

Module-2

AUGUSTE COMTE



(1798-1857)

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Isidore-Auguste-Marie-François-Xavier Comte is regarded as the founders of Sociology. Comte's father parents were strongly royalist and deeply sincere Roman Catholics. But their sympathies were at odds with the republicanism and skepticism that swept through France in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Comte resolved these conflicts at an early age by rejecting Roman Catholicism and royalism alike. Later on he was influenced by several important French political philosophers of the 18th century—such as Montesquieu, the Marquis de Condorcet, A.-R.-J. Turgot, and Joseph de Maistre. Comte's most important acquaintance in Paris was Henri de Saint-Simon, a French social reformer and one of the founders of socialism, who was the first to clearly see the importance of economic organization in modern society.

The major works of Auguste Comte are as follows:

1. The Course on Positive Philosophy (1830-1842)
2. Discourse on the Positive Spirit (1844)
3. A General View of Positivism (1848)
4. Religion of Humanity (1856)

Theory of Positivism

As a philosophical ideology and movement positivism first assumed its distinctive features in the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who named the systematized science of sociology. It then developed through several stages known by various names, such as Empiricriticism, Logical Positivism and Logical Empiricism and finally in the mid-20th century flowed into the movement known as Analytic and Linguistic philosophy. In its basic ideological posture, positivism is worldly, secular, anti-theological and anti meta-physical. Comte's positivism was posited on the assemtation of a so-called law of three stages of intellectual development. There is a parallel, as Comte saw it, between the evolution of thought patterns in the entire history of man; on the one hand and in the history of an individual's development from infancy to adulthood on the other.

Positivism is a term which designates a philosophical tendency oriented around natural science and striving for a united view of the world of phenomena both physical and human, through the applications of the methods and the extension of the results whereby the natural sciences have

attained their unrivaled position in the modern world. From the point of view of methodology the term 'positive' is conceived in polemical opposition to the metaphysical abstractions of traditional philosophy.

It deals with the application of scientific method by natural scientists and by the sociologists in understanding human-behaviour. The idea of positivism can be traced back to Bacon, Berkeley, Locke and Hume. Before Comte, Saint Simon also advocated positivism. He proposed scientific reorganization of society and promotion of science, since he believed that progress depended on it. The idea of positivism was present in an embryonic form in the mind of Saint Simon and Comte expanded this idea. Positivism brought a revolution or renaissance in the field of social science. It combined a belief in progress and a passion for serving humanity. It is based on the belief that a scientific analysis of history would show the way to cure for the ills of society.

The characteristics of positivism are

- (a) Science is the only valid knowledge.
- (b) Fact is the object of knowledge.
- (c) Philosophy does not possess a method different from science.
- (d) The task of philosophy is to find the general principles common to all sciences and to use these principles as guides to human conduct and as the basis of social organization.
- (e) Positivism denies intuition, prior reasoning, theological and metaphysical knowledge.

Comte used positivism as a weapon against the negative philosophy prevalent before the French Revolution. That negative philosophy was more concerned with emotional than practical questions. Comte regarded such speculations as negative, since it was neither constructive nor practical. As an alternative, Comte invented positivism which remains concerned with the questions about how things are in reality. Comte's positivism is described in several ways. One salient point is that it is scientific. Science should not be confused with empiricisms or mere collection of facts. Comte believed that the whole universe is governed by natural laws and these laws could be learned through the method of science. Positive knowledge is based on experience and considers only real phenomena. Comte did not deny the existence of unknown, but positivism was no way concerned with the supernatural. Chambliss has presented the essence of Comtean positivism in this following words, "positivism is not fatalistic, or optimistic or materialistic. It is concerned with the real, rather than fanciful, useful rather than all knowledge."

Social Statics and Social Dynamics

The study of social statics and dynamics are the two fundamentals of Comte's study of the organic phase or social stability. The study of social statics and dynamics are not two distinct

classes of facts but are two components of a theory. These studies are not separate but are complementary to each other as static is the study when society is in equilibrium and dynamics is the study of evolution which is a slow and steady process. This slow and steady process can only occur during the phase in which the society is in equilibrium and not disequilibrium or critical phase. Despite the fact that it seemed desirable for methodological and heuristic purposes to separate the study of statics and dynamics, in empirical reality they were correlative. Comte believed that social structures could not be reduced to the properties of individuals. Rather, social structures are composed of other structures and can be understood only as the properties of, and relations among, these other structures. Social static focuses on how order is maintained in the society and social dynamic focuses on how society changes over time.

Comte separated social statics from social dynamics. Social statics are concerned with the ways in which the parts of a social system (social structures) interact with one another, as well as the functional relationships between the parts and to the social system as a whole. Comte therefore focused his social statics on the individual, as well as such collective phenomena as the family, religion, language, and the division of labor. Comte placed greater emphasis on the study of social dynamics, or social change. His theory of social dynamics is founded on the law of the three stages; i.e., the evolution of society is based on the evolution of mind through the theological, metaphysical, and positivist stages. He saw social dynamics as a process of progressive evolution in which people become cumulatively more intelligent and in which altruism eventually triumphs over egoism. This process is one that people can modify or accelerate, but in the end the laws of progressive development dictate the development of society. Comte's research on social evolution focused on Western Europe, which he viewed as the most highly developed part of the world during his times. This distinction between social statics and social dynamics is one of his lasting contributions to sociology. His aim was to create a naturalistic science of society, which would explain the past development of mankind and predict its future course.

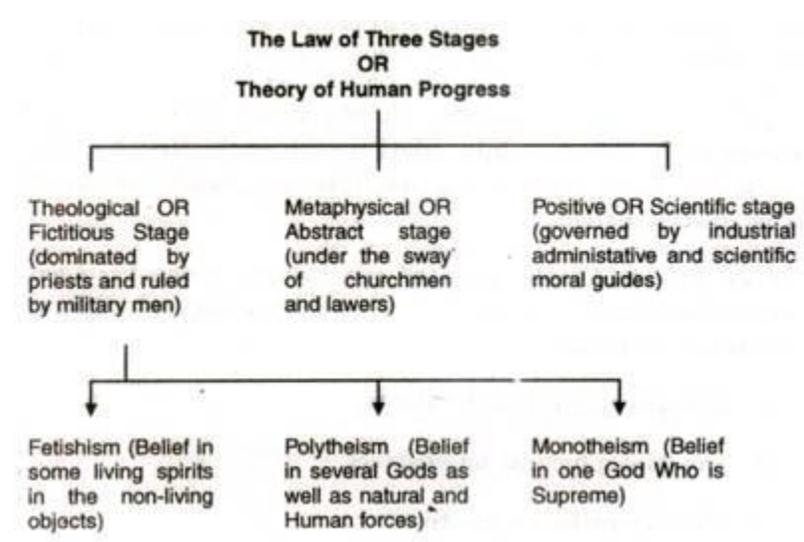
Law of three Stages

The Law of three stages is the corner stone of Auguste Comte's approach. Comte's ideas relating to the law of three stages reveal that man is becoming more and more rational and scientific in his approach by gradually giving up speculations, imagination etc. He has shown that there is a close association between intellectual evolution and social progress. The law of three stages is the three stages of mental and social development. It is the co-ordination of feeling, thought and action in individuals and society. There are three important aspects of our nature. Such as our feelings, our thought and our actions.

According to Comte, each of our leading conceptions-each branch of our knowledge passes successively through different theoretical conditions:

1. The Theological or fictitious,
2. The Metaphysical or abstract,
3. The Scientific or positive.

Comte considered his law of three stages based upon belief in social evolution to be the most important. There has been an evolution in the human thinking, so that each succeeding stage is superior to and more evolved than the preceding stage. It can hardly be questioned that Comte's law of three stages has a strong mentalist or idealistic bias. He co-related each mental age of mankind with its characteristic accompanying social organization and type of political dominance. This law appeared in, the year 1822 in his book Positive Philosophy.



The Theological or Fictitious stage:

The theological stage is the first and it characterised the world prior to 1300. Here all theoretical conceptions, whether general or special bear a supernatural impress. At this level of thinking there is a marked lack of logical and orderly thinking. Overall the theological thinking implies belief in super natural power. This type of thinking is found among the primitive races. In theological stage, all natural phenomena and social events were explained in terms of super natural forces and deities, which ultimately explaining everything as the product of God's will. This stage is dominated by priests and ruled by military men. Human mind is dominated by sentiments, feelings and emotions. Every phenomenon was believed to be the result of immediate actions of super-natural beings. Explanations take the form of myths concerning spirits and super natural beings. Man seeks the essential nature of all beings, first and final causes, origins and purposes of all effects and the overriding belief that all things are caused by super natural beings. Theology means discourse in religion. Religion dominates in this state of development. This state is characterized by conquest. The theological—military society was

basically dying. Priests were endowed with intellectual and spiritual power, while military exercised temporal authority.

In theological stage, soldiers, kings, priests etc. were given respect in the society. Everything was considered in terms of family welfare. Love and affection bonded the members of a family together. In this stage social organization is predominantly of a military nature. It is the military power which provides the basis of social stability and conquest which enlarges the bounds of social life.

Intellectual phase	Material phase	Type of social unit	Type of order	Prevailing sentiment
Theological phase	Military	The Family	Domestic Order	Attachment & Affection
Meta-physical Phase	Legalistic	The State	Collective Order	Veneration (Awe or Respect)
Positive Phase	Industrial	Race (Humanity)	Universal Order	Benevolence

Metaphysical or Abstract Stage:

The metaphysical stage started about 1300 A.D. and was short lived roughly till 1800. It forms a link and is mongrel and transitional. It is almost an extension of theological thinking. It corresponds very roughly to the middle Ages and Renaissance. It was under the sway of churchmen and lawyers. This stage was characterised by Defence. Here mind pre-supposes abstract forces. ‘Meta’ means beyond and physical means material world. Supernatural being is replaced by supernatural force. This is in form of essences, ideas and forms. Rationalism started growing instead of imagination. Rationalism states that God does not stand directly behind every phenomenon. Pure reasoning insists that God is an Abstract being. Under metaphysical thinking it is believed that an abstract power or force guides and determines the events in the world. Metaphysical thinking discards belief in concrete God. It is characterised by the dominance of “ratiocination.” In metaphysical stage speculative thought is unchecked by any other principle. Human body was considered to be the spark of divinity. This kind of thinking corresponded with the legal type of society; and law, lawyers and churchmen dominated the society. Law remained under the control of the state.

The Positive or Scientific stage:

Finally in 1800 the world entered the positivistic stage. The positive stage represents the scientific way of thinking. Positive thought ushers in an industrial age. The positive or scientific knowledge is based upon facts and these facts are gathered by observation and experience. All phenomena are seen as subject to natural laws that can be investigated by observations and experimentation. The dawn of the 19th Century marked the beginning of the positive stage in which observation predominates over imagination. All theoretical concepts have become positive. The concept of God is totally vanished from human mind. Human mind tries to establish cause and affect relationship. Mind is actually in search of final and ultimate cause. The scientific thinking is thoroughly rational and there is no place for any belief or superstition in it. This stage is governed by industrial administrators and scientific moral guides. At this stage of thought, men reject all supposed explanations in terms either of Gods or essences as useless. They cease to seek 'original causes' or 'final ends'. This stage is dominated by the entrepreneurs, technologists etc. Unit of society was confined to the mankind as a whole, vision of mind was broad and there is no parochial feeling. Kindness, sympathy etc. to the cause of humanity prevailed. This is the ultimate stage in a series of successive transformations. The new system is built upon the destruction of the old; with evolution, come progress and emancipation of human mind. Human history is the history of a single man, Comte, because the progress of the man mind gives unity to the entire history of society. For Comte, all knowledge is inescapably human knowledge; a systematic ordering of propositions concerning our human experience of the world.