

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

孔德早期政治著作选

Comte

Early Political
Writings

Edited by

H. S. JONES

中国政法大学出版社

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AUGUSTE COMTE

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Writings*

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

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University of Manchester

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COMTE
Early Political Writings

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剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Introduction

I

By a happy coincidence, the publication of this edition of Comte's early social and political writings coincides with his bicentenary. But, two centuries after his birth, Comte is rarely encountered at first hand by today's readers. He still enjoys an important place in the history of ideas – as Saint-Simon's ablest disciple, as a formative influence on John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic*, and as the author of the doctrine of positivism which, a generation after his death, shaped the work of the founding fathers of the Third Republic in France. Above all, he coined the word 'sociology', and is still commemorated as one of the makers of that discipline. He inaugurated an important sociological tradition – best represented by Durkheim – which took consensus, rather than class conflict, as the discipline's central focus. But few read Comte today, and those that do tend to encounter him in such a ludicrous form – the founder of a secular religion of humanity, with himself at its head as the self-appointed high priest – that the experience brings them no closer to an understanding of the potent influence his ideas exerted in the nineteenth century.

Comte had a host of disciples in his own century, especially after his death; not only or even mainly in France, but dispersed as far apart as Newcastle and Rio de Janeiro. His followers were to be instrumental in the establishment of republics not only in France but also in Brazil, Portugal and Czechoslovakia. The first objective for a modern edition of his writings must be to impress upon

readers some sense of the qualities that enabled Comte to speak so powerfully to his own age. The absurdity of many of the liturgical and doctrinal prescriptions of his later works is so blatant as to obscure the force of his more fundamental ideas. But one obstacle that prevents the modern mind 'accessing' Comte is the sheer scale of his major works: the six volumes of the *Positive Philosophy* and the four volumes of the *Positive Politics* seem destined to gather dust in any modern library. Yet it was precisely the encyclopaedic character of his mind that spoke most eloquently to the nineteenth century – an age that thirsted for new certainties and systematic doctrine.

This is the main reason for turning to Comte's youthful writings, and for constructing a presentation of his work around the 'fundamental essay' he wrote, initially under Saint-Simon's direction, in 1822–4. The *Plan of the Scientific Work Necessary for the Reorganization of Society* has a number of advantages for the modern editor, but the main one is that it combines brevity with encyclopaedic ambition. It does not, to be sure, aim to present the whole of Comte's doctrine: it was conceived as the first part of a much longer work which he did not complete. But it was Comte's first attempt to expound a systematic doctrine. And he continued to regard it as a fundamental work, an essay which set the agenda for his whole intellectual career. It was the work that established him as a major intellectual force, for though a young man's essay, it circulated widely among the intellectual elite of the time. It was distributed to prominent liberals of the stature of Constant and Guizot, Sismondi, Dunoyer and Say; and while Constant was critical of Comte's illiberalism, Guizot and others were deeply impressed. Furthermore, Comte's first disciple, Gustave d'Eichthal, took it upon himself to distribute the essay internationally, and brought it to the attention of both Hegel and Mill. Both read the essay and found much to commend in it. The essay was written at a time when Comte's concerns were at the heart of European political theory. This was not always the case. Later in life, towards the end of the composition of the *Positive Philosophy*, Comte subjected himself to a regime of 'cerebral hygiene': he vowed to preserve the purity of his intellectual vision by insulating himself from the ideas of contemporary thinkers. This regime necessarily had the effect of cutting him off from the European mainstream. But in the 1820s he was addressing questions that were central to European political theory,

which was preoccupied, above all, with this question: how can any kind of political community be forged in a society peopled by individuals shorn of traditional social bonds? In France, more specifically, the most urgent question of all was how to 'close the revolution' – how to construct a new form of legitimacy that would transcend the conflicts that had plagued France since 1789 – and Comte constructed one of the most arresting and distinctive answers to that question.

This is the pre-eminent reason why the time is right for a new appreciation of Comte's place in the intellectual history of early nineteenth-century France. For the tradition of enquiry concerned with closing the revolution has been brilliantly excavated in recent years by François Furet and his collaborators, who have set out to build a decisively new alternative to the 'Marxist' paradigm of French revolutionary studies upon a recovery of France's lost liberal tradition. Precisely because Furet's ideological commitment was to the rediscovery of such liberal writers as Constant, Staël, Guizot and Tocqueville, he has given only fleeting attention to Comte. But if historians need a comprehensive 'mapping' of the exceptionally rich debates in France in the 1820s, we must give due space to the terrain occupied by Saint-Simon and Comte. For their approach rested on an original synthesis of the conservatives' sense of the systemic nature of the social order with the liberals' understanding of the revolution as the product of long-term and hence irreversible social change. Their sense of fundamental historical change, which they shared with the liberals, precluded an acceptance of the counter-revolutionary project. But because, like the conservatives, they saw that society was an organic whole, they were suspicious of the liberals' fondness for constitutional fixes: Comte in particular maintained that the practical and political work of reconstruction must build upon a prior theoretical work of reconstruction, which would depend crucially upon the formation of new kinds of intellectual and spiritual authority. That, in short, is why the positivist intellectual system should be seen as the realization of what was, from the outset, a political project.

II

This edition presents the *Plan* as part of a collection of Comte's early writings, spanning the period 1819–28. This corpus of texts

is pre-selected, in the sense that these were the texts that Comte himself chose to reprint as an appendix to the final volume of his *Positive Politics* in 1854, and which at one time he had hoped to append to his earlier *Positive Philosophy*. This collection therefore possesses a sort of retrospective authorial approbation. At the same time it is worth commenting on why Comte chose to reprint these texts. His aim was to rebut the allegation that the *Positive Politics*, with its fondness for the elevation of positivism into a secular religion, constituted a betrayal of the 'scientific' character of Comte's first system, as he expounded it in the *Positive Philosophy*. The appendix was intended, Comte informed his readers, 'to demonstrate the perfect harmony of the efforts that characterized my youth with the works accomplished by my maturity' (*Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 197). What Comte meant by this remark – here anticipating subsequent lines of criticism developed most notably by Emile Littré and J. S. Mill – was that these early essays, considered together, displayed 'the necessary relation between the philosophical base and the religious construction' in his thought (*Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 197). The latter was not a late accretion, but held a central place in Comte's thought from the outset, as was demonstrated above all by the essays dealing with the 'spiritual power' and its necessity in modern society.

Before we proceed to a detailed examination of the early essays and their significance, we need to begin with a brief survey of Comte's system, as it developed in his two great multi-volume treatises. In these works, Comte addressed the political crisis of the age of revolution, and he analysed that crisis as, at root, an intellectual and spiritual one. He explained the political disorder of the age in terms of the spiritual void that had afflicted Europe ever since the fragmentation of western Christendom at the Reformation. This was, no doubt, an egregious instance of overdetermination – cause and effect were separated by two centuries; and in practice Comte plugged the holes in his argument by invoking the corrosive influence of Enlightenment philosophy, which completed the work of the Reformation. If political unity were to be recaptured, it had to be preceded by the establishment of a new spiritual unity; and Comte's central contention was that the only possible foundation for that spiritual unity was the authority of the positive method.

It has frequently been asserted, most famously by John Stuart Mill, that a wide gulf separated the Comte of the *Positive Philosophy* from the later Comte of the *Positive Politics*. The later Comte – so the argument goes – betrayed the rationalist objectives of his earlier work, and elevated imagination, emotion and the ‘social sentiment’ above reason. Positivism ceased to be a philosophy and was transformed into a secular religion, in which the worship of humanity supplanted that of the Christian God. Comte even prescribed in notorious detail the trappings of his religion of humanity: a hierarchy of priests, with Comte at the head; a calendar of positivist saints; social sacraments; and quasi-religious festivals celebrating social relations.

There is no doubt that Comte’s emphasis did shift in his later work. The priority he now attached to sentiment rather than to reason was quite new, and overturned explicit assertions in his earlier work. But Mill’s interpretation as a whole is difficult to sustain. Comte always insisted on the necessary interdependence of *Positive Philosophy* and *Positive Politics*; and by his lights it is easy to see why. The former alone could not serve as a principle of unity, for as we shall see Comte denied the objective unity of knowledge. It was only in the subjective synthesis of positive knowledge in its application for the good of humanity – that is, in the polity, and in the formation of the new spiritual power – that positivism acquired a unifying power. And it is Comte’s early essays that demonstrate that his objectives were from the outset spiritual and political rather than narrowly philosophical. From the start, the exposition of the positivist philosophical system and the formation of positive sociology were conceived as means to the development of a positive spiritual power which would serve as the centrepiece of a positive polity.

III

The biographical significance of these early texts lies above all in the fact that they coincided with Comte’s break with his mentor, Saint-Simon; indeed, it was the ‘fundamental essay’ and its publication that played a critical role in the rupture of the relationship of master and disciple, since Comte felt, with some cause, that

Saint-Simon was unwilling to give him sufficient credit for the authorship of the text.

It was in 1817 that Comte met Saint-Simon, one of the intellectual geniuses of the age of revolution and reconstruction. The moment was opportune for both men. Saint-Simon had just lost the services of his valued secretary and collaborator, Augustin Thierry, who was soon to make a name for himself as one of the luminaries in France's emergent school of liberal historiography. Saint-Simon was notoriously difficult as an employer, and it was his authoritarianism that finally overcame Thierry's patience. The loss was a grievous one, for Saint-Simon, possessed as he was of one of the most brilliant and fertile intellectual imaginations of the age, was almost wholly lacking in any sort of talent for organization or system. He needed able collaborators who understood the train of his thought and could weld his sparkling insights into some kind of order. This was Thierry's gift; still more so was it Comte's. The young Comte, meanwhile, had been searching for a direction to his career ever since his dismissal from the Ecole Polytechnique, along with the entire student body, in April 1816. The opportunity to work for Saint-Simon put an end to sixteen months of uncertainty in his life.

The intellectual legacy Saint-Simon was to bequeath to Comte was a composite one, 'a bricolage of the organic social theory of the theocrats with the scientism of the Enlightenment, in the guise of a systematic general doctrine that would finally bring the moral and political crisis of the revolutionary period to a close' (Baker, 'Closing the French Revolution', p. 329). Saint-Simon had been deeply impressed by his encounter with the *Idéologues*, those liberal heirs of the Enlightenment who were the dominant intellectual voice in France between the fall of the Jacobins and the advent of Napoleon. They taught that the key to rational social reorganization lay in science, and specifically in knowledge of the physiological generation of ideas, which would become the foundation of a science of morality and politics. Under their influence, Saint-Simon conceived the project of deploying the physical sciences as a basis for the reconstruction of society. Meanwhile, a celebrated encounter with Mme de Staël, herself close to the *Idéologues*, both reinforced the notion that the route to certainty in politics lay in the application of 'the philosophy of the positive sciences' to the moral and political

sciences, and introduced a number of new and fertile ideas into Saint-Simon's thinking. These included a concern with the essential role for an intellectual elite in the scientific reconstruction of society: for Staël, men of letters must constitute a sort of 'lay ministry' to guide the people and to defend them against tyranny. She also awakened in Saint-Simon an awareness of the religious basis of social order. This made him receptive to the influence of the conservative social theorists Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald. Maistre's emphasis on the need for systematic doctrine as the foundation for a stable social order, together with Bonald's notion of society as an organic whole, together constituted the second great formative influence on the development of Saint-Simon's thinking.

These lines of thought were developed by Saint-Simon in a series of brilliant works which were, however, wildly disorganized and largely unread before the advent of Thierry, who served as his secretary from 1814 to 1817. Under his influence, Saint-Simon wrote much more lucidly and with greater literary success, for instance in his *De la réorganisation de la société européenne*, published in October 1814. He also moved much closer to the liberals, whom he had formerly looked upon with a measure of contempt. His works were favourably reviewed in the liberal press, and under the influence of the liberals he became increasingly interested in political economy. It was through the influence of Jean-Baptiste Say, the pre-eminent French economist of the time, that the word *industriel* entered Saint-Simon's vocabulary. The new direction to Saint-Simon's thought was marked by his foundation of the periodical *L'Industrie* in 1816. Its subscribers included eminent scientists, businessmen, bankers, peers and deputies, as well as Say himself. The nineteenth century, Saint-Simon declared, was destined to be 'the industrial century'.

Most of the central themes in Comte's philosophy can be found in Saint-Simon's work. Already in Saint-Simon we find the argument that social reconstruction depended upon intellectual reconstruction, and that the foundation of this intellectual reconstruction must be found in the application of scientific method. Further, we can find the seeds of Comte's doctrine of the spiritual power in the Saint-Simonian notion that in a rationally ordered modern society public opinion must be directed by an intellectual elite of scientists. Many commentators have inferred that Comte's significance lay not

in his intellectual originality but in his skill as an expositor. This was the position taken by the Saint-Simonians after Comte had broken with them: for them, Comte's early work was only a commentary on Saint-Simon's *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*. But this inference would be misleading for a number of reasons.

The first is that, though Comte was not twenty years old when he entered Saint-Simon's employment, his mind was far from being *tabula rasa* at that time. Already he was dividing his reading between two fields of study, the physical sciences on the one hand and the moral and political sciences on the other. In the former he was reading such authors as Monge and Lagrange, while in the latter he was considering the works of Montesquieu and Condorcet, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith (*Correspondance générale* 1, 19). In other words, he was already equipping himself with the intellectual artillery with which, five years later, he would tackle his 'fundamental essay'; in Lévy-Bruhl's words, Comte 'already possessed a large portion of the materials for his future system' (Lévy-Bruhl, *The Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, p. 6). Indeed, though we do not know the precise circumstances that brought Comte and Saint-Simon together, there is a suggestion that it was the convergence of their ideas that was responsible for their encounter, rather than vice versa (Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, p. 101; Gouhier, *La Jeunesse d'Auguste Comte* III, 168-70). The second point is that many of the ideas for which Comte was indebted to Saint-Simon can themselves be traced back to Mme de Staël, to Condorcet or to Turgot. Thirdly, the works produced under Saint-Simon's name during the period of his collaboration with Comte were to a large extent Comte's: he was employed to synthesize his master's ideas, but his role went far beyond that. It was he who undertook the hard work of literary and intellectual craftsmanship, and it was he, too, who contributed greatly to shaping Saint-Simon's intellectual agenda. Indeed, it may be no coincidence that, just as the advent of Thierry coincided with a redirection of Saint-Simon's work, so the same was true of the arrival of Comte: the new working relationship coincided with Saint-Simon's abandonment of his growing preoccupation with the politics of production as he reverted to his earlier concern with the spiritual power.

We are dealing, then, with a case of mutual influence rather than a one-way relationship. Comte was open to Saint-Simon's influence

because Saint-Simon provided what he was looking for: chiefly, he suggested the possibility of synthesizing his twin interests of the natural sciences and the moral and political sciences into a single project entailing the creation of a social science and a scientific polity. But Comte provided the methodical rigour and concern for system which Saint-Simon lacked. Comte was not by nature a searcher after novelty but a searcher after system: he was a hedgehog and not a fox, he knew 'one big thing' and not 'many little things', and Sir Isaiah Berlin's categories might have been invented to describe the contrasting intellectual gifts of Comte and his mentor. And it was the systematic credentials of positivism that largely contributed to its sustained appeal in the nineteenth century. It is in that sense that it is indisputably true to say that without Comte there would have been no positivism.

IV

What clearly was central to Comte's project, in his early writings and throughout his career, was the idea of subjecting moral and political phenomena to scientific investigation. But this idea in itself was by no means new. It had been a central ambition of the thinkers of the Enlightenment, especially in France and Scotland. In France, thinkers in the Physiocratic tradition, such as Turgot, deployed the idea of the rational cognition of the natural order of society as a corrective to the disorder and injustice produced by the arbitrary assertion of political will. In the era of the French Revolution, Sieyes coined the term 'science sociale'; and the idea of a rational social science that would serve as the basis for reconstruction was a familiar theme to the members of the Société de 1789 and to readers of the *Journal d'instruction sociale* – in both of which Sieyes and Condorcet were prime movers. After Thermidor, Condorcet's disciples the Idéologues used the newly founded Class of Moral and Political Sciences at the Institut de France as a forum in which to develop their ideas for a rational reconstruction of society on the basis of a scientific study of the origins of ideas.

Saint-Simon and Comte owed much to Condorcet and his understanding of what a science of society had to look like. They agreed, above all, that it must be progressive, and founded on a history of civilization. But they also wanted to move beyond Condorcet:

indeed, Comte's *opuscule fondamentale* was originally conceived as an attempt to rewrite Condorcet's celebrated *Esquisse* along truly positive lines (Baker, 'Closing the French Revolution'). If we are to appreciate how Saint-Simon and Comte moved beyond the conception of social science inherited from the Enlightenment, we have to understand that they saw themselves as *synthesizing* the ideas of Condorcet and the *Idéologues* on the one hand with those of the conservatives Maistre and Bonald on the other. This synthesis generated a wholly new conception of how a progressive social science could serve as the basis for a process of social reconstruction which would effectively 'close' the revolution.

Saint-Simon and Comte had come to see Enlightenment philosophy itself as radically corrosive of social order. In its negative aspects it had been invaluable in sweeping away the relics of the old order; but it possessed no positive, constructive capacity of its own, as the entire experience of the revolutionary era demonstrated. Its defects were most apparent in Condorcet's sweeping denunciations of the Middle Ages from the absolute standpoint of the inexorable progress of the human mind. Through reading the authors of the counter-revolutionary school, Saint-Simon and Comte came to see medieval Europe in a new, more positive light, and came to see that institutions that were good in one era could be bad in another, and beliefs that had once been true could become the errors of a succeeding age. This historical relativism, amounting to the doctrine that all knowledge is relative to a particular stage in the development of civilization, contrasted starkly with Condorcet's unilinear vision of history as the progressive victory of truth over error. It was this *organic* conception of the stages of history that constituted the chief novelty of the positive conception of social science.

Comte shared Maistre's and Bonald's understanding of the structural features that any stable social order had to possess: above all, there had to be an authoritative moral and intellectual order which would serve as the indispensable foundation for social order. But he disagreed with them on the substantive question of what distinctive features a modern social order must possess. For all the complexity of their thought, Maistre and Bonald believed that only one kind of social order was possible, namely one based on church, king and landed aristocracy. The French Revolution, then, did not entail the formation of a new kind of society, but was simply the dissolution