually much less so, and considerably less important to the orderly reconstruction of industrial society than he had thought. It is understandable, though, that Durkheim never repeated his argument concerning the specifically affective dimension of 'organic

35 For marriage as a paradigm case of organic solidarity, see Durkheim, 1968:56-63. His overall argument is that 'the sexual division of labour is the source of conjugal solidarity [56]', that 'the state of marriage in societies where the two sexes are only weakly differentiated thus evinces conjugal solidarity which is itself very weak' [59], that sexual differentiation has advanced considerably in industrial society, so that 'one of the sexes takes care of the affective functions and the other of intellectual functions' [60], with the overall result that 'today conjugal solidarity makes its action felt at each moment and in all the details of life' [61].
solidarity' in his subsequent work. For it makes an illicit jump from the zone of the face-to-face to that of the more impersonal solidarity that binds the social across distances of space and time. From a Comteian standpoint it was impossible to think the latter as an extension of any kind of interpersonal attachment. Thus it was quite irrelevant to a theory of solidarity at the societal, let alone global, level whether the poles between which such particularistic affect flowed were 'like with like' or 'like with unlike'. Comte's sentiment of 'benevolence', on which these more extended ties depended, had nothing personal about it. It connected individuals with one another (as Durkheim's more consistent theory about the 'cult of the individual' qua moral personality recognized [1968:407]) only indirectly and morally, i.e. in so far as individuals represented agents or organs of Humanity for one another, with all such attachments being mediated by each individual's subjective attachment to Humanity itself.

If this is so, however, then the paradox of Comte's a-social conception of the solution to early industrialism's 'social crisis' extends all the way into his conception, in principle, of the social tie. In his religious discourse, the quality of being social is linked to a category to which are attributed the characteristics of a living being, and which, on the analogy of a

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36 Durkheim's analysis of moral individualism as the cultic centre of the contemporary conscience collective is further developed in his essay 'L'individualisme et les intellectuels' (1898, Revue bleue, Vol.10), written in the context of the Dreyfus affair. The contemporary form assumed by religion, he asserts, 'is precisely this religion of humanity whose rational expression is the individualist morality... One is thus gradually proceeding towards a state of affairs, now almost attained, in which the members of a single social group will no longer have anything in common other than their humanity, that is, the characteristic which constitute the human person in general... This is why man has become a god for man and why he can no longer turn to other gods without becoming
kind of super-individual, simultaneously constitutes itself as a unitary subject 'which alone produces' [VII:421]. In his speculative sociological analysis of this entity in its 'final state', the inner unity which makes Humanity 'vital' resolves into un concours of individual states of mind and soul. Whether viewed ontologically, then, or from a perspective that would insist on the need to incorporate within any definition of the social a dimension, however abstract or attenuated, of intersubjectivity, we are forced to conclude that the care for the social which is to become, now, our paramount duty, does not directly orient its praxis towards the social at all. Or rather, to put it as strongly as I dare: it is motivated by a devotion which has already and from the start abandoned the ground on which it claims to stand.

Two related features of Comte's programme for resolving the 'crisis' of his times can be elucidated in just such terms. The first is the blurred relation, within Comte's conception of the praxis requisite for establishment and maintenance of social order, between what, following the lead of Althusser in his essay on 'ideology and ideological state apparatuses' [1971:121-176], I have been calling the moments of production and reproduction. There is a parallel here with the loose use of the term 'socialization' in popularized sociological discussion -- for example when enduring patterns of gender or ethno-cultural asymmetry are accounted for in such terms. What is left unexplained is why, or how, the social relations which become culturally embedded and institutionalized exist in the first place. Comte's recurrent notion of 'order' raises the same question. For Comte, once the

untrue to himself' [cited in Giddens, 1972:23]. The synthesis of Kant with Comte in this formulation is striking.
political has been duly subordinated to the moral, its role is to back up [seconder] ‘artificially’ the order-in-progress which the Great Being achieves ‘naturally’\(^3\). But this ‘naturally’ requires its ‘artificial’ supplement. Indeed, as Comte argues in the following volume of *Politique positive*, the institution of religion and the achievement of social unity are indissociable [VIII:7-8]. One way of glossing this would be to say that the religious *re-binding* of society into a unity is not distinct from its *binding*. Yet what can that mean? For it implies that *la société* has no organic existence as such independently of its being reproduced — in which case we may wonder whether anything is being reproduced at all.

This brings us to a second feature: the element of artificiality (his choice of term) in the form of association which Comte’s programme was intended to establish. This lies not merely in the technological spirit with which *politique positive* is conceived — i.e. just in virtue of its being designed and implemented as a social blueprint. The deeper artificiality lies in what that design aims to bring about. I have already noted that the supplementary social bonding instituted by the practices of Positive religion is extrinsic to the otherwise non-integral and ‘composite existence’ into which it has to be introduced. This bonding is also social in only the most superficial of senses, that is, by virtue of the simultaneity of individual attachments to a similar idea of the whole. But if we then go on to ask, what is the existential status of this whole, and more to the point, of that more ‘objective’ yet englobing whole which this supplementary bonding was itself supposed to achieve — Humanity as unified and unitary social being —, a curious weightlessness in the entire chain

\(^3\) Positivism *fait consister la politique à servir l’humanité, c’est-à-dire à seconder artificiellement les diverses fonctions, d’ordre ou du progrès, que le Grand-Être*
of reasoning begins to be apparent. For that redeemed totality only replicates an idea of the social which itself purports to be induced from scientific study. But there was no study, because the idea of the social in question was introduced *apriori* into the very definition of the sociological field.

In terms of the immediate lines of intellectual influence we may say that Comte’s organic-holistic concept of *société* passed into Comte’s thinking from the ritualized Catholicism of his youth, from the Christian idea of the ‘mystical body of Christ’, from the *Imitatio*, above all from the justificatory proto-sociology of the Catholic conservatives (De Bonald, De Maistre, and Chateaubriand) whose ontology he sought to combine with the progressivist historicism of the *philosophes*. For Comte himself it could be legitimately inferred from the historical development of the sciences. But either way, his model of the social was only that. It is not just that in realized form a fully social society had never before existed. Even in the *société* depicted in *Politique positive*, it does not exist either, except as an assemblage of suitably motivated individuals institutionally decked out and arranged so as to resemble it. ‘Morally envisaged’, Comte declares, ‘positive society constitutes an objective representation of the Great Being. Its elements should thus arrange themselves according to their aptness for representing Humanity, that is according to their more or less sympathetic nature’.

In sum, just as the social ties reproduced in the religion of Humanity collapse into the process of their reproduction, the associative

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*accomplir naturellement* [VII:362].

³⁸ ‘Moralement envisagée, la société positive constitue une représentation objective du Grand-Étre. Ses éléments doivent donc se ranger suivant leur aptitude à représenter l’Humanité, c’est à dire d’après leur nature plus ou moins sympathique’ [X:62].
bonds thereby 'produced' are not the social as such, but a simulation of it. Like the audiovisual studio products discussed by Benjamin in the context of art [1971:218-20], Comte's 'positive state of society' was a copy for which there was no original — a simulacrum which, with its realist rhetoric, obscured the extent of the absence for which its own implementation was designed to compensate.

To see Comte in this way is to place his conservative pre-occupation with order in a new light. Of course that pre-occupation cannot be denied. Stability, unity, harmony in the face of tendencies towards what he perceived and experienced as social disintegration were uppermost among his concerns. In analyzing these tendencies, what he foregrounded was the crisis of transition, and the intellectual and affective anarchy he thought was being exacerbated by the failure (before Positivism) to go beyond a purely negative and critical orientation towards the ideology and institutions of the old regime. Nor was this the only source of the order problem. In addition to transitional conflicts between theological, metaphysical and positive world-views, he also detected (though these were early days) an inherent difficulty facing the task of establishing the vital unity of the new, industrial, work-based, and above all increasingly task-specialised form of society towards which reconstructive efforts needed to be directed. If industrial society offered the possibility of realizing the most harmonious form of social order — one based on the voluntary cooperation of altruistically motivated individuals — it also left us with no choice but to pursue that immensely difficult path. The price of failure, moreover, would be dire. The very differentiation that distinguished industrialism, and established the conditions for the most complete and universal form of society, was itself incipiently disintegrative.
L'esprit de détail, with its narrowed horizons, and emphasis on individual achievement, militated precisely in that direction unless checked by countervailing measures, perspectives, sentiments and institutions. To which we must also add the corrosive effects of new social conflicts stemming from pathologies, as he saw it, in the management of class relations arising from industrialism's overall division of social labour.

If we put all this together we can see the multitude of threats to the continuing integrity and vitality of the social with which Comte imagined himself as having to deal. Hence, we may say, the exaggerated, surplus repressive, program he thought was needed to cope with it. It would be tempting to leave the matter at that. In the context of these multiplying threats to the stability and harmony of social life, Comte just succumbed to a misty-eyed nostalgia. What he sought, in effect, was a fantasmatic restoration, mutatatis mutandis, of medieval socio-cultural forms in an industrial techno-scientific context.

No doubt some such vision was indeed driving him on. But if so, he also crosses the line from that problematic --- with its echoes of the hankering after gemeinschaft that became a flood-tide in similar social theorizing across the Rhine -- to another that was more theoretically drastic. His system aimed and claimed to be pervasively social. But it secretes at its contradictory core a theory of the impossibility of the social. His program of reform is similarly out of kilter. Far from aiming to realize the most harmonious and developed form of human association conceivable, it advocates the institutionalization of a simulated social body to mitigate the effects of modernizing forces which render such a body in any more authentic sense impossible to sustain. Comte's society-god would seem,
then, to be utterly insubstantial. Its worship as supreme reality is a desperate attempt to fabricate the effects of sociality in the face of actual de-socialization, just as the sociolatric religion surrounding the moral absolutization of this imagined totality substitutes an alienated and self-sacrificial regime for any less minimal sense of the social that we might be able to imagine and hope for. (For example: a community of passional mortals held together, across the web of an always fractured, conflictual and opaque interactivity, by flows of authentic mutual sympathy and support.)

On this reading, Comte, _par excellence_, the thinker of Humanity in place of God, manifests in the contradictory depths of his ‘positive’ thinking an anxiety that is heightened precisely by the substitution he sought to bring about. Unwittingly, then, the founder of sociology, and the founder of it as a _science sacrée_, is also the first thinker of what contemporary theory, via Baudrillard [1983] has come to call ‘the end of the social’. If the old god has culturally expired, the new one is still-born. ‘Humanity’, as the reconstructed foundation of knowledge, sentiments and action in industrial society, and taken to be such because it is identified with the integral vitality of that society’s very being, as indeed of every other, is dead on arrival.
CHAPTER EIGHT
SOCIO-THEOLOGY AFTER COMTE

The second death of God

In retracing the steps which led Comte from the idea of positivity to social science, and thence to Positive politics, the primacy of the sentiments, subjective synthesis and to the 'direct institution' of Positive religion, we have seen that Comte's attempt to reconcile (humanist) faith and (positivized) reason not only rested on false closures. It failed, even in its own terms, to establish either the coherence or the positivity of its posited transcendental signified. Whether considered in terms of continuity, memory and l'Humanité's diachronic dimension, or of solidarity and the synchronic dimension of its 'vital consensus', Comte's fashioning of the Positivist intellectum led him to adopt a contradictory social ontology such that the transcendent and integral being with which he wanted to couple the actuality of the social not only did not, but could not, exist in the sense desired. Indeed, as programmatically envisaged, it could only realise itself as a simulation of what it claimed to be.

Thus Comte's foi démontrable undermines itself. His endless system-building, together with the rhetoric of certitude in which it is clothed, evidently protected him against that realization. However, suppose it had not. Or rather: suppose, that we let the fore-knowledge of the project's impossibility enter into a consciousness grappling with the same overall problem. Then the absence of a focalizing center for thought, feeling and action would present itself (at least for a mind 'seeking God') more sharply than ever. Indeed it would recur with redoubled pain, since the cultural dépassement of the Christian deity in the elevation of Humanity had
entailed a re-investment of (so to speak) orientational eros in the substituted term. We can even imagine a further stage in which faith in faith itself collapsed -- leading, through all the phases of mourning, to an acceptance, symptomatic only in its emphatic tone, that the intellectual and cultural situation had irrevocably changed so that no centering and foundational orientation, *modo theologico*, could ever again be restored; and that this, henceforth, was the place from which thinking had to begin.

In the figure one can unfold from such a reflection on Comte’s project, it is as if a *first* death of God -- the death which Positivism claimed to have made good\(^1\) -- is followed by a *second* one. Only this time it is Society, History, Humanity etc. which reveals itself to have been (all along) a phantasm without any other status than that on the plane of phenomenal actuality -- a plane which has itself, with the first death of God, become identical with the only meaningful sense in which there is reality at all.

We might say that this second death still belongs to the first one. Christianity, Nancy reminds us, has had two (‘antithetical’) ideas of the divine: *deus absconditus* and *deus communis*\(^2\). If Comte ditched the first it was only by elevating the second. Even in its own terms, besides, Positive religion was still in the register of metaphysics. Behind the abstractions of Humanity

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\(^1\) *La supériorité nécessaire de la morale démontrée sur la morale révélée se résume donc par la substitution finale de l’amour de l’Humanité à l’amour de Dieu* [VII:356]. For the ‘décadence de Dieu’, see IX:507-11. In its dying days the latter, at best, i.e. among the ‘populations préservées de protestantisme’, where ‘le sacerdoce lutte contre la théorie’, and the Church endorsed the cult of Mary, had become ‘un vague et insuffisant symbole de l’Humanité’; but Catholicism could not effect the full substitution both because of its official doctrine, and because of the ‘dégénération sociale du clergé’ [VII:355].

\(^2\) ‘Christianity has had only two dimensions, antithetical to one another: that of the *deus absconditus*, in which the Western disappearance of the divine is still engulfed, and that of the god-man, *deus communis*, brother of mankind, invention of a familial immanence of humanity, then of history as the immanence of salvation’ [1991:10].
and Society, especially when endowed with the capacity to think, feel and act, lies an anthropomorphism no less projective because projected onto human material. The very notion of an integral subject is predicated on an apriori idea of the ego or ‘society’ which has been rendered suspect by the advance of the ‘positive’ human sciences. Its maneuvering into the vacated place of God falls apart with the movement of critique\(^3\), including (in his multi-impulse notion of subjectivity, and under-the-surface serialized conception of société) Comte’s. At root, indeed, there was an incompleteness in Positivism’s rupture with Platonism, i.e. with the ‘error’ of projecting a ‘real world’ beyond the actual one. If there is no ‘real world’ beyond the actual one, then the actual one is not (in the Parmenidean sense) ‘real’ either\(^4\). So much, then, for any identification of the social with the firm ground of the real.

Nietzsche’s embrace of becoming -- which pushed him towards ‘transvaluation’ and his ‘most abyssal thought’ of the Eternal Return -- set itself up as a ‘noble’ and ‘free-spirited’ alternative to all ontologising. But in such matters, as Nietzsche was the first to acknowledge, there is no one way\(^5\). Comte’s formulation of the ‘God question’, no less than Nietzsche’s, emerges out of the idiosyncrasies of his deepest impulses, as deployed within the field of its available possibilities. In which context we can make an obvious historical point. The stressfully

\(^3\) (According to Heidegger, we may add, Nietzsche’s own ‘will-to-power’ is ultimately trapped in the same metaphysic.)

\(^4\) ‘We have abolished the real world: what world is left? -- the apparent world perhaps?... But no! With the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!’ [Nietzsche, 1990:51]. See also Lefebvre’s critique of ‘le nouvel éléatisme’, which he particularly identifies with the rise of structuralism [Lefebvre, 1971:262-278].

\(^5\) ‘This -- is now my way: where is yours? Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way’. For the way -- does not exist!’ [Nietzsche, 1961:213].
abandoned theism with which Nietzsche was wrestling was ‘reformed’, Lutheran, individualist. Comte’s was Catholic, and the product of the Counter-Reformation. Hence, just as the Protestant emphasis on the innerness of Spirit migrates, in Nietzsche’s atheism, to Dionysus and the will-to-power, Comte’s break from transcendental religion bore with it a socially realist concept of institution, ceremony, and symbolism, itself tied to an organicist and hierarchical social paradigm inherited from the medievals.

In the aftermath of 1789, the transposition of these elements into this-worldly sociological terms was also politically induced. Besides its initial attraction for proto-socialist reformers, the fashioning of Positivism responded to the unstable post-Revolutionary state’s need for an ideological alternative to Catholicism in a country still saturated with its culture. In the Third Republic this need became pressing, particularly in the secularizing educational reforms which followed the Boulanger and Dreyfus episodes in the 1890s; so that if the eccentricities and extreme anti-individualism of Comte’s own system had doomed it to marginality, the stage was set for the official reception of a suitably softened and ‘civic’ version, which Durkheim and his school were able to provide.6

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6 A vivid (but hostile) indication of the politico-moral fervour that inspired Durkheim after he was appointed to the Sorbonne (in 1902, to teach Education) is given by Nizan in The Watchdogs. After mentioning the ascendant administrative role, particularly in professorial hiring, that Durkheim came to play in Paris after the Education Minister Liard had rescued him from provincial obscurity at the University of Bordeaux, Nizan adds: ‘The introduction of Sociology into the curriculum of the écoles normales sealed the official triumph of this official morality. Over a period of a few years, Durkheim with extraordinary perseverance and great authoritarian rigor, constructed his system of thought and carried his teachings far and wide; and he dressed this system in the venerable trappings of science. In the name of this science, our schoolteachers now teach French pupils to respect the French Fatherland, to justify collaboration between the classes, to
Overall, then, it is hardly surprising that the pursuit of a post-theistic philosophy in France should take a long detour through a secularization of the social. Nor that it should take a simultaneously political, religio-moral and sociological form. That same detour, moreover — which responded to the anomic challenge of materialist unbelief through the positivistic appropriation of the counter-revolutionary Catholic critique of individualistic rationalism — also helps to explain why modern French thought, having been the privileged site for the rise of the social as a key, ‘scientific’, category has also been the site for its most thorough dismantling. It more especially explains why that occurrence — the effect both of an ideological disintegration and of an intellectual catch-up of French socio-theology to its inner contradictions — had quasi-religious overtones, as an anti-humanist reprise of Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’.

It would require another study to show how, in the wake of attempts first to salvage Comte’s system, then to face the void at its centre, this disturbing thematic came to assert itself within French social theory to the point where it became, in the third quarter of this century, not just a proclaimed but an affirmed intellectual event. Most proximately, as Descombes [1980] has accept everything they see, and to commune in the cult of the Flag and Bourgeois Democracy [Nizan, 1971:109].

7 This went across the political spectrum. Despite the continuing strength of the old (Catholic and Royalist) forces, the new proto-fascist right that began to form in the 1890s, spearheaded by Charles Maurras, was also drawn to its own — nationalist, and anti-Christian — version of a religion of the social. For the influence of Comte on Maurras see Nolte:52. For Maurras’s conception of Déesse France see ibid:143.
chronicled, and Derrida attests, the theoretical demise of humanism in post-1945 France begins with the publication of Headgear’s ‘Letter on Humanism’, itself written in response to questions put to him about Sartre’s *Existentialism and Humanism*. The far-reaching consequences of the humanism controversy, whose deconstructive noise has scarcely yet died down, can be understood against the background of several accompanying features of the post-War intellectual landscape. These included the gathering influence of Kojève’s re-reading of Hegel, the rise of structuralism out of ethnography and Saussurian linguistics, and a confrontation — with both philosophical and ideological resonances — of the anti-historicist objectivism of the latter with both neo-Hegelian philosophies of the subject and newly imported Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology. And through it all have been the successive receptions of Nietzsche himself, first through Bataille, then in the context of existentialism, finally — spurred by the French publication of Heidegger’s pre-War commentaries — as the philosophical forerunner of anti-foundationalism in its various contemporary forms [Allison, 1985].

There was also a political context. The traumas of the thirties and forties had completed the work of the Great War in discrediting the grand narratives of reason and progress. After

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8 Particularly in the address he gave at Columbia in 1968, published as ‘The ends of Man’ in *Margins of Philosophy* [1982].
9 For the immediate circumstances of Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* see Heidegger, 1977:190-2. For a commentary on it as a strategic (self-rehabilitating) intervention, see Bordieu, 1991: 90 et seq.
10 For a straightforward account of the rise of ‘new French theory’, including the formative role of the Hegelian regroupment round Kojève, and the reaction against Sartre, see Descombes, 1980. For the confrontation between Marxism and structuralism see Sebag (1964); and for the interrelation between Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, see Behler, 1991 (esp 107-158).
1945, there was a further resurgence of oppositional thinking -- including a revival of Marxism informed by a rediscovery of Marx's early writings\(^\text{1}\) -- spurred on by the Algerian war, the nuclear arms race, anti-colonial struggles in South East Asia, and the crystallization of a dissident artistic and intellectual bohemianism as the alienated flip-side of the candy-floss corporatism which accompanied the long post-war economic boom. Whatever the political ambiguities in which French socio-theology had been born, then, the dissolution of its sacred categories in (the middle decades of) this century was primarily\(^\text{1}\) a left-wing occurrence, linked on the one hand to ideology-critique, and on the other to a new challenge: how, if at all, and without any foundationalist metaphysics of the subject, History, or Society, to conceive forms of sociality that pointed beyond capitalism altogether.

But this is only to take stock of the immediate context. A fuller understanding of what underlies and frames all those post-structuralist 'deaths' (of the subject, Man, history, the author, referentiality etc) which were announced in the 1960s by Foucault, Barthes\(^\text{13}\), Derrida and others, would also have to take account of the longer-term vicissitudes of French sociology itself since its classical period. These would include the way in which Durkheim

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\(^1\) Publication of Marx's early (1845 and earlier) writings began with the edition of Lanshut and Mayer in 1931. For a discussion of this edition and its French translation see Althusser, 1969:50-53.

\(^1\) Derrida, who was a personal friend of Althusser, has always identified himself as sympathetic to the left; Lyotard was a member of the *Socialisme ou Barbarisme* till the mid-sixties; Foucault and Deleuze worked together on the prison reform project in the 1970s, which was close to *Gauche Proletarienne*; and Barthes's early work is openly Marxist. Harder to characterize are Bataille (in the 1930s, an ultra-leftist fascinated by the symbolic aspects of fascism) and Blanchot, whose political sympathies were similar to Bataille's.

\(^1\) In literary theory the death of Man takes the form of the 'death of the author' (the key essay is included in Barthes, 1977). See Biriotti and Miller, 1-52.
and his school critically appropriated and re-launched Comte’s larger social and religious project\(^{14}\), its falling apart and disillusionment after 1914\(^{15}\), the emergence, with Lévi-Strauss, of a de-subjectified and de-historicised structural anthropology\(^{16}\), and the way in which, through Bataille’s appropriation of Mauss’s essay on gift exchange [1967] and (with Hubert) sacrifice [1964], a revised conception of the social, influenced by reflections on the ‘primitive’, broke from the integralist model of society, reconceived the truth of religion, and provided a new bridge to Nietzsche and Marx [Bataille, 1985:69-70;120 et seq.].

One conclusion that may be drawn from the collapse of Comte’s and Durkheim’s attempt to construct a ‘positive’ socio-theology is that it cannot be done without invoking a metaphysic of collective being which is at variance with the intended positivity of the project. As Bataille’s Dionysian conjuring with the ecstatic aspect of sacrifice [1994:130-136] suggests, however, it is possible to conceive the social as harboring an immanent transcendent without in any way essentialising or hypostasing society, or any version of the human collectivity. The same point can be made, then, about the ‘second death of God’ as about the first one, of which the (post-classical) sociological abandonment of ‘society’ is an echo. Just as theism, of

\(^{14}\) I have discussed Durkheim in these terms in Fekete, 1984: 139-143. Durkheim’s most forthright acknowledgment of his (corrective) relation to Comte came in the course of a polemical exchange with the Thomist Simon Deploige [Giddens,1971:71]. Durkheim had good reason, at this stage, to stress the Comtean provenance of his sociology, since Deploige accused him of being an intellectual agent of German philosophy and social theory, a most damaging charge in the period leading up to the War, and one no doubt with anti-Semitic undertones.

\(^{15}\) For Durkheim’s own melancholic descent, especially after his son, Pierre, was killed in the Balkans in 1916, see Henri Peyre’s foreword to the essays on Montesquieu and Rousseau [Durkheim, 1965:xii].

\(^{16}\) See especially Lévi-Strauss’s introduction to Mauss’s *Essai sur le Don*, published in English as the first chapter of *Structural Anthropology* [1967].
a kind, can survive even a sympathetic encounter with Nietzsche\textsuperscript{17}, likewise for ‘God-seeking’ reflections on the social. Even in the midst of a hyper-critical ‘suspicion towards all meta-narratives’, there are other ways to continue what was necessarily unaccomplished in French sociology. It is possible to endorse — even push to the limit — the demise of its organicist categories while still seeking, through a fundamental reflection on the social element of human being, to give an account of what can, or does, draw us forward and beyond our finite selves.

To illustrate how this might be done, I want to conclude by examining three contrasting responses that have been made in recent decades to questions still resonating in French social theory from amidst the ruins of the Comteian project. The first is Louis Althusser’s intra-Marxist polemic against ‘theoretical humanism’. The second is Jean Baudrillard’s proclaimed ‘end of the social’. The third is Jean-Luc Nancy’s reflection on ‘inoperative community’.

At first sight the differences of approach are so stark as to obscure the thematics they all engage. Althusser, in the name of Marx, undertakes a partial reconstruction of the Comteian matrix. Baudrillard, bespeaking a capitalism gone viral and hyper-real, pronounces an end to any conceivable version of sociology or its object. Nancy, in an ethicised dialogue with Nietzsche, Heidegger and Bataille, essays a primordial rethinking of community. At the same time, however, they each manifest a similar preoccupation with the fundamental nature of social (as opposed to, if also in relation with individual) being. Each is also concerned to find,

\textsuperscript{17} For a self-consciously postmodern discussion about the place of Nietzsche in ‘theology at the end of the century’ see Scharlemann 1990. Of the interlocutors, Mark Taylor’s position is the most open to Nietzsche, welcoming him indeed with almost open arms: ‘The end of theology is apocalyptic — inevitably apocalyptic. The death of God is the death of theology. This end is simultaneously the consummation and the dissolution of the history of the Christian West. To appreciate the difficulties and the opportunities for
through such inquiry, a transcending principle for progressive praxis which, if not apodictic, is in some sense compelling. All three, at the same time, differ from classical French sociology in that they accept both the Marxist critique of its elided socio-economic categories and the post-structuralist critique of philosophical anthropology, absolute historicism, and self-realizing theories of the human subject (including the expression of these in Marxist form). Within this loosely overlapping frame, the positions which Althusser, Baudrillard and Nancy respectively stake out certainly clash. Nevertheless we might think of them as pointing towards complementary sites of inquiry regarding the locus of a transcending social principle - a principle which, in their different registers, they are all concerned to uncover, even as they exorcise the social-ontological ghosts of Comte and Durkheim.

**Althusser: Humanism without Humanity**

At several points in this study I have suggested that Althusser’s ‘ventriloquist structuralism’ was influenced by Comte. More particularly, I have suggested that it was guided by the idea that Marx could be understood as having accomplished, in his ‘immense theoretical revolution’ [1970:182], what Comte himself, in the vocabulary of Positivism, claimed to have achieved. Just as Comte insisted that positivizing knowledge in the social-human domain

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thinking at the end of theology, it is necessary to consider the end that guides the historical process form the beginning’ etc. [1990:50].

18 The title of André Glucksmann’s (neo-Maoist) contribution to *New Left Review* 72, a special issue on Althusser, with other notable contributions by Ernest Mandel and Norman Geras. None of these, indeed none of the significant commentaries on Althusser in English (e.g. Resch, 1992; Benton, 1984; M. Glucksmann, 1974; Eliot, 1987; Thompson, 1978), seem to have discerned the importance of Comte to Althusser’s intellectual manoeuvre.
facilitated and necessitated a wider epistemic change, so Althusser insisted that Marx’s departure from left-Hegelianism (and the humanist idealisms of his youth) entailed a double ‘epistemological break’. Inaugurating ‘the science of history’ (historical materialism) transformed philosophy -- ‘the Theoretical’ -- by inaugurating the ‘theory of the history of theoretical formations’ (the materialist dialectic)\(^{19}\).

This is not to say that Althusser’s Marx is simply Comte in disguise. The container of what Comte called positive sociology is filled, in its Marxist replacement, with concepts which are incompatible not only with the Hegelian and ‘economist’ problematics which are their stated target, but with any version, even ‘inverted’, of Comte’s holistic theory of social development. There is no *société*, no ‘order and progress’. Althusser’s ‘social formation’ is an ‘overdetermined’ structure of structures. Each mode of practice is quasi-autonomous and determined in its ‘index of effectivity’, and ‘in the last instance’, by the economic\(^{20}\). History is the heterogeneous site of multiple temporalities [1970:132-5]. Althusser’s Marx, indeed, is credited not only with ‘opening up’ the ‘new continent of History’ [1969:14], but also with that overcoming of (‘essentialist’) metaphysics that is usually associated with Nietzsche,

\[^{19}\] This “epistemological break” concerns conjointly two distinct theoretical disciplines. By founding the theory of history (dialectical materialism), Marx simultaneously broke with his erstwhile ideological philosophy and established a new philosophy (dialectical materialism). I am deliberately [!] using the traditionally accepted terminology ... to designate this double double foundation in a single break’ [Althusser, 1970:33]. For an elaboration, see especially the Introduction, and the essays ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’ and ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’ in *For Marx* [1969].

\[^{20}\] ‘[I]n History, these instances, the superstructures, etc., are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes’ [Althusser,1969:113].
Heidegger and the linguistic turn [Derrida, in Macksey and Donato:249]. Nevertheless, in
*For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, the ‘Marxist philosophy’ that Althusser claims is buried but
‘active’ in Marx’s ‘mature’ work [1969:14], and which Althusser sets himself to disengage
through a ‘symptomatic reading’ of Marx’s texts [1970:32-3], is formulated in strikingly
Comteian terms.²¹

By drawing on Comte’s positivist understanding of philosophy as the science of science,
Althusser aims both to repudiate the Engels/Stalin notion of dialectical materialism as a
general theory of nature, and also to rescue the philosophical enterprise, as such, from the
immediate or ‘lingering’ death (as an ‘evanescent critical consciousness’) to which Marx
himself would have consigned it [1969:34]. As we know, Althusser was forced — on pain of
losing his Marxist credentials — to disavow this conception of Marxist theory as
‘theoreticist’.²² In ‘Lenin and philosophy’ he substituted a revised notion according to which

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²¹ One single footnote in *Reading Capital* acknowledges the provenance. After quoting
from the opening volume of *Philosophie positive* on the founding of modern physics,
Althusser notes: ‘Bacon, Descartes and Galileo thus determine the transition of physics to
positivity, and at the same time the beginning of the general preponderance of the positive
state. With his double articulation of the sciences and the law of the three states, Comte is
the most rigorous thinker so far of this general theoretical problem: how the distinct
practices which constitute a ‘division of labour’ are articulated together, and how this
articulation varies with the mutation in these practices’ [1970:205-6 n4].

²² Althusser signals his retreat in his Forward to the 1970 (Italian) edition of *Lire le
Capital*, repeated in the English edition of that same year. ‘[O]ne of the theses I advanced
as to the nature of philosophy did express a certain ‘theoreticist’ tendency... To define
philosophy in a unilateral way as the Theory of theoretical practices (and in consequence a
theory of the differences between the practices) is a formulation that could not help but
induce either ‘speculative’ or ‘positivist’ theoretical effects and echoes’ [1970:8, emphasis
in original].
(Marxist) philosophy is ‘the class struggle in theory’ [1971:22]. But it is the early Althusser (1959-1968) which concerns me here, and especially the less visible re-working of Comte which Althusser appears to be engaged upon, in this same period, with respect to a neighbouring problem: the implications of ‘the general preponderance of the positive state’ [1970:205] for the Marxist theory of ideology. Consider, in that light, the following passage from *Reading Capital*.

This ‘break’ between the old religions, or ideologies, even the ‘organic’ ones, and Marxism, *which is a science*, and which must become the ‘organic’ ideology of human history by producing a *new* form of ideology in the masses (an ideology which will depend on a science this time — *which has never been the case before*) — this break was not really reflected by Gramsci, and, absorbed as he was by the necessity and the practical conditions for the penetration of the ‘philosophy of praxis’ into real history, he neglected the theoretical significance of this break and its theoretical and practical consequences [1970:131, emphasis in original].

The coherence of Althusser’s comment relies on the dual value given to ‘ideology’. On the one hand it is an epistemological category, on the other hand an irreducible social reality. As the former, ideology is a non-scientific mode of cognition, a circular and subjectively centred discourse which only ‘knows’ what the subject has already projected into it. As the latter,

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21 See also the title essay of *Lenin and Philosophy*, especially 1971: 49 *et seq*. After disengaging the appropriate formulations about partisanship, idealism vs materialism, etc., from some texts of Lenin, Althusser concludes by noting that ‘what is new in Marxism’s
ideology consists of all the actively embedded 'systems of representations' through which individuals live their relation to the social relations in which they are implicated, and in terms of which they identify, as functioning 'subjects', with what and where they are. Gramsci, says Althusser, understood 'ideology' only in the latter sense, i.e. as subjective orientation. This enabled him, correctly, to understand Marxism as having the capacity, even the mission, of becoming, in its historical turn, an 'organic' ideology, a world-view, a grand philosophy. The 'philosophy of praxis' would replace both the liberalism of the market and the traditional forms of religion as the 'ideological cement' binding together post-capitalist society, and motivating its further advance. But, since Gramsci collapsed historical and dialectical materialism together -- failing to appreciate the transformed 'Theoretical' represented by Marxist philosophy -- he ignored the epistemological sense of 'ideology'. He thus glossed over the break between all preceding 'organic' ideologies and this one. In effect, he missed the difference between ideologies based on ideology (the case hitherto) and 'Marxism, which is a science', and destined to produce 'a new form of ideology in the masses ... which will depend on a science this time'.

This, of course, is precisely how Comte understood the distinctive role of philosophie positive. If Althusser's formulation -- an ideology that depends on a science -- seems more paradoxical, this was because of his (marxisant) use of the term ideology itself. For Althusser, the term covers not only what Comte, in his theory of knowledge, called theology and metaphysics\(^2\). It also covers what Comte came to call la morale, thought of as the

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\[^2\] Durkheim, in fact, used the term 'ideology' in just this sense [1964:14].
(objectively grasped) subjective dimension of la société, a dimension which includes knowledge and philosophy in their moral-religious functioning, whether positivised or not.

From which we can see that the Comtean echo in Althusser’s intervention is not confined to that of Comte’s first synthesis. Althusser’s criticism of Gramsci refers not just to the theoretical consequences of Gramsci’s failure to recognize the (scientifically) ruptural character of ‘the philosophy of praxis’, but also to the ‘practical consequences’ -- consequences which extend, in fact, to the whole field of politics. Now this field Marxism has transformed in a scientific direction too. First: through its general theory (for example, the centrality it accords to the class struggle); secondly: because it strategizes action by way of a comprehension of political practice as always intervening on, and from within, the specific complexity of a ‘conjuncture’ [1969:175-82]. For that same reason however (here Althusser is following Gramsci) the politics of class struggle should not be understood in too narrow a sense. More is involved than the struggle for state-power. Theory has a politics, and so does ideology itself. The epistemological break effected by Marxism has implications for aesthetics, education, and the sciences, with ramifications in turn for the formation of social alliances and the overall relations of force. It also implies, at the meta-discursive level of Althusser’s own ‘intervention’, a scientifically informed politics of that same philosophico-ideological break.

25 But not, be it noted, into a complete ‘science of politics’ in Comte’s ‘previsionary’ sense. ‘The fact that there is no knowing the future prevents there being any science of politics, any knowing that deals with the future effects of present phenomena. That is why no Hegelian politics is possible strictly speaking, and in fact there has never been a Hegelian politician

26 For Althusser’s application of this formula to his own ‘intervention’ (‘for Marx’) see 1969: 21-31.
A general framework for conceptualising a ‘scientific policy towards ideology’ is sketched out in Althusser’s celebrated essay on ‘Ideology and Ideological state-apparatuses’ [1969:121-176]. As a social reality, ideology is defined as the set of instituted practices within and through which individuals are ‘interpellated’ as subjects [1971:162]. On its subjective side, it mediates between (unconscious) desire and social identification to constitute a continually reproduced imaginary within which social relations (and their conflicts) are ‘lived “spontaneously”’[1971:160]. On its objective side, ideology operates through ‘ritual practices’, directed by ‘state ideological apparatuses’. These, in turn, are to be distinguished from the coercive apparatus of the state as operating mainly ‘by ideology’, rather then ‘by violence’ [1971:138]. But, finally, state ideological apparatus also operate alongside the state’s repressive ones in the process wherein the dominant nexus of social relations is reproduced. All that is missing, though it is developed elsewhere²⁸, is a theory of political practice itself as the production and reproduction of social relations, and, as a region within that, a theory of ideological politics conceived as acting upon the (re)production of ideology through struggles over its codes and practices.

Althusser presents these theses in a highly schematic way. The historical reference is vague, though the essay does contain an illustrative comment on the state education system (‘the School’). This, he argues, has replaced the Church in capitalist society as ‘the dominant state

²⁷ Althusser presents as his ‘central thesis’ that ‘Ideology is a “representation” of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ [1971:152].
ideological apparatus’, both through its transmission of bourgeois myth and through its sorting and socialization of individuals into the differentiated pyramid of ‘social posts’ [1971:146-149]. Althusser (who was himself the Sécrétaire of the Ecole Normale de la rue d’Ulm29) thus affirms an emphasis on education that was prominent for both Comte and Durkheim, though with the Marxist qualification that ideological institutions are secondary (if essential, and quasi-autonomous)30, and that the School’s current role is to reproduce capitalist social relations, rather than those of ‘society’ as such31. But as Althusser’s remarks on Gramsci suggest, it is not the currently dominant ideological institutions which really interest him. His main concern is to clarify the nature of socialist ideology, considered both in its oppositional function but still more as the nascent, but finally dominant, discourse of a post-capitalist order. But what does establishing this ‘new ideology’ entail? What rituals and

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28 Althusser sketched out a theory of ‘Marxist political practice’[e.g. 1969:175-182], but it was Poulantzas [1970] who developed Althusser’s notions about power, the state, and class politics, into a full scale system.

29 One of the post-Revolutionary elite Grandes Écoles, and specializing in the humanities, its graduates filled university posts throughout France [Bourdieu, 1988:254-5]. It was thus an institution which produced teachers to teach teachers. Durkheim, like Althusser, had been a graduate (normalien).

30 The strategic role of ‘the School’ in reproducing capitalist social relations nonetheless means that ‘the unprecedentedly deep crisis which is now [1968-70] shaking the education system of so many states across the globe, often in conjunction with a crisis shaking the family system, takes on a political meaning’ [1971:149].

31 Althusser’s thesis about the dominance of the School (or ‘the School-Family couple’ [1971:49] might be sustainable for earlier phases of capitalist development. However, the rise of the mass media, consumer culture, and the ‘society of the spectacle’ have rendered the claim increasingly dubious, even if a rigorous meaning could be given to the ‘dominance’ of an ideological institution in the first place. The case, moreover, of an ideological institution like advertising, which is economically determined, and which functions as an internal element of the accumulation process, implies the need for a further theoretical development of the whole notion of ideology and its related practices which Althusser does not even begin to undertake. For a structural account of a hypothesized ‘post-Fordist’ shift in ‘the regime of signification’, see Lash [1990:4-5].
'state-ideological apparatuses' are to be deployed for the task? What, indeed, at the level of 'systems of representations', is to be its *ideological* (as opposed to scientific) *content*?

Althusser rarely addresses these questions directly, but in one of the essays in *For Marx*, 'Marxism and Humanism', we get at least the inkling of an answer. ‘Today’ he tells us (in 1965), ‘Socialist ‘Humanism’ is on the agenda’ Why? Because ‘as it enters the period which will lead it from socialism (to each according to his labour) to communism (to each according to his needs), the Soviet Union has proclaimed the slogan: All for Man, and introduced new themes: the freedom of the individual, respect for legality, the dignity of the person.’ [1969:221]

A generation later we may smile, but Althusser’s argument is still worth tracing out. He meditates on ‘the significance of this historical event’ along two tracks. Along the one, he stresses the theoretical peril of any recourse to slogans about ‘Man’. The term ‘humanism’, unlike the term socialism, has ‘no scientific value’. To overlook this, and then justify it by reading humanism back into Marx, would compound the error. It would misunderstand, above all, the ‘scientific’ character of the break Marx made from any such perspective: a break indicated in the *Theses of Feuerbach* by Marx’s insistence that to grasp human history in its ‘practical-sensuous’ actuality we must stop contemplating the human essence (with history as the dialectical, or linear, unfolding of its emancipatory self-realisation) and study instead ‘the ensemble of social relations’ [1969-242-3].
Along the other track, Althusser defends the slogans. Ideology, he insists, is irreducible, even in a classless society. It is in a different register than knowledge, serving to motivate, ethicize, inspire, etc, and on this level the capital ‘H’ Humanist language of the Soviet Communist Party programme is to be endorsed. Here too, though, there are perils. Humanism is a labile ideologeme. Its precise political meaning depends on the inflection given it, and the context in which it is advanced. Above all, we must carefully distinguish between socialist and bourgeois humanism. The latter -- still dominant, he claims, in the French education system -- misconstrues a class-divided ‘society’ as essentially unifiable on the basis of what its (exploited/exploiting) members humanly share. Socialist humanism avoids the error by eschewing such universalism. In a capitalist context, it can only be a ‘class humanism’, expressed as partisanship for the working class, in the name of the community-without-classes its victory alone would make possible. And this continues right into the period of socialist transition, when classes, residually, still exist, and the threat of capitalist restoration is still present.

But, it transpires, a new epoch is now upon us. Class antagonisms in the leading socialist society have been overcome. Henceforth, ‘socialist’ humanism comes to have two different forms: ‘class humanism, where the dictatorship of the proletariat is still in force (China etc), and (socialist) personal humanism, where it has been superseded (the U.S.S.R)’. These correspond to ‘two necessary phases. In “personal” humanism, “class” humanism contemplates its own future, realized’ [1969:222].

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32 'The score of the Ideology of the current ruling class integrates into its music the great themes of the Humanism of the Great Forefathers, who produced the Greek Miracle even before Christianity, and afterwards the Glory of Rome, the Eternal City, and the themes of Interest, particular and general, etc., nationalism, moralism and economism' [1971:146].
Admittedly, adds Althusser, there is something situationally specific about the humanist slogans launched. In the still resonant aftermath of Kruschev’s ‘secret speech’ in 1956, they are the slogans of de-Stalinization. In the capitalist democracies, those same slogans, relayed by the Communist Parties of the West, have a second function as well. Following an analysis that holds out the prospect of a ‘peaceful road’ to socialism, they aid in the formation of a united front. They provide a ground for ‘a dialogue between Communists and Social-Democrats, or even a wider exchange with those ‘men of good will’ who are opposed to war and poverty. Today’, Althusser opines, ‘even the high road of Humanism seems to lead to socialism.’ [221] However, there is also something in the Soviet ideological turn which goes beyond the political moment. During the long period of transition from capitalism to socialism, and then to communism, ‘socialist humanism [in ‘personal’ form] ... can see itself not only as a critique of the contradictions of bourgeois humanism, but also and above all as the distillation of the latter’s ‘noblest’ aspirations’. Across that entire epoch, it points to a form of human community from which market relations have been expunged. And as that limit is approached, its own character as ideology changes. Ceasing to have any connection with class hegemony (even working-class), it becomes, instead, ‘the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relations between men [sic] and their conditions of existence is lived to the profit of all men.’ [1969:236]

That Althusser’s whole argument functions — ‘conjuncturally — as an apologetic for the mid-60s Soviet Party line, is self-evident. Controlled de-Stalinization at home, the Parliamentary road abroad, ‘peaceful competition’ with the capitalist West internationally — the litany is (or
was) familiar. Althusser makes no bones about it. He writes as a faithful, if intellectually embattled, militant of the French Communist Party, a Party whose loyalty, indeed subservience, to Moscow was, and remained, notorious. For this allegiance Althusser came under fire even from supporters, especially after the PCF's contribution to defeating the insurgency of 1968. His adhesion to the PCF co-existed uneasily with his stated aim of demolishing the Stalinist deformation of Marxism and Leninism from the left.

The political furore occasioned by Althusser's stubborn partisanship focussed on this point. But that partisanship also had a deeper significance in relation to his project. A Catholic activist in his youth, he had joined a new, and better, Church. In his work of theoretical 'clarification' and 'correction', he was reworking that Church's official doctrine, above all to provide a ground for its (would-be) scientifically based faith. Like Comte's Humanism, Althusser's communist conviction is a fides quaerens intellectum. And like Comte's, too, its is not just theoretically Positivist. Comte's foi démontrable is linked to the equivalent of Positivist politics -- not just through Marxism's 'scientifically' based strategy and tactics, but in Althusser's insistence that such a faith (any faith) can only be subjectively sustained through a set of mainly ritual practices [1971:158-62] which, in the final stage of human development, have also to be deliberately set up and maintained. In sum, Althusser re-thinks the ideological programme he takes (from Gramsci) to be intrinsic to the process of socialist transformation, by rendering it into the terms of Comte's religion positive. Which leads him, correlatively, to

33 Which he joined in 1948 and quit only in 1981, in order, as he later puts it, 'to spare the Party further embarrassment' after he killed his wife. For Althusser's reflections on his experience with the PCF see 1993:227-254.
think Lenin's 'vanguard party' — the locus of fusion between intellectuals and militants, theory and practice, science and politics — into the space of Comte's new *pouvoir spirituel*.

For Althusser, then, the ecclesiastical ethos of the Communist Party is to be taken seriously. Whatever its strategy-determining functions, the Party (linked to the, capitalized, World Communist Movement) is also an 'ideological apparatus'. As such it has the same roles as were ascribed to organized religion by Comte: as a centre for doctrinal development and dissemination, as an organizer of ritual practices (rallies, demonstrations, memorials, May Day, etc), and as keeper of the Communist flame. To be sure, Althusser's (and the CPSU's) version of Positive religiosity is considerably less strenuous and totalistic than Comte's. There is no hyper-organized calendar of worship, no *Culte de la Femme*. Its ethical content — a collectivism qualified by respect for the human person, individual rights, etc — similarly derives more from Durkheim's correction of Comte's programme in the *Division of Labour*, than from the *Catéchisme positif*. In short, the Party supervises *le dogme* and *le culte* but not *le régime*. On the other hand, Althusser is more Comteian than Durkheimian in subscribing to the (Leninist) idea of an ideological apparatus which is (in principle) autonomous from the (socialist) state. He also reverts to Comte in advancing 'Humanism' itself as the largest ideological envelope within which communism as a 'system of representations' is to be expressed.

*Mutatis mutandis*, the fit indeed would seem to be perfect. Except for one small detail. History, for Althusser, is 'a process without a subject' [1979:95-7]. The social formation,
which replaces the non-scientific category of *société*, is a 'complex and overdetermined' structure of structures' [1969:210-11]. The diachronic dimension cannot be understood as the unfolding essence of Man, nor the synchronic as an integral and transcending super-being. For that same reason — the decentering displacement that, for Althusser, made Marx a *Marxist* [1969:24-7] — humanism, as a system of belief in, and worship of, 'Humanity', is scientifically *empty*. Neither in reality, nor for knowledge, is there any such object. Humanity may be a supreme value, but it is not something which can be known, narrated, intervened in, or strategized on behalf of. The same (Althusser turns here to Freud and Lacan) goes for the 'human person'. Given the repression that fissures the oedipalized subject inscribed within the order of the symbolic [1991:189-90] what is benign, even mandatory, as a progressive civic totem, is also (in theory as well as actuality) an ideological construct that must be dismantled in its concept before objective knowledge of 'the human' can begin. In short, by locating social scientificty in (the later) Marx, rather than in the sociology of Comte and Durkheim, and then by reading that scientificty in the anti-essentialist light of (post)structuralism, the Humanism Althusser endorses ideologically is firmly tied to a 'theoretical anti-humanism.'

Now on one level, as against Comte's own Positivism, this is a real gain. Althusser's humanism without Humanity releases the system from the Comteian bind. If positivised faith does not have to be organized around a single transcending point, if that point does not have to be phenomenally 'real', if the referent of *l'Humanité* is itself declared 'fictif' — while still serving as a (necessary) symbol in which to project, and through which to express, 'our noblest aspirations' — then Positivism's false, and forced, closure does not have to be made. This leaves the 'open discourse' of (social) science free to go on its way, without having to

with him, even those who left or were expelled from the Party.
collapse into the (socialist) ideology it scientifically and philosophically supports. Furthermore, Althusser's Marxist separation of the social relations to be reproduced (internal to the 'mode of production') from the (political and ideological) process of their reproduction also releases Comte's analysis from the catastrophist sense of terminal crisis that comes from their conflation. Althusser's version of Positive religion, then, is not burdened with the task of continually re-creating 'Humanity', at the price of otherwise letting the human collectivity as such completely dissolve.

However, Althusser's emendation of Comte raises problems of its own. In the first place, any ideological system that distinguishes between an exoteric understanding of its doctrine — humanist slogans taken at face value, for example — and an esoteric understanding, in which these same slogans are comprehended 'scientifically', implies a social hierarchy at variance with what 'socialist humanism' would seem to imply. For Comte, as for Counter-Reformation Catholicism, this was not itself an objection. Perhaps not for Althusser either. For these predecessors, in any case, the disjuncture between levels of doctrinal understanding was not

35 For Althusser's deployment of the 'circle' and the 'mirror' as figures for the 'ideological' formulation of the 'classical problem of knowledge' see 1970:52-56. The passage concludes: 'The mere substitution of the question of the mechanism of the cognitive appropriation of the real object by mean of the object of knowledge, for the ideological question of guarantees of the possibility of knowledge, contains in it that mutation of the problematic which rescues us from the closed space of ideology to the open space of the philosophical theory we are seeking'.

36 In the strict sense, an egalitarian conception of practice — and I say this with the deep respect every Marxist owes to the experience and sacrifices of the men whose labour, sufferings, and struggles still nourish and sustain our whole present and future, all our arguments and hope — an egalitarian conception of practice is to dialectical materialism what egalitarian communism is to scientific communism: a conception to be criticized and
absolute. The eminent term — God or Humanity — was taken, however understood, to be both singular and ‘real’. So the split in subjectivity between doctrinal leaders and ideological followers was mitigated by the shared indubitability of both what is deemed to be sacred and the deeming itself. But for Althusser, there is no such common focus for faith and knowledge. Indeed, there is no focalizing object at all. The ‘humanity’ of socialist humanism is neither thematized nor thematizable. Moreover, the scientific understanding of humanist discourse is in an entirely different register from humanism as an ideological system of representations. Hence a more serious problem. In the absence of a common hinge, it is hard to see how, except instrumentally and from le dehors (in a ‘scientific policy’ towards ideology), that the two planes of Marxist science and socialist ideology could be ideologically articulated together at all.

This exacerbates the difficulty already attending Althusser’s justificatory theory of the Party. It leaves the Communist faith itself hanging in the air. Why, other than that we do, should we believe in the socialist struggle? If the Party of Humanity has no way to reply to that question other than in an ideological language which it knows to be no more (though no less) than that, it would be open to a serious charge: that it subsists in bad faith. Various escapees are possible. One would be to recast the notion of Communist faith itself. We might take nothingness, or différence, as the ‘groundless ground’ of both democratic community, and the engagement it inspires\(^{37}\). Alternatively, we might take our stand from within the given

\(^{37}\)‘It [the ‘finite being’ ‘shared’ in ‘community’] is a groundless “ground”, less in the sense that it opens up the gaping chasm of an abyss than that it is made up only of the network, the inter-weaving, and the sharing of singularities’ [Nancy, 1991:27]. See also the
subjectivity of movements in struggle, for example on justice. However, unless that notion (on which there is an entire literature) is examined further, and if the thirst for justice is taken to be its own justification, the motives associated with it may relax into a self-convinced moralism that is vulnerable to the soundings of Nietzsche’s hammer. That was just the suspicion voiced by an anonymous French critic who detected only guilt and rage in the ‘moral and ideological reason’ which Althusser (in a talk to students) endorsed as the proper spirit of the political militant.

There is need, in any case, for a deeper ideological reflexivity than Althusser offers. Althusser’s enterprise of ‘theoretical ideology’, and more particularly that aspect of it which concerns the socialist equivalent (or non-equivalent) of theism’s principle of transcendence, may have established some conceptual parameters. As a clarification in substance, however, it only provides the most tentative of starting-points. In the absence of a solution — and how could ideological theory ever be apodictic? — the site of such inquiry, then, must be kept open. This would be a salutary recognition, though for it would have disturbing implications for any Leninist theory of the ‘union of theory and practice’. Against all doctrinalism, it would imply that the tension between ‘communist’, or left-humanist, faith and its ‘scientific’ (self)understanding should be acknowledged, even deliberately maintained. From which we might conclude that for the political left to assume the role and temper of a church in the first place is illicit and counter-productive.

discussions by Horowitz (‘Groundless democracy’) and Cupitt (‘Unsystematic ethics’) in Berry and Wernick [1992].

Althusser's unremitting effort to justify that idea in the tough-minded terms of an anti-humanist humanism is unconvincing. Perhaps he knew that a Leninist closure, and the results of his striving to fashion an orthodoxy for it, were as artificial and unsustainable as Comte's. (The fantasy element did not escape him. In his autobiographical mémoire he confesses, throughout his political and intellectual life, a recurrent desire to be 'the master's master' [1993:167].) Regardless, the key questions to which his position might lead if we pushed it to give a better account of its underpinnings and presuppositions are simply unasked. How, for example, in line with a socialist-humanism linked to a 'theoretical anti-humanism', are we to think its horizon of community? How can we do so non-teleologically, and without recourse to a metaphysic of Humanity or Society as an integral meta-being? In what register, indeed, are we to couch such a commitment? What is the meaning of the ethical, or the sacred, if the social to which such categories and dimensions are referred, is to be conceived as a non-expressive non-totality? Again, if 'I' and 'we' are asymmetrical non-unities, what would it mean to speak of 'our' noblest aspirations, or 'my' dignity as a person? How, if at all, are we to think freedom, justice, happiness, in the medium of a de-ontologized subjectivity?

We are, it seems, back to first principles, yet blocked by a mixture of sociologism and dogmatism from pushing such questions along. For all of Althusser's efforts, then, to clarify the ideological element of the movement from and for which he speaks, that element remains finally opaque. At the place where his thought stops, everything is still to play for.

Baudrillard: the end of the social
By Marxifying Comte and then applying an anti-essentialist correction, Althusser would refigure Leninist orthodoxy. If we dispense with his Party loyalty his ‘intervention’ might be given a more heterodox interpretation. It opens the way for us to imagine ourselves within an invisible Church of the Left (for example Derrida’s ‘New International’ [1993]) grappling with the mysteries of a faith that has neither a ‘real’ subject nor object, and whose cultural reproduction is as necessary for sustaining it as its ideological forms of expression are inadequate for that faith’s ‘scientific’ self-comprehension. Either way, Althusser’s humanism without Humanity is, in a Comteian sense, reconstructive. The position developed by Jean Baudrillard could hardly present a sharper contrast. Where Althusser, like Comte and Durkheim, aimed to synthesize and rectify, Baudrillard is anarchic and ‘pataphysical’.

Baudrillard’s pronouncements about the ‘end of the social’ [1983b] pronounce an end not only to any thematization of that category as divine, but to any project of transforming, improving or reviving the social at all. The end of the social is not even apocalyptic. It bespeaks, as the ultimate disillusioning of both radical and liberal teleology, ‘the end of the end’.

39 The term ‘pataphysics’ taken from Jarry, is ‘a science of imaginary situations, a science of the simulation or hypersimulation of an exact, true, objective world, with its universal laws, including the delirium of those who interpret it according to these laws’ [1983b:33-4].

40 Citing Canetti on ‘the dead point’ [1990:14-15] and Virilio on the paradoxes of speed-up and lived time, Baudrillard advances a particularly sweeping (and chronologically specific) version of the idea that history has ended. ‘At some point in the 1980s, history took a turn in the opposite direction. Once the apogee of time, the summit of the curve of evolution, the solstice of history has been passed, the downward slope of events began and things began to run in reverse. It seem that like cosmic space, historical space-time is also curved…This is the problem: is the course of modernity reversible, and is that reversibility itself reversible? How far can this retrospective form go, this end-of-millenium dream? Is there not a “history barrier”, analogous to the sound or speed barrier, beyond which, in its palinodical movement, it could not pass?’ [1995:10;13].
At first sight, Baudrillard’s significance for the tradition of thinking which sought a post-theistic principle of transcendence in the actuality or ideality of human society lies simply here. With his insistence that the movement of history, or rather the movement of capital, has rendered ‘the social’ unthinkable, the socio-theological project, whether in Positivist or Marxist form, is definitively brought to a close41.

There would indeed be little more to say, were it not that Baudrillard’s negation proceeds as an immanent critique — both on its Marxist side, where Marxist categories are themselves unmasked as the ‘mirror of production’ [1985], and on its sociological side, where the ‘social’ is given a ‘sociological’ death. Concerning the former, the force of the negative does not wholly disappear, though where it migrates to only becomes clear when we explore the meaning of the latter. As for that, it is a question of taking Baudrillard at his word. While acknowledging (in an interview with Sylème Lottringer) that ‘My point of view is completely metaphysical’, he immediately adds: ‘The only “sociological” work I can claim is my effort to put an end to the social, to the concept of the social’ [Gane:106].

Indeed, that work is ‘sociological’ (in the French manner) in two respects. First, because the ‘end of the social’ is itself presented as a moment in the unfolding of social being; and secondly because, as an echo of what ‘the social’ meant in classical French social theory, a religious aura envelops its very disappearance into the Baudrillardian black hole of ‘general exchange’, ‘the masses’, and ‘third order simulation’. To be sure, unlike those who used to

41 Baudrillard’s obsequies for ‘the social’ conclude: ‘Nevertheless, let us tenderly recall the unbelievable naivety of social and socialist thinkers, for thus having been able to reify as universal and elevate as ideal of transparency such a totally ambiguous and contradictory — worse, such a residual or imaginary — worse, such an already abolished in its simulation — “reality”: the social’ [1983b:86].
worry about the 'moral crisis' of industrialism, or worry today about the 'tearing of the social fabric', Baudrillard's response is neither one of panic nor regret. But neither is it as flatly cynical as some critics have supposed. For later in the same interview, he goes on to remark that his deepest aim is to 'bring theory into a state of grace', and to 'continue the game of appearance and disappearance' by making 'the real', and even 'god or the gods', appear once more [Gane, 1993:122]. All of which would suggest not only that ending the social is itself a religiously tinged event, but that Baudrillard's obsequies are another, and not just the final, chapter in the thought adventure which opens with Comte.\footnote{Among anglophone commentators, Mike Gane is notable in his stress on Baudrillard's relation with French sociology, and especially its concept of religion and the sacred [1991:9]. While he highlights Baudrillard's appropriation of Durkheim through Bataille, however, he makes no attempt to relate him to French social theory's longer tradition.}

Shifts in terminology, as well as perspective, have made it difficult to interpret the logic of Baudrillard's writings\footnote{The problem of interpretation has not been helped by tendencies among both supporters [Kroker and Cook, 1988] and critics [Kellner, 1989] to identify Baudrillard's thought with a culturally substantialized 'postmodernism', a term Baudrillard refused. Besides Gane (1991), good recent commentaries include Levin, 1996, and Genosko, 1994.}. His abandonment of discursive theory after Towards A Critique Of The Political Economy Of The Sign creates further hazards. Still, a thread of sorts is provided by his summary self-characterization in The Ecstasy of Communication. Thematically, he tells us [1988:11], he had always focussed on the fate of 'the object', understanding by that the object in commodity form, both in its development as a form, and in its pervasively reifying effects on social life. In these terms, what characterizes the movement of Baudrillard's thought is the way in which a Frankfurttian pessimism about the prospects of
resistance by the human subject gives way to a perverse championing of the object itself\(^{44}\), a shift in perspective that takes him, in Mike Gane's phrase, 'from critical to fatal theory' [1991]. Baudrillard's early work\(^{45}\) can be read as an extension of Adorno's and Marcuse's analysis of advanced capitalism as a one-dimensional and totally administered society. His initial move is to incorporate Debord's play with Benjamin's analysis of 'mechanical reproduction' ('All that was lived has passed over into a representation' [Debord 1977:2]) to seal fatally the sense of historical impasse. From there the analysis takes off, highlighting, in its admitted extremism, the direst tendencies in the mediatized ultra-capitalism it seeks to describe. Thus, claims Baudrillard, the fusion of sign and commodity in what Debord called 'the society of the spectacle' has led to a form of exchange (of meanings in culture, of commodities in the market) more enclosed and reified than anything imagined by Marx [1981:143-163]. With this same shift, moreover, the Promethean and 'revolutionary' epoch of production is itself over. 'We have passed form the commodity law of value to the structural law of value, and this coincides with the obliteration of the social form known as production' [1995:10]. Which means not only, with the rise of mass production, mass marketing, and the culture industry, that the initial primacy of production over circulation and exchange within the capitalist mode has been reversed. What collapses with this primacy is something still more fundamental: the plausibility of conceiving the social according to the same model, i.e. as the space for the

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\(^{44}\) 'The only strategy possible is that of the object. We should understand by this, not the 'alienated' object in the process of disalienation, the enslaved object claiming its autonomy as a subject, but the object such as it challenges the subject, and pushes it back on its own impossible position' [1990:113].

\(^{45}\) *Le Système des objets* (1968) and *la société de consommation* (1970). Extracts are translated in Poster, 1988 chapters one and two.
deployment of purposive action, and critico-revolutionary practice, and thus also as the scene of production in a theatrical sense as well [1983b:82-4].

The panoptical gaze, and show, of mass media amplifies the effect. Horkheirmer and Adorno had already noted that 'real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies'46. Baudrillard adds that where everything is a 'scene' (Greek: stage) there is no back-stage, a condition which, following the same etymology, is precisely 'ob-scene' [Foster, 1983:130]. So the line is erased, and not only in the mediatized arts, between what presents itself and what is represented. In the 'third order of simulation', it has become objectively impossible to distinguish between concept and referent, map and territory, the real and its model [1983a:1-2]. An unresponsive hyper-reality has dissolved the stage into a screen47, while capital has vaporized into the electronic circulation it stimulates. Thus, at the peak of the transformation described by the Frankfurt thinkers, and announced, in different tones by McLuhan48, capitalism

46 1989:126. The comment is preceded by one even more reminiscent of Baudrillard's hyper-reality: 'The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world outside as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is intent on reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the producer's guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen' [ibid]. In contemporary retail complexes, 'English pubs', and recycled vernacular architecture, the feeling of being in a movie set is no longer an illusion on the side of the movie-habituated subject. The studio-modelling of the built environment (cities as theme parks) erases the line between real and hyper-real, and inaugurates Baudrillard's world of 'third-order' simulation.

47 'Television is still the most direct prefiguration of this. But today it is the very space of habitation that is conceived as both receiver and distributor, as the space of both reception and operations, the control screen and terminal which as such may be endowed with telematic power' [Foster:1983]. In Seduction [1979] and later works, Baudrillard introduces a fourth order of simulation, 'the digital', where the control screen becomes actualized in the personal computer.

48 In such phrases as 'the reversal of the overheated medium' [1965]. For Baudrillard's sympathetic critique of McLuhan, see Baudrillard, 1981: 172 et seq
has both imploded and gone into hyperspace. Under the circumstances, there is not only no exit through purposive social change, but the ‘cognitive mapping’\(^{49}\) aimed at in such projects has become a fruitless and groundless endeavour.

It follows, of course, that sociology in the old ‘scientific’ sense has itself become impossible. If Baudrillard’s analysis is nonetheless ‘sociological’ this is not, then, because of its method or epistemology, but because of its continuity with the themes that were developed under that name. This becomes evident when we look more closely at the terms in which his argument about the ‘end of the social’ is actually couched. In his key essay on that theme [1983b:65-94], Baudrillard advances three ‘possible hypotheses’:

1. *The social has basically never existed.* There has never been any ‘social relation.’ Nothing has ever functioned socially. On this inescapable basis of challenge, seduction and death there has never been anything but *simulation* of the social and the social relation [1983b:70-71].

2. *The social has really existed, it exists even more and more,* it invests everything; it alone exists. Far from being volatilized it is the social which triumphs; the reality of the social is imposed everywhere. But contrary to an antiquated idea which makes the social into an objective progress of mankind, it is possible to envisage that *the social itself is only residue* ... Litter piling up from the symbolic order as it blows around, it is the social as remainder which has assumed real force and which is soon to be universal...[ibid:72].

\(^{49}\)The intellectual strategy recommended by Frederic Jameson in ‘Postmodernism, the cultural logic of capital’ [1984:90-2].
3. The social has well and truly existed, but does not exist any more. It has existed as coherent space, as reality principle... The social has not always been a delusion as in the first hypothesis, nor remainder, as in the second. But precisely it has only had an end in view, a meaning as power, as work, as capital, from the perspective space of an ideal convergence, which is also that of production — in short, in the narrow gap of second-order simulacra, and, absorbed into third-order simulacra, it is dying [ibid:82].

At first sight the points are inconsistent. 1 and 2 contradict one another, and the ‘middle’ view advanced in 3 is at variance with the two preceding. The epochs and movements of social being which are alluded to have a fuzzy, and multiple, historical reference. When was ‘the social’? When was it not? The argument begins to come into focus when we realise that Baudrillard is not only conducting a Frankfurter, Situationist, and McLuhanite revision of Marx. He is doing so from a position that has already taken its bearings from Mauss’s and Bataille’s reconsideration of the ‘primitive’, and from the critique this makes possible of the Durkheimian (and behind that, Comteian) sociology, with whose conception of the primordially social it marked a break.

From this vantage point, Baudrillard draws a trenchant conclusion. The social, such as sociology imagined it — the glue holding together an integral group, sublime and auto-affected, producer and product, instantiated in the institutions it gives itself, and through which it and they are reproduced — was not originary. As Sahlins [1976] and Clastres [1987] had shown, ‘there were societies without the social’ [1983b:67]. To call these still ‘societies’ would itself be dubious. Perhaps, then — Baudrillard’s first hypothesis —, the social was only
ever a mirage, a changing agglomeration of visible rules, customs and ceremonies, which was all along operated by a symbolic process it futilely sought to master, and conjure away.

Baudrillard's second hypothesis, the social as remainder, both proposes how the mirage of the social came to have substance — as the undischarged accumulation of the practico-inert — and points to a secondary mechanism in which those excluded from the pseudo-social which arises on its basis, are themselves re-incorporated into it. In a spiralling movement, the social, as the remainder of the remainder it continually excretes, finally consumes its own corpse.

Sociology, which would benignly socialise everything, proclaims the last rites. However, with the onset of industrial modernity, collective life acquires the energy and cognitive perspective for project and intent. And in that 'narrow gap' the illusions of sociology in thinking itself able to map the social — as action, as ends in view, as institution and re-institution — acquire some real foundation. Here, at least, and in conceptualizing as 'objective' a simulation model which it was itself actively recycling back into the world, French sociology may have been illusional, but it had 'effects of truth'. (As, too, in nineteenth century context, had Marx's preoccupation with transforming 'social relations'.)

However, continues hypothesis three, it has these no longer. With the collapse of the referent into the sign, of the social into its own code, both the object of sociology's gaze, and the 'perspectival space' from which it might be viewed, have gone. And gone too, Baudrillard suggests — in a footnoted hypothesis 4 — is the very dynamism of the social: i.e. that clash of forces, and energy to act and plan, which derived ultimately from a vast deterritorialization, and from which sociology itself drew strength. In the era of media, rule-by-polling, and capital-become-viral, 'the social has imploded into the masses' [1983b:91n12]. Where it was,
if it was at all, is now *le masse* — a black hole of densely networked communication, which resists meaning, cannot be worked on, and, as the object of no possible knowledge, can be neither encountered nor rigorously conceived. Thus, for Baudrillard, the social today is triply dead. As a phantom, it was never alive. As a reality, it was only ever a corpse artificially given life. And finally, as a vampire, it has given up the ghost, a dead death, an abyss of indifference, sucking the life out of the symbolic itself.

Two features of this construct should be emphasized.

The first is that Baudrillard posits his farewell to the social, and the necessity of its disappearance, on the basis of a shift taken to have occurred to the nature of social being itself. Thus, for all his double move out of Durkheimianism — by recourse to the symbolic as the primordial-social on the one side, and to the late capitalist implosion of the social on the other — he stays within the orbit of the ontological question (what is the being of the social?) around which it was discursively organized. The simulated social projected by sociology turns out to have been merely an episode (conceptual, but also real) in the history of a more inclusive ‘social’ that cannot any longer be thought of under that name. It is indeed a composite, which includes not only *this* social (Comte and Durkheim’s *société*), but also the economic order of exchange and the more primal order of the symbolic, not to mention ‘the social’ that still piles up as remainder, as well, in current mode, as the black hole into which all these others disappear.

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50 C.f. Benjamin: ‘The mass is a matrix from which all traditional behaviour towards works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation’ [1969:239].
This is not say that Baudrillard ontologizes the social in the same manner as classical sociology. Given the lack of commonality among the modes it would inscribe, the englobing reality he gestures towards in his genealogical sketch-plan is a contradictory complexity, an assemblage without essence, and not to be conceived as either entity or substance. Nevertheless, the conceptual space within which Baudrillard’s narrative unfolds still maintains, at the most abstract level of its patterning, a basic sociological presumption: that somewhere in the zone of what he is trying to speak of, there is a break in the continuity of being which permits us to speak of the associative/interactive element of the human as irreducible, exhibiting a character, and range of ontic possibility (including ‘disappearance’), all of its own. If he is to be criticized in this respect it is, indeed, for not being sociological enough. By not attempting to conceptualize the complex social ontology he deploys, he conveniently elides the multiple meanings of ‘the social’ whose end he hypothesizes. This simplification, in turn, authorizes him to overstate the extremity of the late capitalist situation in line with the ‘metaphysical’ concerns which, all along, underlie his account. Not the least charm of Baudrillard’s position is that this itself can be construed as a deliberate stratagem.

The second noteworthy feature of Baudrillard’s ‘hypotheses’ concerns the transformed meaning he gives to their central motif. ‘The end of the social’ had been a central concern for Comte and Durkheim too. For them, however, it had been linked to anxiety about a primal social dissolution. Failure to sustain ‘humanity’ or ‘society’ as religiously experienced transcendentals risked an ideological catastrophe in which, dissolved by cynicism, impulse and egoism, the integration and reproducibility of the group as such were at risk. The paradox of Baudrillard’s formulation is that it enables him to say, on the one hand, that the nihilism feared
by classical sociology has triumphed. It has done so, indeed, immanently: in the medium, and through the metamorphosis, of the social itself. On the other hand, however, since the social was nothing in the first place, precisely nothing has dissolved. With its passage into sidereal circulation, simulation, and ‘the mass’, the nothing has nothinged itself. To which extent, the ‘end of the social’ is not a cause for lamentation. It brings the fall of an illusion, and bespeaks a fatality to embrace.

Nothing, perhaps, has given Baudrillard’s critics greater difficulty than this embrace. ‘It would, in fact, be unintelligible if we missed on the one hand its contestatively mocking tone, and on the other its Nietzschean resonance. Here, though, we must be careful. If the ‘end of the social’ evokes ‘the death of God’, it must also be understood in the context of Baudrillard’s parallel account of the rise of simulation. The translation is startling. The eclipse of the real — and of ‘the social’ — by the hyper-real in the ‘third order of the simulacrum’ realizes, in material form, the culminating stage of Nietzsche’s account of how ‘the real world’ at last became a myth. (‘What? There is no real world? Then there is no apparent one either...’).

51 Baudrillard abstractly summarizes the ‘three orders of simulacra’ in the opening pages of ‘Simulation’. ‘Three orders of appearance, parallel to the mutations of the law of value, have followed one another since the Renaissance. Counterfeit is the dominant scheme of the ‘classical’ period, from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution; Production is the dominant scheme of the industrial era; Simulation is the reigning scheme of the current phase that is controlled by the code. The first order of simulacra is based on the natural law of value, that of the second order on the commercial law of value, that of the third order on the structural law of value’ [1983a:83]. Baudrillard’s the third order combines two features, whose relation he assumes to be intrinsic: a) the universalization of ‘economic’ exchange (beyond even the zone of commodities and the money economy), and b) a mode of representation — the hyper-real — in which sign-objects are simulacra without original [1995:72-4].
I have already suggested that the death of Man, Society etc., in postmodern French theory has amounted (and self-consciously) to a second deicide. But Baudrillard goes one better. His sociological reformatting, in light of late capitalist development, of Nietzsche's story about the rise and fall of the (ultimately) 'real' inverts the meaning not only of classical sociology's anxiety about social disintegration. It also inverts the meaning which Nietzsche gave to that story's outcome. In Baudrillard's end-play, the scene of action, and the locus of the collapsed line between the real and apparent, has shifted from that of the *subject* (Western consciousness from Platonism to 'the free spirits') to that of the *object* [1990:111 *et seq.*]. Through the reifying effects of commodification and semiosis, the social itself has become object. Indeed, it has done so not just as another object among many, perhaps to be mastered once more, but in a ghostly way, losing itself in the more general objectality of the world, as that world metamorphosizes from artifact to simulacrum, ever more radiant with effects of the 'real'. Under the circumstances, the Nietzschean daybreak -- through the emergence of a self-affirmative will-to-power -- has become impossible, even unthinkable. So if the end of the social recapitulates the death of God, it is also worse. It is the end of the end, the deadening of power, the declension of the will.

But there is something more. If the social passes over to the object, and if the object has a metastatically excessive 'will' of its own, then an evil power is installed in the heart of what a remnant incarnationist religiosity might still like to think of as the source and horizon of the Good. In the Baudrillardian theatre, all works as if the social, the objectal social, the social
that finally makes the social as simulacrum dissolve — is possessed by an evil genie\textsuperscript{52}. We are far from Dionysos, but even further from the Crucified. So what is Baudrillard's faith? We may suspect a diabolism, or at least a heretical version of Benjamin’s chess automaton: an anti-God that is programmed to ‘win every time’. But Baudrillard’s heresy is, as he insists, ‘Manichean’ — which is to say, dualistic\textsuperscript{53}. Just as in any Manichean construct, then, there is also, but elsewhere, and not for Baudrillard lodged in any kind of ‘subject’, a counter principle to the ‘God’ who rules appearances and would reconcile (and finalize) the world. This other is the symbolic: that element of the social (in the erased yet wider sense) which — as ‘reversibility’ incarnate — resists being thematized, and mastered, at all.

It is here, in fact, that Baudrillard takes up his position. The power that capital has become is irresponsive. What is called for — at first apocalyptically, but in Baudrillard’s later writings more mysteriously — is a change of terrain:

\begin{quote}
We will not destroy the system by a direct, dialectical revolution of the economic or political infrastructure....We will never defeat the system on the plane of the real...We
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52} ‘There is no reality principle, nor one of pleasure. There is only a final principle of reconciliation, and an infinite one of evil and seduction. Hence ‘beyond the ecstasy of the social, of sex, of the body, of information’, three ‘ironic’ strategies. These are identified, respectively, with ‘the evil genie of the social, of the object, and of passion’ [1990:72].

\textsuperscript{53} ‘There are in fact two principles at stake: on the one hand ... the fundamental attempt to rationalize the world, and on the other hand there is the inverse principle... adopted by the ‘heretics’ all the way throughout the history of Christianity. This is the principle of evil itself. What the heretics posited was that the very creation of the world, hence the reality of the world, was the result of the existence of the evil demon. The function of God, then, was really to try to repudiate this evil phantom — that was the real reason God had to exist at all. ... It is once again the principle of seduction that needs to be involved in this situation: according to Manichaeism, the reality of the world is a total illusion; it is something which has been tainted form the very beginning ... seduced by a sort of \textit{ir}real principle since time immemorial. In this case, what one has to invoke is precisely this
must therefore displace everything onto the sphere of the symbolic where challenge, reversal, and overbidding are the law [1995:36-37].

The wager is that despite the ever more pervasive effects of an exchange and accumulation process that has gone ‘into orbit’, that prevents the exigencies of the symbolic from asserting themselves, and which, as dead labour consuming the living, is social death itself, the symbolic is none the less inextinguishable. But how can the symbolic be brought back to life? How can it topple its rival? The answer is given by the question. What would be required is a challenge beyond the limit, a reverse extermination, in short, a counter-gift which capital cannot top. ‘We can respond to death only by a superior death....defying the system with a gift to which it cannot respond save by its own collapse and death’ [ibid, emphasis in original].

This challenge can be conceived in various ways — as défi, gaming, counter-gift, fatal strategy. But it does not yield a politics, at least not in any rational, calculative, sense. The social (but what can this now mean?) is to be seduced -- magicalized into being -- rather than produced yet again. Nor is ‘seduction’ to be thought voluntaristically. It proceeds from the object -- from the ‘sacred horizon of appearances’[1979:75] -- and it returns back to the object only as an elicited response. Thus the challenge Baudrillard speaks of is already within the charmed circle it would explode. Capital itself ‘challenges’ the social -- both by turning everything into use-value and sign-economic exchange and, in the form of wage-labour, by offering a ‘gift without the possibility of counter-gift’ [1995:37]. It is in these terms that Baudrillard discusses (and seems to endorse) the wave of hostage taking and bombings by gauchistes in power of illusion’ [Gane,1993:139]. This theme is developed in all Baudrillard’s later
the early 1970s -- the counter-gift of 'a violent death' in response to 'the slow death capital offers its workers' [1995:39]. The companion essay to 'the death of the social' finds similar reasons to approve of electoral apathy, and mass trends towards a refusal of meaning [1983b:48]. The same consideration can even inspire 'theory' itself. This too, through a provocatively abject and excessive miming of the object, can offer a challenge. Against exponents of a tedious political didacticism Baudrillard writes: 'Better a despairing analysis in felicitous language than an optimistic analysis in an infelicitous language...That is where true depressive thought is to be found, among those who speak only of the transcending and transforming of the world, when they are incapable of transforming their own language' [1996:103]. Which leads him, in the same essay, to an almost Kantian maxim: 'The absolute rule of thought is to give back more than you were given. Never less, always more. The absolute rule of thought is to give back the world as it was given to us -- unintelligible. And if possible to render it a little more unintelligible' [1996:105].

Nancy: community without communion

Althusser's Marxist transposition of Comte affirms humanism (with appropriate class correction) as an ideological position. But only on condition that Humanity is dismantled as an ontological category, and that its moral force as the end of ends is replaced by that of a 'communist commitment' which is itself only negatively defined54. For Baudrillard, the

works, but see especially 'Whatever happened to evil?' [Baudrillard, 1993:81-88].

54 'The communism to which the Soviet Union is committed is a world without economic exploitation, without violence, without discrimination -- a world ... that can do without shadows or tragedies' [Althusser's, 1969:238]. See also the more personal statement in the mémoire [1993:223 et seq]. 'I believe the only possible definition of communism -- if one day it were to exist in the world -- is the absence of relationships based on the market, that is to say of exploitative class relations and the domination of the State' [ibid:225].
movement of social being (whose theorizing he abandons) has both rendered ‘the Revolution’ illusory, and also undercut the appeal to a language of social relations in terms of which, from the Marxist side, any notion of the social as an integral and transcending totality might itself be criticized, or for that matter advanced [1983b:66-7]. At the same time, the rise and fall of ‘the social’ ushers in a world whose hyper-real excesses paradoxically secrete, in the irrepressible destructive/creative dynamics of ‘the symbolic’, something more primal than the social, and more apt to be described as an immanent force for the divine.

Baudrillard’s shift in ground dispenses with all recourse to teleology, communist or otherwise. But it still leaves us with a question he does not ask: what the reawakened symbolic might itself engender. It has been tempting to read into this silence an idealization of the primitive, though Baudrillard’s writing’s are as hostile to nostalgia as to utopia. Whatever might lie beyond ‘the vanishing point’ [1986:5 et seq.], the horizon that beckons is left obscure. For Comte, this horizon was the object of a master science, and the ground of reality itself. Taking one prudential step back, Althusser affirmed that there was a horizon, but all that could be rigorously said about it is that it designates a social formation based on a mode of production which precludes class domination. Its ideal element — what Blanchot called the ‘exigency of community’ [1986:3-4] — was a purely ideological figure, and so neither the object nor the basis of any knowledge. Baudrillard simply refuses to contemplate any such exigency — whether as a site for reflecting on sociality, or for reflecting on the vanished god which Positivist or socialist humanism had projected onto it. In the end, then, if Althusser has

Note again the negative definition, which is of course (in Marxist mode) consistent both with a materialist refusal to engage in utopian speculation and with a negatively theological form of immanent transcendentalism.
only banalities to offer about the form of sociality which might lie on the other side of ‘the river’ [1993:224], Baudrillard, by ensconcing theory itself within his own other of the symbolic, has nothing to say about it at all.

Nevertheless, from a left perspective, and even amidst ‘the derilection of the idols’, the question about how we might think — or rather, re-think — the question of ‘community’ still remains. How: both with regard to what it is, as a fundamental trait of social being (if we eschew the model of a fusionsal social superimposed on a Hobbesian egoism, how might the in common of social life be conceived?). But also ideologically, as the touchstone of political value, and as the desirable itself. And here, if we are to conceive community not as a pure ideal (perhaps as a lost paradise to which we long to return), might we not build on what is disclosed by pursuing the first question? Which would be a question not of dreaming the new, but of affirming, welcoming, giving maximal (or at least optimal) play to a feature of our collective life which is already, and always, however precariously, present.

This is just the approach taken by Jean Luc Nancy in his reflections on the ‘inoperative community’ (la communauté désœuvrée) [1991:1-42]. It should be said at once that Nancy’s engagement with the shaping themes of French sociology is nothing like as direct as in the two previous cases. Indeed, if he evinces an interest in the fundamental character of social being, he does so from a vantage-point which rejects in principle the objectifying style that is the hallmark of that tradition (even for Baudrillard). He writes rather as a philosopher; and more particularly as that kind of philosopher for whom philosophy as traditionally developed (from Plato to Hegel) has exhausted its possibilities: not just by saying everything that could be said within it, but by enclosing its thought-objects in concepts which erase their alterity and ever
more completely forget the question of being that initially set the tradition in motion. For Nancy, as for Derrida, as for Heidegger who provided a prototype for both, philosophy is left with the task of meditating on its own closure, with the aim thereby of reopening thought to that phenomenological inquiry into the Being of beings that Heidegger called ‘thinking’ [1977:341 et seq.].

Not that Nancy is a pure or uncritical Heideggerian. His *Experience of Freedom* [1993] is concerned with rescussitating a category — freedom — which is indispensible in the formulation of any kind of emancipatory politics, and which had been central to German philosophy before Heidegger. In that text, the inquiry proceeds by locating the place in the movement of Heidegger’s thought, from *Sein und Zeit* to the later work on poetics and technology, in which the grounding of (human) being in freedom has been abandoned. It is a similar gesture, with but also against Heidegger, that guides Nancy’s meditation on the meaning of ‘community’ — a meditation which he undertakes by thinking through, to places Heidegger would or could not go, the meaning of that associative aspect of *dasein* Heidegger termed *mitsein*, ‘being with’. Heidegger’s enthusiasm for the ‘national-social revolution’ indicated ‘a vision of a people and a destiny conceived in part at least as a subject’ [1991:14]. For Nancy, this was not just an aberration. It indicated, despite himself, an incomplete break from the philosophy of the subject that was already evident in *Sein und Zeit* in Heidegger’s failure to understand how ‘Dasein’s “being-towards death” was ... radically implicated in its being-with — in Mitsein’ [*ibid*].
But if Nancy conducts his inquiry into the nature of community as a critical development out of Heideggerian ontology, in three respects it still belongs to the discursive field whose contours I have been trying to describe.

First is the question itself, which both harkens back to a formative concern of classical French sociology (the fundamental constitution of société) and is couched as a critical reflection on a key orienting idea of the left. Acknowledging (the essay was first written in 1983) both the ‘history of betrayals’ and the inner collapse of socialism before the triumphal march of capital, Nancy accepts, but only in ‘a sense quite foreign to Sartre’s intentions’, that ‘communism is the unsurpassable horizon of our time.’ What concerns him particularly is the ‘emblematic’ meaning of that term, an emblem ‘which no doubt amounted to something other than a concept, and even something other than the meaning of a word’ [1991:1]. As such ‘communism’ expressed (past tense, because ‘this emblem is no longer in circulation except in a belated way for a few’) simultaneously two things. On the one hand, ‘the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion’; and on the other, ‘a place from which to surmount the unraveling that occurs with the death of each of one of us — that death that, when no longer anything other than the death of the individual, carries an unbearable burden and collapses into insignificance’ [ibid]. The problem for Nancy is that the idea of community has generally been confounded with that of communion. The latter, which would swallow up individual finitude in the ‘absolute immanence’ of a transcending ‘we’, is actually the death of ‘community’ as that which would respond to this double desire. This confusion has been abetted, moreover, by an insistence that community be thought of as ‘a community of human beings’, understood
as a mode of collectivity that would accomplish, integrally and in the manner of a produced work, ‘the essence of humanness’ [1991:3].

Nancy’s (theoretical) anti-humanism, a version of which we have already encountered in Althusser, brings us to a second respect in which his rethinking of community relates to the general thematics of contemporary socio-theology. It is post ‘death of God’, and preoccupied with the implications for social theory of the anti-metaphysical Nietzschean aftershock. The critical meaning of this for Nancy is clear. It amounts to an imperative: even in the midst of what might be conceived as a redemptive project, ‘God’ must in no wise be smuggled back in. The essay which closes *The Inoperative Community* -- ‘Of Divine Places’ -- is implacable on this point. A ‘sickening traffic’ he notes ‘has grown up around a so-called return of the spiritual and of the religious’. But ‘[f]orgetting the death of God, when not politically or commercially motivated, is tantamount to forgetting thought’ [1991:122]. Here, indeed, Nancy aims to dislodge not only whatever derivatively theistic associations still hover around an essentialism of the ‘human’ -- whether as a generic or collective essence -- but also any negative theology that might be coaxed out of the divine disappearance itself.

The death of God called for and brought forth a mode of thought that ventures out where God no longer guarantees either being or the subject of the world. At these extremes, over these abysses or amid this drifting no god could possibly return... [and] there is no reason why the divine should lend its name to what thought explores or confronts in its withdrawal [*ibid*].

The stricture extends to those who would make the *abgrund* of Being, or, *différance* or, in historical mode, a profound sense of cultural desolation in which ‘the god no longer speaks’,
themselves into signs of deity. But if reviving the deity through the idea of its (unrecoverable) absence is illusory, filling the vacuum with a sacralized idea of the social is worse. It is positively dangerous. In the traditional religious notions of a covenanted community, or community as the mystical body of Christ, ‘God is for the community -- and a community... is what it is only before the face of the gods’ [1991:142]. Such a community does not entail, as we might imagine, a communion type of bonding at all. Each of its members face what they each experience as ‘my God’, and do not find ‘within the community itself the presence of what binds it together’. The converse is the case where the gods are absent. Then the integrally unified community ‘is capable of becoming horrifying, massive, destructive of its members and itself, a society burned at the stake by its Church, its Myth, or its Spirit’. The nightmare is a community which ‘thinks it is God, thinks it is the devastating presence of God’ when it is ‘no longer placed facing him and his absolute remoteness’ [1991:143].

There is, finally, a third feature of Nancy’s account of community which relates him to modern French social theory more directly. This is the special status he accords to Bataille, as the one ‘who has gone furthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community’ [ibid:16]. Nancy’s essay proceeds, indeed, as a commentary on Bataille’s own (re)thinking of community, examined as the history of a ground-breaking, though finally unsuccessful attempt.

This history, with its successive attempts to square Marx with Mauss, Freud, de Sade and Nietzsche, and with its evolving dichotomies of general vs restricted economy, heterology vs homology, excess vs utility etc, had its own intellectual logic. But it was also, Nancy insists, the history of an experience [ibid:16]: in the first instance, a political experience, ignited, in
the age of Hitler and Stalin, by a fervid activism; but also a literary, artistic and even ‘personal’ one. And through it all was a quest for a kind of community that Bataille was not in the end able to find except for fleeting moments, or to elucidate to his own satisfaction. (The evidence: that Bataille did not publish his sociology of religion, and that he was not able to complete *On Sovereignty* [1991:21].)

Bataille’s quest took him through a variety of experimental groups — from the Surrealist ‘community of artists’ and the street-fighting *Contre-Attaque*, to *Acéphale*, whose secret face was turned to finding within itself an exemplary human sacrifice — just as it also took him, during the isolation of the war years, into the private intensity of friendships and ‘the community of lovers’\(^{35}\). Throughout, what Bataille was trying to discover (and live) was a mode of association that was free and egalitarian but also imbued with a transgressive intensity precluded in the prevailing socialist vision. In opposition to ‘the fascist orgy’, the ecstatic quality of its being-together would come not from the extinction but from the heightening to the limit of ‘clear consciousness’. It was a heightening, therefore, that had nothing to do with the unity of all in One, nor even with a dialectic of recognition (the discovery of self in the other and other in the self). It came, rather, from the *interruption* of any such identificatory desire. Community of that kind would have to satisfy three desiderata: that it not be structured in dominance; that the being together of those it related not be subordinated to the ‘restricted economy’ of work and production (whether material or

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\(^{35}\) In a sympathetic contribution to Nancy’s reflection, written and published between the first and second essays of Nancy’s book, Blanchot’s *La Communauté Inavouable* amplified the meaning of these successive moments [1986]. See also Stoeckl’s introduction to the collection of Bataille’s writings in *Visions of Excess* [1985:ix-xxiii].
cultural); and that the group not set itself up as a Sovereign over its members. The first requirement barred the door to fascism which, with respect to the second, held a certain fascination [1991:16-17]. The third barred the way as well not only to the nationalism and neo-medieval hankering for organicity of the traditional right, but also, in combination with the second, to the collectivism espoused by social-democracy or (Stalinized) Bolshevism.

Suspended, as Nancy puts it, 'between the two poles of ecstasy and community'[1991:20], and aided by his encounter with the work of Mauss and Hubert, Bataille's guiding insight was that the secret of a community which took the form of communion was 'the operative and resurrectional truth of death' [ibid:17]. At first, indeed, this was just the form in which he was drawn to pursue it. Hence Bataille's growing fascination with blood sacrifice, both among archaic societies and as a renewed historical possibility in his own. But he equally recognized that a community founded in sacrifice had no logical place to stop. Rushing 'headlong into immanence' it points towards the 'horror' and 'total absurdity.... of the death work, of death considered as the work of common life'. And the same was true even of the inauthentic version, in which the sacrificial production of 'immanent being' was only 'simulated'. Here too the work of death was still accomplished, at least to a relative degree, in the form of the domination, oppression, extermination, and exploitation to which all socio-political systems finally lead... It was not only the Sun King who mixed the enslavement of the State with radiant bursts of sacred glory; this is true of all royalty that has always already

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56 For Bataille's account of the distinction between 'restricted and 'general economy' see Bataille [1988].
distorted the sovereignty it exhibits into a means of domination and extortion [1991:17-18].

In such terms, says Nancy, Bataille came to realise the aberrance of what he characterized as his own, ‘paradoxical nostalgia’ for ‘the royal and religious edifice of the past’. Aberrant not just because it was impossible to go back, nor even because the desideratum was a community without class domination. But because ‘the effort to which [it] corresponded was an immense failure’ and ‘something essential was missing from the world in which it collapsed’\(^{57}\). Hence, eventually, his complete turning away from community as a political project (he seeks his model in the isolated community of artists or lovers) and before that (in the experimental groups of 1936-39) his exploration of what might be entailed by a ‘negative community’: a ‘community of those who have no community’\(^{58}\), because, in the sovereign excesses of those who make it up, the sovereignty of the group itself has been sacrificed.

In retracing Bataille’s adventure, Nancy’s main concern is to address, or at least formulate, the problems that in his view Bataille’s attempts to think the relation between ecstasy and community on some model other than that of communion were never able to surmount. At the limit of Bataille’s thinking, where Nancy sets himself to begin, these problems stemmed from ‘the paradox of a thinking magnetically attracted toward community and yet governed by the theme of the sovereignty of a subject’ [1991:23]. The furthest that Bataille had been able to go was in conceiving community as connecting ecstatic beings through the sharing of an ego-nihilating desire — his capitalized NOTHING. But this sharing was still conceived as a

communing between subjects, which posited, on the one side, a shared third term which embodied the essence of that communing, and on the other, a kind of individual subject, as the place where this sharing became transparent to itself.

For Nancy, Bataille's crucial insight had been that community, regarded as something other than the 'night of immanence' was not a being, still less a super-being, but an experience of being-in-common that occurs when we each, in 'clear consciousness' (and not therefore in the effusions of an ego that would lose itself in the experience of being fused into a communal self), exist outside ourselves, ec-statically. But to convert that insight into a clear thought, we must do what Bataille would not: let go of the communion model of community entirely. This in turn might make it possible to better understand not only the relation between community and ecstasy, but between both of these and death, which for Nancy as for Bataille is their linking term.

Nancy proceeds from an existential consideration. The anticipated death which is each our 'ownmost' always has an outside wherein it (and I) appears in the world as the finitude of the other for an other. In this sense, and against Heidegger, we could say that the ecstatic character of dasein derives not simply from its own thrown-ness and being-unto-death, but from the relational implication of that finitude as something shared in our being-with others. My singularity as a mortal being is not something self-enclosed, to be cultivated, suffered, or

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99 This phrase of Bataille's is Blanchot's epigraph for part one of The Unavowable Community, on 'negative community' [1986:1-28] and is extensively commented on throughout.

99 C'[I]n his writings from the period of la Souverainé ..., it is as though the communication of each being with NOTHING were beginning to prevail over the communication between beings, or as if it were necessary to give up trying to show that in both cases it was a question of the same thing' [1991:22].
asserted. To the contrary, it is the effect of a continual 'ex-posure', of each as a singular and finite other for each, such that the singularity of Dasein is even constituted by the field of finitudes in which it 'co-appears' [com-parait]. In the 'community of lovers' — which for Nancy as for Bataille served as a paradigm [1991:24-26] — it is in this sharing/dividing (partager) of finitude, rather than in the lovers' suicide pact (which only exemplifies communion as a death work), that the irrefragable link between love and death is to be found.

At the ecstatic zenith of consciousness — wordlessly, perhaps, with passions unleashed, in the mutual contact of skin with skin — I find myself not to be a sovereign over others, nor even a sovereign among others, but a singularity which exists as such in being shared. Community, then, is not that to which we 'belong', but is simply the 'spacing of this dislocation'. It is the place where, as finite other for finite other, we are always outside ourselves. And likewise for any communing practice we might think of as making community 'happen'. 'What "there is" in place of communication is neither the subject nor the object of communal being, but community and sharing' [1991:25].

It will be evident that 'community' in the sense which Nancy strives to identify is not something to be built, produced, or brought into being. It is as opposed, in fact, to anything which might be the object of a project, or the result of a work, as to community conceived of as communion. Indeed, it is manifest in, and as, the unworking of all the instrumentalities which make organized social life — ever more intensively — what it has become. Hence the qualifier, which borrows a term from Blanchot, desoeuvré. Still less, at the same time, is la

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60 'Finitude co-appears or compear (com-parait) and can only compear: in this formulation we would need to hear that finite being always presents itself "together," hence severally, for finitude always presents itself at a hearing and before the judgment of
communauté désœuvrée some kind of pre-lapsarian condition — oral culture, the intimacy of the face-to-face, etc. — which has been tragically nihilated in the giddy but disintegrative progress of a technologized and globalizing capitalism, and which it would be good, or salvific, to recover. The ‘inoperative community’ is the originary ‘being-with’ that is the precondition for all sociation whatever. (This, Nancy suggests, had been Rousseau’s thought in the Second Discourse, concerning a sociality in the ‘state of nature’ that preceded ‘society’, and that preceded, therefore, both the unity and division to which its institution gave rise61). Community, then, as ‘that which communicates in community, and [as] what community communicates’, always exists [ibid:25]. And it will continue to exist — even at that extreme limit of totalitarianism where the ‘com-pearance of singularity’ threatens to be destroyed (or where sharing ‘threatens to destroy what is shared’) — so long as mortal beings live among, and beside, one another at all.

At which point, however, we may wonder if Nancy’s answer is strictly in line with Bataille’s question. For if the ‘unheard experience’ of community that he seeks to elicit from Bataille’s adventure with the concept is to be disengaged through a meditation on mitsein, has he not detached it from the very considerations that propelled Bataille’s own interest? By opposing the inoperative community to the communion concept from which, Nancy argues, Bataille never quite freed himself, the equation of community with the sacred (even a Dionysian

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61 ‘Community is the presentation of the detachment...of this distinction that is not individuation, but finitude of compearing. (Rousseau was the first to conceive of this: in his thinking, society comes about as the bond and as the separation between those who, in “the state of nature,” being without any bond, are nonetheless not separated or isolated. The “societal” state exposes them to separation, but this is how it exposes “man,” and
experience of the sacred, on the edge of sacrifice) is snapped. At the same time, the rethinking of ecstasy in relation to death and community which Nancy’s move entails, converts community into an eternally recurrent feature of existence. At which point, it is hard to see what remains of its political significance, whether as a critical reference-point for analyzing/denouncing the deficiencies of capitalist sociality, or as a programmatic goal, the ‘real’ community without domination and exploitation which we might aspire to bring into being.

Yet the fruit has not fallen so far from the tree as it might seem. First, concerning its religious dimension, while Nancy certainly carries forward Bataille’s critique of the Society-God against Bataille’s own hankerings for the sacred, yet, in a different sense, Nancy’s ‘inoperative community’ itself has a transcendent quality. After noting that even in the extermination camp, which is ‘in essence, the will to destroy community’, ‘community never entirely ceases to resist this will’, Nancy adds:

Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence.

Consequently, community is transcendence: but “transcendence”, which no longer has any “sacred” meaning, signifying precisely a resistance to immanence (resistance to the communion of everyone or to the exclusive passion of one or several: to all forms and all the violences of subjectivity) [1991:35].

This is not the transcendence of a deity, neither with respect to a commanding will or majesty, nor with respect to an immortality, in whose perfection and infinitude we might lose and save ourselves. Nor is the goodness in such a figure to be thought of incarnationally.

how it exposes him to the judgment of his fellows. Rousseau is indeed in every sense the
Nevertheless, something of the divine is still manifest within it. Nancy’s community is a real force, dwelling in the human world, which unceasingly ‘acts’ (though not as an agent) to resist the supreme evil of immanence.

Nor, by the same token, is the ‘inoperative community’ an entirely apolitical notion. If it dispels the idea of community as ‘a work to be done or produced’, it refigures community as ‘a gift to be renewed and communicated’. It points, then, to an ‘infinite task’ (‘a task and a struggle that Marx grasped and Bataille understood’), ‘at the heart of finitude’ [1991:35]. On this construal, the standpoint of community would indeed imply a politics; though it would also imply both an end to means-and-ends thinking (and thus to politics as strategy and tactics) and to Promethean activism as its emancipatory mode. Instead, ‘[[if the political is not dissolved in the socio-technical element of forces and needs (in which...it seems to be dissolving before eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community’. Thus ‘“[p]olitical” would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication ... consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing’ [ibid:40]. And the defining feature of the struggle such a notion of politics entails would be communication itself — ‘as when Lyotard, for example, speaks of the “absolute wrong” done... to the one who does not even have the language in which to express the wrong done to him’ [ibid:35-36].

Several objections may be lodged against this view. One is that Nancy’s politics of community merges too readily into a contemporary politics of ‘voice’. By moving from the terrain of struggle against the conditions which produce the ‘wrong’ to that of its (mere) representation, do we not leave these conditions unchallenged? By insisting on the absolute thinker pas excellence of compearance)” [1991:29-30].
opposition between community and communion, warrant may also be given for an even more adaptive move. This would be to see something hopeful in the unworking of collective work, and of the collectivity as the product of its own work, by the ‘techno-economic exigencies’ of capital itself. It may be said that the Communist Manifesto’s modernist paean for the cultural dynamic of capitalism, in which ‘all that is solid melts into air’ [Feuer, 1959:10], points in a similar direction. But if Marx and Engels endorsed the break up of pre-capitalist institutions and traditions, what made this liberating was the prospect of new forms of solidarity, and of communal institution, which capitalist development, against itself, would also bring about. Where no such dialectic can be presumed, such a position, for all its benign intention, is hard to distinguish from a complacency towards the culturally dissolvent force of the market. A politics defined, finally, as ‘the communication of community’ is a politics without mediations. It would not be unfair to say, indeed, that it is the very purism of Nancy’s position -- his disinclination to consider as the proper site of the political that messy middle-ground between community and communion, between making happen and letting be, between task and work -- which is responsible for the ease with which it can be given an accommodationist gloss.

Whatever the validity of these objections, they do not negate the overall interpretative point: that Nancy is operating -- in however altered and attenuated a form -- within the same implicitly ‘socio-theological’ problematic as we have seen in the cases of Althusser and Baudrillard, a problematic which he too, in his way, seeks to deconstruct. No doubt, in continuing to posit a transcendental dimension to the social Nancy goes furthest in denying both divinity and substantiality to that dimension. It is the very force of his denial which gives

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\(^{62}\) For a forthright adoption of this position, see Agamben [1993].
his position its critical edge. We might say, however, that is this which also limits him politically. Despite Nancy’s wish to thematize the ‘inoperative community’ almost constitutively as that which leaves the vacated place of God empty (and especially sociology’s secularized version of the deus communis), the emphatically anti-absolutist and anti-totalizing movement of ‘communication’ is accorded an absolute moral value such that (by relegating all else to demonic immanence and fallen instrumentality) it commands the political field. In such terms, the second-order practices indispensable to any transformist horizon—i.e. those which would work on the mediating structures of social life—become unthinkable.

**Politics, transcendence and the social**

If I may risk a summarizing formula that is perhaps unavoidably fuzzy, since all its terms and relations are precisely at issue in the problem-field whose emergence I have been trying to describe, what links the otherwise disparate reflections of Althusser on ‘socialist humanism’, Baudrillard on the ‘death of the social’ and Nancy on the ‘inoperative community’ both with one another, and, through Durkheim, with Comte’s earlier attempt to launch a Positive religion, is this: that—from the midst of an intellectual culture which continues to affirm the enlightenment break with any otherworldly metaphysics—they are part of a common effort to develop an orientation towards politics, social life, and (what for lack of a better word I will call) the transcendent; and to do so in a way that links these moments indissociably together.

Politically, such thinking relates itself to a practice of human improvement, however conceived. Its character as social theory stems from conceiving that practice, even if the pure production model is disavowed, as acting upon the conditions, relations, or constitutive character of social life, which is itself regarded as a sui generis reality. And its transcendent
dimension lies in the commitment to, and effort to secure, an ideological reference point that calls or commands such practice from infinitely beyond what is immediately given in the mundane play of prevailing interests and needs. What closes the loop, and defines the 'family resemblance' between positions, is that (in some sense) the social itself, rather than any transmundane reality, is taken to be the site or source of the beyond that calls. It is this notion which gives (what I will term, for short) the 'French' tradition of modern social theory both its paradoxical character and, in combination with its derivatively Catholic ontological approach to the social, its distinctiveness.

Marx's revolutionary atheism was no doubt inscribed within the same general field of thought. For him, however, the (Left Hegelian) project of realizing the Absolute was assimilated without remainder into the always incipiently transformist politics of the class struggle. The independent conceptualization or even figuration of the 'social humanity or human society' which was the highest orienting value for revolutionary praxis were therefore unnecessary. Operating on consciousness at all, as for example in Feuerbach's critique of religious self-alienation, was an idealist diversion that could lead to class collaborationist politics. To realise the ideal and emancipatory aims of German philosophy, we must instead enter into the actual conflicts of the world.

If Marxism, and the tradition of revolutionary socialism, continued nonetheless to harbor a theology of the social ('communism as the riddle of history solved'), that theology remained, as Benjamin put it, 'wizened and out of sight'. For Comte, on the other hand, in the aftermath of a revolution that had actually occurred, and in a country where the Reformation had not, it was a matter of re-thinking and re-instituting, rather than just practically translating, what was
fantasmatically occluded within the old religion. In that context, where the spirit of an unreconstructed Christianity was cornered by reaction, and political discourse was haunted by nihilism (at the limit, De Sade's 'republic of crime'), constructing a new principle of transcendence could plausibly present itself as an essential component of social reform.

In line with a social moralism forged in the Revolution itself, and taken to its furthest extent, the Positivist move was to identify the requisite principle of transcendence with what it took to be a wholly this-sided but nonetheless morally eminent reality: the developing social totality constituted by the species as a whole. This totality -- l'Humanité -- was at once le Grand-Être and the proper object of a science. Given this duality, completing the scientific revolution by founding 'sociology' was not just a gain for knowledge. It would also transform all the other sciences by linking them up in a philosophical system endowed with a worshipful attitude towards this eminent object, an object whose inner development was represented by the rise of those same sciences. Positive science, from being the enemy of religion, would thus achieve the unachieved ambitions of Christianity to unite knowledge and faith in a truly systematic theology -- albeit one in which the supernatural theos was replaced by a 'relative' absolute which was located firmly in the world, which changed through time, and which was subject to all the laws of nature. Within the system, sociology (capping the 'objective' synthesis) and la morale (capping the 'subjective' synthesis), would provide a positive knowledge of what a scientific understanding revealed to be le vrai Dieu.

A crucial weakness of Comte's solution lay in the apriori concepts of 'society' and 'Humanity' introduced analogically into his social 'science' from contemporary biology. These relied on an organicist and developmental metaphors vulnerable to the scepticism of a phenomenally
based conception of science which Positivism itself methodologically endorsed. In effect, there was a gap between the real and ideal objects of sociology covered over in the way its knowledge object was conceptually constructed. The practical impossibility of the Positivist solution flowed from the same gap, which could only be closed on the plane of the real by actually instituting Humanity as a transcendent force within individual subjectivity. In the face of capitalist industrialization, whose techno-economic dynamic a bio-organismic conception of the social could not begin to grasp, such an attempt, through establishing a fully articulated and punctiliously ritualized Religion of Humanity, was doomed to sectarian marginality.

Durkheim's amendment of the Comteian program to some degree addressed these weaknesses. On the diachronic side, he ditched 'the law of three stages' and de-emphasized memorialization as a key component of the subjective maintenance of the transcendent reality to be constituted out of société. With regard to the new morale required by industrialism he privileged ritual over belief, and insisted that the conscience collective, as a homogenizing force for social unity, was necessarily reduced in role and scope. He also abandoned the philosophical unification of the sciences as a key component of that morale's supporting intellectual framework, which sociology alone would provide. He further amended the Comtean program by identifying la société with Kant's kingdom of ends, but shorn of its formalism by the way in which these ends themselves evolved together with the structure of la société. In place, then, of Comte's wholesale creation of a religion of Humanity, Durkheim's sociology would underwrite a solidary civic religion focused on the universal element of (each national) society, which was itself represented, given the differentiated structure of industrial society, in a socially and morally responsible individualism which respected the sanctity and autonomy of the person.
The rallying power of this elevated liberalism against the proto-fascist forces mobilized in the Dreyfus affair cannot be discounted. However, the semi-official status that Durkheimian sociology and sociolatry subsequently achieved also indicated a slackening of Positivism’s transcendent element. In shifting to a civisme that made fewer practical demands, he had done more than just abandon Comte’s authoritarian and baroque blueprint for the new order. He had also reduced the distance and tension between l’Humanité and present conditions, such that, in the Durkheimian translation, the contemporary form of the transcendent element of the social, the liberal-conservative logos articulated by the conscience collective, was all too readily identifiable with the ideal which actually existing industrial capitalist society gave itself. At the same time, Durkheim persisted in regarding la société, whether in ‘mechanical’ or ‘organic’ mode, as an integrated supra-individual entity. Not only was this to retain a suspect bio-organismic model of the social. It also continued in the Comteian track of figuring the transcendent call of the social in the mirror of a God which had itself been figured in the mirror of a perfectly harmonious and unified community. What I have called ‘the second death of God’ in post-Durkheimian French social theory has been the history of the collapse and disavowal of this idea.

Comte’s inadequate account of the relation between social being and the ‘social tie’, his conflation of the social with its reproduction, and his failure to produce an idea of Humanity’s actualization other than as reliant on a vast and self-abnegating effort to create and keep it going as an idea, already pointed to this collapse. Le Grand Étre, and the unfolding société it subjectively represented, were simulacra whose hollowness was hidden only by the convoluted rationalizations of his faith. The same anxieties about the fragility of Society as a socially constructed transcendent haunted Durkheim’s revised espousal of a morally individualist civic
religion; and these similarly pushed to the background questions about that category’s conceptual underpinnings (Marxist or Rousseauian ones, for example, about the alterity of the conscience collective) which it would have been dissolvent to pursue. But how could faith in Humanity or Society be disavowed if its sacral object practically anchored the Good? Or if sustaining that faith was all that stood in the way of actual social dissolution? For disavowal of the society-god to be something other than a despairing move it was not enough just to let the imaginary goose out of the imaginary bottle. It required more indeed than radicalizing the analysis so as to disentangle questions concerning the destiny of society under the techno-economic conditions of capitalism from that of society as such, though this was a necessary step. To affirm the death of the Society-God while still affirming a political commitment oriented towards the transcendental dimension of the social would necessitate, as well, a reconceptualization both of social being and of what might be regarded as transcendental ‘within’ it.

Negatively, this would mean sweeping aside a conception of the primordially social as a fused totality which behaved as a collective subject and which presented itself transcendentally in the image either of monarchical Authority or of a common body in which all were lovingly conjoined. Bataille’s critique of ‘sovereignty’, and his corresponding quest for an acephalic community [Bataille, 1985:xix-xx;178-181], pointed trenchantly in this direction. It implied a critique not only of medieval corporatism and its One True God, but also of classical sociology’s vision of a solidary société industrielle. Not to mention nationalisms of every stripe, and all nostalgia for pre-industrial gemeinschaft (the paradise that never existed) as well. A similar breadth of target is discernible in Althusser’s critique of social essentialism. His general model of ideology — a ‘specular’ structure in which the small ‘s’ subject is
‘interpellated’ by the projective big ‘S’ Subject — is illustrated by simultaneous reference to the Catholic mass and to the swelling themes of a universalistic bourgeois humanism propounded in French state schools.

For Althusser, though, ideology in some such form was functionally indispensable, both for individual formation and for social reproduction. Indeed, it was so not only in class societies, but in all social formations whatever. This in turn provided sociological warrant for halting the demolition of Comteian and Durkheimian socio-theology half-way. That is: in a compromise position which insisted on the necessity of an illusory (but socialist) humanism rigorously underwritten by a ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ conjoined with a critique of Society as an ‘expressive’ totality. There was no such compromise for Bataille. Meditating ceaselessly, and experimentally, on the cruel secret that underlies any unitary idea of society, he wrestled forthrightly with the disturbing implication which demolishing any social ontology of that kind held substantively for the left. This was the suspicion it brought towards the ‘community’ of commun-ism itself, whether as a feasible or even desirable emancipatory goal.

From Bataille, at the same time, derive two possible ways in which, from a radical perspective, the relation between the social and the divine might be affirmatively reconceived. One, building on gift, sacrifice and ‘general economy’, would be a sociologically inflected Dionysianism which — in Baudrillard’s défi — places its chips on the potential for ‘reversibility’ of ‘symbolic exchange’. A second, highlighted by Nancy, would be to rethink ‘community’ in terms other than, indeed in categorical opposition to, those of ‘communion’. For Bataille no doubt these ways were not distinct. Even as differentially developed we might see in them only a complementary distinction between the dynamic and static dimension of
Comte's god, respectively rendered into the spirits that attend (for Baudrillard) metamorphosis and (for Nancy) communication as the freedom to exist.

Regardless of their relations and differences, what is noteworthy about these two pathways is the similarity of their lines of flight. In relation to the deification of the social they each aim to overcome, theirs is an anti-immanentist immanentism. This is not as contradictory as it sounds. Baudrillard's 'symbolic' and Nancy's 'inoperative community', beckon to us from beyond the confines of a social world that always threatens to close in on itself. Yet against any such closure, they exercise a force, of a resistance and of an attraction, from within the very nature of social life itself. On the one hand, that is to say, both Baudrillard and Nancy repudiate, as hell on earth, any idealized figure of a socius that would present itself as a god to those bonded together by and within it. On the other, both are nonetheless immanentist with respect to their own, drastically revised, understandings of what inextricably belongs to the nature of social being. To this there is an equally important corollary. If, for Baudrillard and Nancy, adopting the perspective of 'general economy' and/or 'the between' shifts the social site of immanence, it also changes the meaning of the transcendent which might be represented as 'being' there. In contradistinction to the society-god of classical socio-theology, the equivalent category in postmodern socio-theology is be conceived as neither an essence nor an entity, nor indeed as anything lodged in human subjectivity. Nor, at the same time, can it be regarded as just another name for God. What Baudrillard affirms is a transformative fire which might permit the gods to 'appear'; for Nancy, it is the liberating air of a communing ex-position which opens us to that empty infinitude into which the abandoned and abandoning gods have definitively disappeared. In both cases, if such metaphors can be used this way at all, we have divinity of process, rather than divinity of being.
It may easily be said, of course, that the efforts by Nancy and Baudrillard to preserve a non-theistic space for the transcendental within social theory come at the price of depoliticising it; just as, by contrast, Althusser's Marxified Comte elevates political categories at the expense of being able to think the transcendental element to which the ideological dimension of that politics beckons. Thus neither Baudrillard's reflections on the altered social being of advanced (post-Fordist) capitalism, nor Nancy's rethinking of Bataille's 'community', nor Althusser's reflections on (socialist) humanism are sufficient in themselves. None give an adequate account of the relation between politics, social being, and the 'god' that attends the secular left. Nevertheless, each puts in play a set of considerations which are as absent in one another's thinking as they were in the pre-post-modern socio-theology of Comte and Durkheim. Given their incompatibilities, a synthesis would be hard to imagine. Taken as a whole, I would simply say, their thought gives us a field of questions, issues and dimensions, that cannot be avoided by those who might wish, from a resolutely 'this-worldly' perspective, to clarify the transcending ideological element within the project of an emancipatory social transformation, such as it might be conceived today.

As for the religious status of such thinking, whether Althusser, Baudrillard and Nancy continue not only the classical nineteenth century attempt to replace theology with sociology, but also ('a/theologically') the project of theology itself, may be debated. I am inclined to argue yes to the first and no to the second, in order to highlight the radical nature of the breach with any form of otherworldliness which classical sociology attempted, but was not able to make complete. To define this whole thought adventure from the base-line of
traditional theology (as does John Milbank) is doubtless illuminating. But it runs the risk of a reduction in which the religious preoccupations of secular reason are seen only as flawed, aberrant or shamefaced versions of the real (theological) thing. In an age when, in common opposition to both religious fundamentalisms and to the closed horizons of late capitalist culture, a new dialogue is developing between ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’ on the ground of contemporary theory [Blond:1998], what we need to develop, perhaps, is a more agnostic vocabulary, the sense of a discursive field that includes theology and all its post-theological continuations. This would make it easier to engage substantive religio-political issues across the theistic divide. All that is clear is that the ‘French’ project is not over, and that efforts to provide a conceptually adequate intellectum for a redemptive but politically embedded faith in collective human possibilities will retain their currency, and continue to press for better questions and better answers, so long as some such faith continues to be generated out of the socio-historical process itself.
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