

REVIEW ESSAY

Positive Thinking: Social Science, Sociology and the Intellectual Legacy of Auguste Comte

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Johannes Feichtinger, Franz L. Fillafer and Jan Surnam (eds.), *The Worlds of Positivism: A Global Intellectual History, 1770–1930* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2018)

Michel Bourdeau, Mary Pickering and Warren Schmaus (eds.), *Love, Order, and Progress: The Science, Philosophy and Politics of Auguste Comte* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017)

Christian Rubio, *Krausism and the Spanish Avant-Garde: The Impact of Philosophy on National Culture* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2017)

How can you know something that cannot be seen, heard, tasted, touched or smelled? The question applies most obviously to things like rights, justice or freedom because they do not seem to be as easy to locate or describe as things that can be known by the senses. Part of the point of positivism was that under certain conditions they can. To Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the movement's founder, it was possible to have as positive a knowledge of rights, justice or freedom as whatever was needed to know a cat or a mat. Positivism could, therefore, have as much to do with morality as with epistemology and as strong a concern with values and beliefs as with facts and certainty. The resulting capacity to move seamlessly between the external and the internal and from the physical to the moral was one reason why, together with the word “sociology,” the other word that came to be associated most widely and durably with positivism was another of Comte's coinages, “altruism.”¹ Positivism, in short, was the science—or knowledge—of altruism.

¹On altruism and positivism see, notably, Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism* (Oxford, 2008). Dixon's book is one of several recent contributions to positivist studies singled out by the editors of *Love, Order, and Progress* in their introduction to the collection. The others are Mike Gane, *Auguste Comte* (London, 2006); Jean-François Braunstein, *La philosophie de la médecine d'Auguste Comte: Vaches carnivores, vierge mère et morts vivants* (Paris, 2009); Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850–1920* (Cambridge, 2010); Claudio di Boni, *Storia di un'utopia: la religione dell'Umanità di Comte e la sua circolazione nel mondo* (Milan, 2013); and Annie Petit, *Le système*

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Put like this and setting aside, at least for the time being, the problem of deciding where or how to draw a line between the external and the internal that John Stuart Mill was one of the first to highlight, it is not hard to see why positivism acquired so broad and deep a following in so many parts of the world.² The scale and scope of that following are covered very fully in *The Worlds of Positivism*, the collection edited by Johannes Feichtinger, Franz Fillafer and Jan Surnam, with an array of chapters on positivism in India, Brazil, Turkey, Spain, Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia and Sweden, as well as its better-known centres of support in France and Spain (Britain, oddly, is largely off the map, or perhaps has been represented somewhat obliquely by Mill).³ This emphasis on spatial dissemination makes the collection an illuminating counterpart to the one edited by Michel Bourdeau, Mary Pickering and Warren Schmaus, where, in eight essays by an established group of leading Comte scholars, the emphasis falls more fully on Comte himself and, as its title indicates, on the mixture of emotion and rationality that Comte intended positivism to become. The combination of love, order and progress that has been used to give this collection its title helps to underline the fact that if positivism was the science of altruism, then altruism was rational—or targeted—love.

In itself, the idea of rational love has a long pedigree. In a remote sense, it was connected to the controversial seventeenth-century theological concept of general grace, a concept used by heterodox Calvinists and Jansenists to explain, they claimed, how it was possible for fallen humans to respond positively to some types of human action rather than others.⁴ General grace, in this sense, had an emotional, aesthetic or epicurean dimension that fitted the embodied character of human nature in ways that were unavailable to purely spiritual beings like angels or, most importantly, fallen angels, like Satan. To someone like Comte, who grew up in what was then the largely Protestant southern French city of Montpellier, the concept could still be associated with the thought of the early eighteenth-century French Protestant theologian and moralist Jacques Abbadie, whose book *L'art de se connaître soi-même* (*The Art of Knowing Oneself, or An Enquiry into the Sources of Morality*, as the contemporary English translation was entitled) was reprinted regularly over much of the eighteenth century.⁵ Comte's use of the concept of rational love was, however, considerably different from earlier usage, partly because of its focus on common feeling and collective action rather than on their purely individual counterparts and partly, too because, in keeping with this common or collective orientation, its aim was to integrate rather than to

d'Auguste Comte: De la science à la religion par la philosophie (Paris, 2016). Mention should also be made of Laurent Fedi, ed., *La réception germanique d'Auguste Comte*, Cahiers philosophique de Strasbourg, 35 (Strasbourg, 2014), Andrew Wernick, ed., *The Anthem Companion to Auguste Comte* (London, 2017); and, recently, the issue of *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 190 (2020), entitled *Autour de Comte et Saint-Simon: Reconfigurations socio-religieuses post-révolutionnaires*.

²For Mill's assessment of Comte see John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (London, 1865).

³On positivism in Britain see, recently, Matthew Wilson, "British Comtism and Modernist Design," *Modern Intellectual History* 17/4 (2020), 1009–40.

⁴On the concept of general grace see Pierre Nicole, *Traité de la grâce générale* (Paris, 1715) ; and Jacques-Joseph Duguet, *Recueil de quatre opuscules fort importants de feu M. l'abbé Duguet* (Utrecht, 1737).

⁵On Abbadie see Isaac Nakhimovsky, "The Enlightened Epicureanism of Jacques Abbadie: *L'art de se connaître soi-même* and the Morality of Self-Interest," *History of European Ideas* 29/1 (2003), 1–14.

differentiate. In this sense, and in keeping with the concept of sociology, positivism was the science of common values and shared beliefs. As with altruism, this is an aspect of Comte's legacy which is not obviously compatible with the aura of scientism that still hangs over the history and historiography of positivism.

The scientific aura is not, however, entirely wrong because positivism was certainly intended to be a science, but in the old, nonscientific, sense of the term. Even with this qualification, however, it is still a somewhat misleading label. This is because positivism began as an attempt to understand the extraordinary and exceptional rather than the ordinary and regular, or, more specifically, to make sense of the capacity for self-abnegation or self-sacrifice that, almost by definition, altruism implies. Comte was fascinated by the French Revolution. In his case, however, the fascination was not so much with why noble ideals and high hopes had turned into violent conflict and global war, but with why, particularly between 1793 and 1795—and despite the violent conflict and global war—the first French republic had survived. To Comte, the fact that men and women were willing to die for something called a republic or for a value known as liberty was the mystery, but also the fact, that called for explanation.

Positivism, from this perspective, began with Comte's interest in trying to explain things like the republican *levée en masse* of 1792 or the abiding attraction of the political career of the Jacobin leader Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just, rather than with a number of more familiar stereotypes centered on the laws of history and the principles of progress. In this respect, the activity of the Jacobin club was exemplary because, as a purely voluntary association that was external to state power, it was, as Comte put it, the first to reveal “the fundamental division between the moral and political government of modern societies” and the first to point the way towards the synthesis of organized power and popular morality that was the hallmark of modern politics.⁶ The way to get there was likely to be abrupt and dictatorial, which was why Comte was prepared to endorse Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's coup d'état in 1851 as well as the centralized power of the Russian tsar. The politics of substitutionism began, it could be said, with positivism. Every “true philosopher,” Comte wrote, “should always have a particular regret for the loss of the eminent Saint-Just, a noble young man who became an almost voluntary victim of his blind devotion to an ambitious sophist unworthy of such rare admiration.”⁷ In this respect, Saint-Just was something like an emblem of altruism and an abiding alternative to the purely instrumental exercise of power that could be associated with a Robespierre or a Bonaparte. If, Comte claimed, it was possible to explain the captivating quality of Saint-Just's brief moment of power, then the hallowed republican preoccupation with patriotism really could give way to another of the nineteenth century's buzzwords, humanitarianism.⁸ The positivist idea of a religion of humanity was premised on the assumption that Comte had found the answer.

⁶Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1830–42), vol. 6, 374.

⁷*Ibid.*, 381. On Comte's endorsement of tsarist power and the Bonapartist *coup d'état* see his *Catéchisme positiviste* (Paris, 1852), vii–viii; and the preface to the second volume of his *Système de politique positive*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1851–4), vol. 2, xv–xviii.

⁸On humanitarianism see Naomi J. Andrews, “The Romantic Socialist Origins of Humanitarianism,” *Modern Intellectual History* 17/3 (2019), 737–68; and A. G. Lehmann, *Sainte-Beuve: A Portrait of a Critic 1804–1842* (Oxford, 1962), 114–33.

In this light, Comte's neologism, *sociologie*, had a different kind of affinity with Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès's coinage, *science sociale*, from the one usually attributed to it. Instead of the value-neutral science of society that the two concepts were once taken to share, or their joint association with the *pouvoir-savoir* diptych of more recent, Foucault-inspired, studies of social science, the two terms were originally coined to address a more straightforward, but more durable, political problem. This is the relationship between minorities and majorities under conditions of democratic sovereignty and electoral politics. As has been pointed out from antiquity onwards, it has never been clear why 51 per cent entails the allegiance of the other 49 per cent when there are just as many cases in which the opposite seems to apply. Something more than a number seems to be needed to make majority rule viable. In Sieyès's initial usage, social science was the science—or knowledge—of how and why, under partisan electoral conditions, one part of the sovereign could accept, endorse, or simply put up with the electoral, but also consequential, supremacy of the other. In keeping with this usage, social science, to be able to work, had to explain altruism because something like altruism seems to be necessary if majorities and minorities are to coexist. If, for Comte, evidence of its existence was available from the extraordinary career of Saint-Just and the way that a twenty-year-old could, for a time, hold the future of France in his hands, the real problem was to try to find a way to integrate the mysterious human capacity for altruism that lay behind this type of political trajectory and turn it into the basis of the more ordinary arguments of everyday life. We are perhaps, as events in the United States in the autumn and winter of 2020–21 have helped to show, still trying.

As was the case with the twentieth-century German jurist Carl Schmitt, the initial focus of Comte's thought was on the exception. But in terms of a political typology, Comte, it could be said, was the anti-Schmitt. Unlike Schmitt, the interesting question for Comte was how to turn an exception into a rule or a norm. From this perspective, positivism stood somewhere near the beginning of a long story that has as much to do with aesthetics and phenomenology—or with values and axiology—as, more recognizably, it has to do with history, society and the division of labor. Part of the content of that story can be found in the chapters by Guillin, Bourdeau and Wernick in the *Love, Order and Progress* collection, while other parts are well set out in the chapters by Denise Phillips and Nathalie Richard in the *Worlds of Positivism* collection. Its origins, however, go back to the late eighteenth-century revival of interest in the imagination that began with Rousseau and, more substantively, with the investigation of the relationship between memory, the imagination and the emotions that Rousseau passed on to Immanuel Kant. As Comte emphasized in the final volume of the *Cours de philosophie positive* that he published in 1842, “the illustrious Kant nobly deserves eternal admiration by being the first to attempt to break free from the philosophical absolute by means of his famous concept of a double—subjective and objective—reality, which points the way towards the correct approach to sound philosophy.”⁹

⁹Comte, *Cours*, vol. 6, 724: “le plus grand des métaphysiciens modernes, l'illustre Kant, a noblement mérité une éternelle admiration en tentant, le premier, d'échapper directement à l'absolu philosophique

Comte did not read German. But it is now clear, thanks to the research of Mary Pickering and, more indirectly, the intellectual impact of Germaine de Staël, that he knew that Kant and his followers were on to something important.¹⁰ Once, in the nineteenth century, it was possible to claim that Comte's version of positivism was similar to the positive philosophy associated with Kant's critical follower, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. "No-one," according to a British commentator writing in 1856,

who compares the philosophic method of Schelling with the *philosophie positive* of Auguste Comte, can have the slightest hesitation as to the source from which the latter virtually sprang. The fundamental idea is indeed precisely the same as that of Schelling, with this difference only, that the idealistic language of the German speculator is here translated into the more ordinary language of physical science. That Comte borrowed his views from Schelling we can by no means affirm. But that the whole conception of the affiliation of the sciences in the order of their relative simplicity and the expansion of the same law of development so as to include the exposition of human nature and the courses of social progress is all to be found there, no one in the smallest degree acquainted with Schelling's writings can seriously doubt.¹¹

Despite the initial, somewhat ambiguous, insinuation, the comparison was designed to highlight a parallel rather than reinforce a charge of plagiarism. It suggests that positivism was part of a larger family of moral and political theories that straddled a range of political, religious and linguistic boundaries and whose focus had less to do with states, governments and laws than with trying to identify and establish the kind of balance between knowledge, emotion and reason that was needed to make human associations work.

In one sense, both the names and components of this family of moral and political theories are all well known.¹² It encompassed Hegelianism and Young

par sa célèbre conception de la double réalité, à la fois objective et subjective, qui indique un si juste sentiment de la saine philosophie."

¹⁰See Mary Pickering, "New Evidence of the Link between Comte and German Philosophy", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50/3 (1989), 443–63; and, more broadly, Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1993–2009). One significant link was supplied by Kant's 1784 essay on *The Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, which was described to Comte by his friend Gustav d'Eichthal in a letter of 22 August 1824. See "Matériaux pour servir à la biographie d'Auguste Comte: correspondance d'Auguste Comte et Gustave d'Eichthal", *Revue occidentale*, 2nd series 12 (1896), 241, 244–45.

¹¹John Daniel Morell, "German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century," originally published in *Manchester Papers* (1856), and reprinted in his *Philosophical Fragments Written during Intervals of Business* (London, 1878), 87–150, at 101. On the reception of Kant in Britain see, classically, René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England 1793–1838* (Princeton, 1931), esp. 255–62; and, more recently, Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817* (London, 2012).

¹²For helpful recent overviews see the chapters by Mary Pickering, Jerrold Seigel and Gareth Stedman Jones on, respectively, positivism, liberalism and socialism, in Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2019), vol. 1, 151–231. See also Michael C. Behrent, "The Mystical Body of Society: Religion and Association in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69/2 (2008), 219–43; and Jack Hayward, "Solidarity: The Social History of an Idea in Nineteenth-Century France," *International*

Hegelianism, Owenism, Saint-Simonianism and Fourierism to include, at least in some respects, the proto-Transcendentalism of the American Unitarian William Ellery Channing and its fuller version in the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the young Orestes Augustus Brownson.¹³ As many contemporary commentators pointed out, positivism had quite a lot in common with socialism, irrespective of whether it was the socialism of Charles Fourier; the socialism of Prosper Enfantin, Amand Bazard and the Saint-Simonians; the socialism of Philippe Buchez; the socialism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon; the socialism of Flora Tristan; or the socialism of Pierre Leroux and George Sand. It also had quite a lot in common with liberalism, irrespective of whether it was the liberalism of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Alexis de Tocqueville or John Stuart Mill. It is less easy, however, to identify the fractures and fissures interrupting that common ground. One way to make a start can be found, somewhat surprisingly, in Christian Rubio's monograph on *Krausism and the Spanish Avant-Garde*. This is because Krausism—named after a German philosopher called Karl Friedrich Christian Krause (1781–1832) who died in the same year as Hegel, after a much less successful academic career—had quite a lot in common with positivism. Although its starting point was French and Belgian as well as German, these northern European origins were eclipsed after 1848 when Krausism moved from its original setting and began to acquire a more substantial following, first in nineteenth-century Spain, and then in almost every state in South America.¹⁴ Krausism and positivism shared this strongly transnational quality even though, unlike Marxism and anarchism, none of its principal advocates gave up on the idea of the state. Nor, also unlike Marxism and anarchism, did they subscribe to the idea of a radical alternative to a property-based and class-divided world. To Comte and his followers, like Krause and *his* followers, there was enough possibility of a possible world in the world as it was.

To Comte and the positivists the possibility in question was represented by the human capacity to generate a stable balance between the human imagination, with its propensity towards fetishism; human memory, with its propensity towards

Review of Social History, 4/2 (1959), 261–84; Hayward, “The Official Social Philosophy of the French Third Republic: Léon Bourgeois and Solidarism,” *International Review of Social History* 6/1 (1961), 19–48; Hayward, “Solidarity and the Reformist Sociology of Alfred Fouillée,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 22/1 (1963), 205–22, 303–12, together with his earlier, unpublished, PhD thesis, “The Idea of Solidarity in French Social and Political Thought in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” (University of London, 1958).

¹³On Brownson see recently Naomi Wulf, *Une autre démocratie en Amérique: Orestes Brownson, un regard politique (1824–1845)* (Paris, 2017); Richard M. Reinsch, *Seeking the Truth: An Orestes Brownson Anthology* (Washington, 2016); and, earlier, Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Pilgrim's Progress: Orestes A. Brownson* (Boston, 1966; first published 1939); together with George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965).

¹⁴On Krausism see George Gurvitch, *L'idée du droit social* (Paris, 1932), 442–70; Pierre Jobit, *Les éducateurs de l'Espagne contemporaine*, vol. 1, *Les krausistes* (Paris, 1936); Michael Dreyer, “German Roots of the Theory of Pluralism,” *Constitutional Political Economy* 4 (1993), 7–39; Pierre Bidart, “L'influence du philosophe allemand F. Krause dans la formation des sciences sociales en Espagne,” *Revue Germanique Internationale* 21 (2004), 133–48; Juan López-Morillas, *The Krausist Movement and Ideological Change in Spain, 1854–1874* (Cambridge, 1981; first published 1956); and Michael Sonenscher, “Krausism and Its Legacy,” *Global Intellectual History* 5/1 (2020), 20–40.

partiality; and human rationality, with its ability to produce a type of knowledge that, in keeping with the idea of sociology, had the power to break free of the particularities of time and place to become a general human resource. This was the point of the positivist philosophy of history. It was designed to show how humanity could bring memory, imagination and rationality into productive alignment by enclosing the disruptive power of the first two faculties within the rational bounds of the third. Unlike its theological and metaphysical counterparts, the type of state that Comte called the positive state meant giving up on grand questions about the origins and meaning of life. Instead, as one of Comte's followers put it in 1880, it meant identifying the connections between particular phenomena and a body of "general facts" whose number would fall, but whose scale and scope would rise as knowledge progressed.¹⁵ As the ordinary displaced the extraordinary, humanity would become increasingly equipped to take charge of its own destiny. As is apparent from the chapter on positivism in Brazil by Elias José Palti in the *Worlds of Positivism* collection, one reason for the resonance of both positivism and Krausism in the second half of the nineteenth century was that they appeared to offer the prospect of an integrated alternative to the increasingly polarized politics of the global South in the wake of the French Revolution, the disintegration of the old Spanish and Ottoman empires and the new European competition for empire after 1830. In this context, Euclides Da Cunha's *Os Sertões* of 1902 (or *Rebellion in the Backlands* as the 1946 English translation was entitled) was Brazil's great monument to positivism's potential for social and political integration.

As John Stuart Mill pointed out, however, positivism relied on a type of knowledge that amounted to treating people as if they were planets. Planets are susceptible to general facts because their behavior can be measured from the outside. People, however, are less predictable because their behavior is also determined from the inside. Comte, Mill wrote, "rejects totally, as an invalid process, psychological observation properly so called, or in other words, internal consciousness, at least as regards our intellectual operations."

He gives no place in his series of the science of psychology, and always speaks of it with contempt. The study of mental phenomena, or, as he expresses it, of moral and intellectual functions, has a place in his scheme, under the head of biology, but only as a branch of physiology. Our knowledge of the human mind must, he thinks, be acquired by observing other people. How we are to observe other people's mental operations, or how to interpret the signs of them without having learnt what the signs mean by knowledge of ourselves, he does not state.¹⁶

Positivism, in Mill's assessment, failed to bridge the gap between the external and the internal or, consequently, between the physical and the moral.

One reason for the affinity between positivism and Krausism was that Krause had approached the same problem but from the opposite point of view. As Rubio's monograph helps to show, instead of starting with observation and

¹⁵Auguste Comte, *La philosophie positive*, résumé par Jules Rig, 2 vols. (Paris, 1880), vol. 1, 2–3.

¹⁶John Stuart Mill, *Comte and Positivism*, 2nd edn (London, 1866), 63.

general facts, Krause started with introspection and the mystery of the unconscious. In this, he was building upon a body of largely German-language thought headed, in the early nineteenth century, by the natural philosophy (*Naturphilosophie*) of Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869) and his older peer Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert (1780–1860).¹⁷ In their examinations of the human mind, the salient fact was the distinction between what they called fantasy, meaning the random association of different items of experience, and the imagination, meaning a more focused arrangement of experience that could then produce concepts and knowledge. In early nineteenth-century Britain, a similar claim was made by the poet and Anglo-German cultural broker Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was also responsible for the now rather opaque distinction between what he called fancy and the imagination. Here, “fancy” referred to the mind’s ability to classify and arrange information, or to associate ideas in the old, eighteenth-century, sense of the phrase, while the imagination, as Coleridge put it in his *Biographia Literaria*, was “essentially vital, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.” Elsewhere, in terminology redolent of Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès and the French Revolution, Coleridge called the imagination the “co-adunating faculty,” or the faculty responsible for turning the many into one (here meaning both one concept and one person), with fancy defined as simply “the aggregating faculty of the mind.”¹⁸ In this usage, the imagination was the creative part of the mind, while fancy was, at best, simply classificatory. This was why the imagination and invention rather than memory and association were the real engines of human history. “All that is literature,” wrote the critic and student of German philosophy Thomas de Quincey in 1828, “seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge.”¹⁹ To some, the distinction was particularly applicable to history and the way that the two types of communication could be combined to produce the mixture of local color and social development which, later, came to be associated with the concept of historicism. “It is in and through symbols,” wrote Thomas Carlyle, another student of German philosophy at about the same time, “that man, consciously or unconsciously lives, works, and has his being.”²⁰

¹⁷On this aspect of early nineteenth-century German thought see the introduction by Patrick Valette to his translation of G. H. Schubert, *La symbolique du rêve* (Paris, 1982; first published 1814); and the introductory note by James Hillman to the translation by Renata Welch of Carl Gustav Carus, *Psyche* (Thompson, CT, 2017; first published 1846). See too David E. Leary, “German Idealism and the Development of Psychology in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 18/3 (1980), 299–317; and particularly Angus Nicholls and Martin Liebscher, eds., *Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought* (Cambridge, 2010).

¹⁸Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1983; first published 1817), vol. 1, 304–5; and, for Coleridge on the “co-adunating faculty,” Thomas McFarland, *Originality & Imagination* (Baltimore, 1985), 106. On the distinction between fancy and the imagination see, helpfully, John Spencer Hill, ed., *The Romantic Imagination* (London, 1977); and the editorial guidance in Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, lxxxi–civ. For an overview see Theresa M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (Cambridge, 1997), esp. 6, 15, 121–4.

¹⁹Thomas De Quincey, “Letters to a Young Man” [1828], in De Quincey, *Essays* (London, n.d., but c. 1870), 243–92, at 269.

²⁰Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* [1831], Bk. III, ch. 3, in Thomas Carlyle, *Works*, 30 vols. (London, 1896), vol. 1, 177. On the concept of local colour see Odile Parris-Barubé, “La notion de couleur locale dans l’œuvre d’Augustin Thierry”, in Aude Déruelle and Yann Potin, eds., *Augustin Thierry: L’histoire*

Krause used the distinction between fancy (or *Phantasie*) and the imagination to produce something like a mirror image of Comte's distinction between positive knowledge and its metaphysical or theological counterparts. As with Comte, human history was a process of improvement, generated, as also with Comte, by occupational specialization, the development of the division of labour and the gradual substitution of knowledge for fantasy and of organized comprehension for arbitrary association. For both, the outcome would be a decentralized world. In the final world order, Comte wrote, the states of the West would have a normal size no bigger than Tuscany, Belgium or Holland. Scotland, Wales and Ireland, he predicted, would leave the United Kingdom and, by the end of the nineteenth century, France would be made up of seventeen independent republics, each formed by five of the existing departments.²¹ But, where the emphasis in positivism fell on social integration and generalized norms, the emphasis in Krausism fell on social differentiation and individual autonomy. To Krause's followers, history tracked the gradual emergence of individual personality from the soup of fantasy. To Comte's followers, history tracked the gradual immersion of individual idiosyncrasy into the broader nexus of normativity. To their critics, however, neither set of claims seemed to be based on a sufficiently distinct set of causal mechanisms to prevent either version of human history from falling into circularity. At most, the one could simply offer support or corrections to the other. As the chapter on Spain by Jorge Fernández-Santos Ortiz-Iribas and Sara Muniain Ederra in the *Worlds of Positivism* collection helps to show, Krausism and positivism readily became Krausopositivism as the shortcomings of the one were used to offset the shortcomings of the other without, however, being able to escape entirely from the teleological assumptions built into their starting points.²²

Thanks in part to Mill's criticism of Comte, a clearer synthesis—or a real alternative to both—began to emerge in Germany with the publication of Franz Brentano's *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*) in 1874, preceded by an earlier article on "Auguste Comte and Positive Philosophy" in 1868.²³ As Brentano indicated, he fully subscribed to Mill's objections to Comte's treatment of the mind-body problem. But he also insisted that, possibly inadvertently, Comte had still identified something significant in the relationship between the external and the internal and, by extension, between the physical and the moral. "When," Brentano wrote in his 1868 article,

Comte explains that the positive phase entails giving up on knowledge of the internal causes of phenomena, one might think that one is listening to a pupil of Kant and, when he then points out that he has never studied Kant or any

pour mémoire (Rennes, 2018), 63–82. On the conceptual context see Paule Petitier, "Entre concept et hypothèse: l'histoire au XIXe siècle," *Romantisme* 144/2 (2009), 69–80.

²¹Auguste Comte, *Catéchisme positiviste* (Paris, 1852), 294–5.

²²On Krausopositivism see Jens R. Hentschke, "Adolfo Posado's Krauso-positivist Project of Social and Political Reform: Its Impact on Spain, Argentina and Uruguay," *Historical Research* 93/259 (2020), 105–30; and his earlier "José Victorino Lastarria's Libertarian Krauso-Positivism and the Discourse on State and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Chile," *Intellectual History Review* 22/2 (2012), 241–60.

²³On Brentano and Comte see Denis Fissette, "Franz Brentano and Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy," *Brentano Studien* 16 (2018), 73–110.

other subsequent German thinker, this does not amount to the absence of any more indirect connection between the two philosophers. Even without any historical connection at all, the concordance of their doctrines may be all the more surprising but is no less certain, because, in the light of Comte's clear pronouncements, the only accessible truth is phenomenal rather than real truth.²⁴

Positivism, through Brentano, led to phenomenology. "What characterises every mental phenomenon," he wrote famously in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, "is what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (but still mental) inner existence (*Inexistenz*) of an object in what we ourselves would call—using terms that are still not unequivocal—a relationship to a content, an orientation towards an object (without, however, meaning something real), or an immanent objectivity."²⁵ Something that was neither purely mental nor purely physical appeared to be located between the internal and the external because its attributes were too particular to be described, on the one side, solely in terms of consciousness and introspection or, on the other, in terms of being and observation. It was, it seemed, what happened when being and consciousness encountered each other, because, like a chemical compound, the outcome was different from both. As with positivism, it appeared to be known as much as felt, but, as Brentano presented it, an immanent object was something that could be known by way of individual intent, or intentionality, rather than from general facts. It could, potentially, be studied as a large, but bounded, set of effects and affects. In this sense, as the French political philosopher Alfred Fouillée pointed out, positivism had something in common with his own concept of an *idée fixe*.²⁶ But it was still not clear how either could be studied, or what kind of knowledge either could produce.

After Comte, positivism gradually lost touch with its origins. With Sieyès, the concept of social science was devised to bridge an electorally generated gap between minorities and majorities. With Brentano, the concept of psychology was devised to bridge an imaginatively generated gap between general facts and alternative facts. Clearly, both types of gap have yet to be bridged. But perhaps this is because the important thing is not the bridge, but the gap, and, as Comte himself understood, the endlessly recurrent problem of finding a way, at any particular time and any particular place, to see the gap and create a bridge. Positivism began with this insight and the recognition that the gaps between the physical and the moral, the real and the ideal, the material and the spiritual, or any of the many other binaries that seem, at first sight, to require a monistic solution called, instead, for

²⁴The text of Brentano's article is published in French in Denis Fiset and Hamid Taieb, ed. and trans., "Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive," *Les cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg* 35 (2014), 257–84 (267–8 for this passage). Thanks to Denis Fiset for making the text available to me when local libraries were closed.

²⁵Franz Brentano, *Psychologie du point de vue empirique*, trans. Maurice de Gandilhac (Paris, 1944; first published 1874), 102. I have used this translation rather than its more literal equivalent in Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (London, 1995), 68.

²⁶On the overlap see Alfred Fouillée, *L'idée moderne du droit*, 6th edn (Paris, 1909; first published 1883), 236, 261.

finding out why they had arisen, how they could coexist, and what, in the light of this initial knowledge, could be done with them. From this perspective, the legacy of Auguste Comte's version of sociology is still worth distinguishing from what sociology became.

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