

***AUGUSTE  
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***A GENERAL VIEW  
OF POSITIVISM***

**Auguste Comte**

# **A General View of Positivism**

**Or, Summary exposition of the System of Thought  
and Life**

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# **A GENERAL VIEW OF POSITIVISM**

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‘We tire of thinking and even of acting; we never tire of loving.’

In the following series of systematic essays upon Positivism the essential principles of the doctrine are first considered; I then point out the agencies by which its propagation will be effected; and I conclude by describing certain additional features indispensable to its completeness. My treatment of these questions will of course be summary; yet it will suffice, I hope, to overcome several excusable but unfounded prejudices. It will enable any competent reader to assure himself that the new general doctrine aims at something more than satisfying the Intellect; that it is in reality quite as favourable to Feeling and even to Imagination.

## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

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Positivism consists essentially of a Philosophy and a Polity. These can never be dissevered; the former being the basis, and the latter the end of one comprehensive system, in which our intellectual faculties and our social sympathies are brought into close correlation with each other. For, in the

first place, the science of Society, besides being more important than any other, supplies the only logical and scientific link by which all our varied observations of phenomena can be brought into one consistent whole<sup>1</sup>. Of this science it is even more true than of any of the preceding sciences, that its real character cannot be understood without explaining its exact relation in all general features with the art corresponding to it. Now here we find a coincidence which is assuredly not fortuitous. At the very time when the theory of society is being laid down, an immense sphere is opened for the application of that theory; the direction, namely, of the social regeneration of Western Europe. For, if we take another point of view, and look at the great crisis of modern history, as its character is displayed in the natural course of events, it becomes every day more evident how hopeless is the task of reconstructing political institutions without the previous remodelling of opinion and of life. To form then a satisfactory synthesis of all human conceptions is the most urgent of our social wants: and it is needed equally for the sake of Order and of Progress. During the gradual accomplishment of this great philosophical work, a new moral power will arise spontaneously throughout the West, which, as its influence increases, will lay down a definite basis for the reorganization of society. It will offer a general system of education for the adoption of all civilized nations, and by this means will supply in every department of public and private life fixed principles of judgment and of conduct. Thus the intellectual movement and the social crisis will be brought continually into close connexion with each other. Both will combine to prepare the advanced portion of humanity for the acceptance of a true spiritual power, a power more coherent, as well as more progressive, than the noble but premature attempt of mediaeval Catholicism.

The primary object, then, of Positivism is two-fold: to generalize our scientific conceptions, and to systematize the art of social life. These are but two aspects of one and the same problem. They will form the subjects of the two first chapters of this work. I shall first explain the general spirit of the new philosophy. I shall then show its necessary connexion with the whole course of that vast revolution which is now about to terminate under its guidance in social reconstruction.

This will lead us naturally to another question. The regenerating doctrine cannot do its work without adherents; in what quarter should we hope to find them? Now, with individual exceptions of great value, we cannot expect the adhesion of any of the upper classes in society. They are all more or less under the influence of baseless metaphysical theories, and of aristocratic self-seeking. They are absorbed in blind political agitation and in disputes for the possession of the useless remnants of the old theological and military system. Their action only tends to prolong the revolutionary state indefinitely, and can never result in true social renovation.

Whether we regard its intellectual character or its social objects, it is certain that Positivism must look elsewhere for support. It will find a welcome in those classes only whose good sense has been left unimpaired by our vicious system of education, and whose generous sympathies are allowed to develop themselves freely. It is among women, therefore, and among the working classes that the heartiest supporters of the new doctrine will be found. It is intended, indeed, ultimately for all classes of society. But it will never gain much real influence over the higher ranks till it is forced upon their notice by these powerful patrons. When the work of spiritual reorganization is completed, it is on them that its maintenance will principally depend; and so too, their combined aid is necessary for its commencement.

Having but little influence in political government, they are the more likely to appreciate the need of a moral government, the special object of which it will be to protect them against the oppressive action of the temporal power.

In the third chapter, therefore, I shall explain the mode in which philosophers and working men will co-operate. Both have been prepared for this coalition by the general course which modern history has taken, and it offers now the only hope we have of really decisive action. We shall find that the efforts of Positivism to regulate and develop the natural tendencies of the people, make it, even from the intellectual point of view, more coherent and complete.

But there is another and a more unexpected source from which Positivism will obtain support; and not till then will its true character and the full extent of its constructive power be appreciated. I shall show in the fourth chapter how eminently calculated is the Positive doctrine to raise and regulate the social condition of women. It is from the feminine aspect only that human life, whether individually or collectively considered, can really be comprehended as a whole. For the only basis on which a system really embracing all the requirements of life can be formed, is the subordination of intellect to social feeling: a subordination which we find directly represented in the womanly type of character, whether regarded in its personal or social relations.

Although these questions cannot be treated fully in the present work, I hope to convince my readers that Positivism is more in accordance with the spontaneous tendencies of the people and of women than Catholicism, and is therefore better qualified to institute a spiritual power. It should be observed that the ground on which the support of both these classes is obtained is, that Positivism is the only system which can supersede the various subversive



schemes that are growing every day more dangerous to all the relations of domestic and social life. Yet the tendency of the doctrine is to elevate the character of both of these classes; and it gives a most energetic sanction to all their legitimate aspirations.

Thus it is that a philosophy originating in speculations of the most abstract character, is found applicable not merely to every department of practical life, but also to the sphere of our moral nature. But to complete the proof of its universality I have still to speak of another very essential feature. I shall show, in spite of prejudices which exist very naturally on this point, that Positivism is eminently calculated to call the Imaginative faculties into exercise. It is by these faculties that the unity of human nature is most distinctly represented: they are themselves intellectual, but their field lies principally in our moral nature, and the result of their operation is to influence the active powers. The subject of women treated in the fourth chapter, will lead me by a natural transition to speak in the fifth of the Esthetic aspects of Positivism. I shall attempt to show that the new doctrine by the very fact of embracing the whole range of human relations in the spirit of reality, discloses the true theory of Art, which has hitherto been so great a deficiency in our speculative conceptions. The principle of the theory is that, in co-ordinating the primary functions of humanity, Positivism places the Idealities of the poet midway between the Ideas of the philosopher and the Realities of the statesman. We see from this theory how it is that the poetical power of Positivism cannot be manifested at present. We must wait until moral and mental regeneration has advanced far enough to awaken the sympathies which naturally belong to it, and on which Art in its renewed state must depend for the future. The first mental and social shock once passed, Poetry will at last take her proper rank. She will lead Humanity onward towards a future which is

now no longer vague and visionary, while at the same time she enables us to pay due honour to all phases of the past. The great object which Positivism sets before us individually and socially, is the endeavour to become more perfect. The highest importance is attached therefore to the imaginative faculties, because in every sphere with which they deal they stimulate the sense of perfection. Limited as my explanations in this work must be, I shall be able to show that Positivism, while opening out a new and wide field for art, supplies in the same spontaneous way new means of expression.

I shall thus have sketched with some detail the true character of the regenerating doctrine. All its principal aspects will have been considered. Beginning with its philosophical basis, I pass by natural transitions to its political purpose; thence to its action upon the people, its influence with women, and lastly, to its esthetic power. In concluding this work, which is but the introduction to a larger treatise, I have only to speak of the conception which unites all these various aspects. As summed up in the positivist motto, *Love, Order, Progress*, they lead us to the conception of Humanity, which implicitly involves and gives new force to each of them. Rightly interpreting this conception, we view Positivism at last as a complete and consistent whole. The subject will naturally lead us to speak in general terms of the future progress of social regeneration, as far as the history of the past enables us to foresee it. The movement originates in France, and is limited at first to the great family of Western nations. I shall show that it will afterwards extend, in accordance with definite laws, to the rest of the white race, and finally to the other two great races of man.

# CHAPTER I

## THE INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER OF POSITIVISM

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**The object of Philosophy is to present a systematic view of human life, as a basis for modifying its imperfections**

The object of all true Philosophy is to frame a system which shall comprehend human life under every aspect, social as well as individual. It embraces, therefore, the three kinds of phenomena of which our life consists, Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions. Under all these aspects, the growth of Humanity is primarily spontaneous; and the basis upon which all wise attempts to modify it should proceed, can only be furnished by an exact acquaintance with the natural process. We are, however, able to modify this process systematically; and the importance of this is extreme, since we can thereby greatly diminish the partial deviations, the disastrous delays, and the grave inconsistencies to which so complex a growth would be liable were it left entirely to itself. To effect this necessary intervention is the proper sphere of politics. But a right conception cannot be formed of it without the aid of the philosopher, whose business it is to define and amend the principles on which it is conducted. With this object in view the philosopher endeavours to co-ordinate the various elements of man's existence, so that it may be conceived of theoretically as an integral whole. His synthesis can only be

valid in so far as it is an exact and complete representation of the relations naturally existing. The first condition is therefore that these relations be carefully studied. When the philosopher, instead of forming such a synthesis, attempts to interfere more directly with the course of practical life, he commits the error of usurping the province of the statesman, to whom all practical measures exclusively belong. Philosophy and Politics are the two principal functions of the great social organism. Morality, systematically considered, forms the connecting link and at the same time the line of demarcation between them. It is the most important application of philosophy, and it gives a general direction to polity. Natural morality, that is to say the various emotions of our moral nature, will, as I have shown in my previous work, always govern the speculations of the one and the operations of the other. This I shall explain more fully.

But the synthesis, which it is the social function of Philosophy to construct, will neither be real nor permanent, unless it embraces every department of human nature, whether speculative, effective, or practical. These three orders of phenomena react upon each other so intimately, that any system which does not include all of them must inevitably be unreal and inadequate. Yet it is only in the present day, when Philosophy is reaching the positive stage, that this which is her highest and most essential mission can be fully apprehended.

**The Theological synthesis failed to include the practical side of human nature**

The theological synthesis depended exclusively upon our affective nature; and this is owing its original supremacy and its ultimate decline. For a long time its influence over all our highest speculations was paramount. This was especially the case during the Polytheistic period, when Imagination and Feeling still retained their sway under very slight restraint

from the reasoning faculties. Yet even during the time of its highest development, intellectually and socially, theology exercised no real control over practical life. It reacted, of course, upon it to some extent, but the effects of this were in most cases far more apparent than real. There was a natural antagonism between them, which though at first hardly perceived, went on increasing till at last it brought about the entire destruction of the theological fabric. A system so purely subjective could not harmonize with the necessarily objective tendencies and stubborn realities of practical life. Theology asserted all phenomena to be under the dominion of Wills more or less arbitrary: whereas in practical life men were led more and more clearly to the conception of invariable Laws. For without laws human action would have admitted of no rule or plan. In consequence of this utter inability of theology to deal with practical life, its treatment of speculative and even of moral problems was exceedingly imperfect, such problems being all more or less dependent on the practical necessities of life. To present a perfectly synthetic view of human nature was, then, impossible as long as the influence of theology lasted; because the Intellect was impelled by Feeling and by the Active powers in two totally different directions. The failure of all metaphysical attempts to form a synthesis need not be dwelt upon here. Metaphysicians, in spite of their claims to absolute truth have never been able to supersede theology in questions of feeling, and have proved still more inadequate in practical questions. Ontology, even when it was most triumphant in the schools, was always limited to subjects of a purely intellectual nature; and even here its abstractions, useless in themselves, dealt only with the case of individual development, the metaphysical spirit being thoroughly incompatible with the social point of view. In my work on Positive Philosophy I have clearly proved that it constitutes only a transitory phase of mind, and is totally inadequate for any constructive purpose. For a time it was

supreme; but its utility lay simply in its revolutionary tendencies. It aided the preliminary development of Humanity by its gradual inroads upon Theology, which, though in ancient times entrusted with the sole direction of society, had long since become in every respect utterly retrograde.

**But the  
Positive spirit  
originated in  
practical life**

But all Positive speculations owe their first origin to the occupations of practical life; and, consequently, they have always given some indication of their capacity for regulating our active powers, which had been omitted from every former synthesis. Their value in this respect has been and still is materially impaired by their want of breadth, and their isolated and incoherent character; but it has always been instinctively felt. The importance that we attach to theories which teach the laws of phenomena, and give us the power of prevision, is chiefly due to the fact that they alone can regulate our otherwise blind action upon the external world. Hence it is that while the Positive spirit has been growing more and more theoretical, and has gradually extended to every department of speculation, it has never lost the practical tendencies which it derived from its source; and this even in the case of researches useless in themselves, and only to be justified as logical exercises. From its first origin in mathematics and astronomy, it has always shown its tendency to systematize the whole of our conceptions in every new subject which has been brought within the scope of its fundamental principle. It exercised for a long time a modifying influence upon theological and metaphysical principles, which has gone on increasing; and since the time of Descartes and Bacon it has become evident that it is destined to supersede them altogether. Positivism has gradually taken possession of the preliminary sciences of Physics and Biology, and in these the old system no longer prevails. All that remained was to complete the

range of its influence by including the study of social phenomena. For this study metaphysics had proved incompetent; by theological thinkers it had only been pursued indirectly and empirically as a condition of government. I believe that my work on Positive Philosophy has so far supplied what was wanting. I think it must now be clear to all that the Positive spirit can embrace the entire range of thought without lessening, or rather with the effect of strengthening its original tendency to regulate practical life. And it is a further guarantee for the stability of the new intellectual synthesis that Social science, which is the final result of our researches, gives them that systematic character in which they had hitherto been wanting, by supplying the only connecting link of which they all admit.

This conception is already adopted by all true thinkers. All must now acknowledge that the Positive spirit tends necessarily towards the formation of a comprehensive and durable system, in which every practical as well as speculative subject shall be included. But such a system would still be far from realizing that universal character without which Positivism would be incompetent to supersede Theology in the spiritual government of Humanity. For the element which really preponderates in every human being, that is to say, Affection, would still be left untouched. This element it is, and this only, which gives a stimulus and direction to the other two parts of our nature: without it the one would waste its force in ill-conceived, or, at least, useless studies, and the other in barren or even dangerous contention. With this immense deficiency the combination of our theoretical and active powers would be fruitless, because it would lack the only principle which could ensure its real and permanent stability. The failure would be even greater than the failure of Theology in dealing with practical questions; for the unity of human nature cannot really be made to depend either on

the rational or the active faculties. In the life of the individual, and, still more, in the life of the race, the basis of unity, as I shall show in the fourth chapter, must always be feeling. It is to the fact that theology arose spontaneously from feeling that its influence is for the most part due. And although theology is now palpably on the decline, yet it will retain, in principle at least, some legitimate claims to the direction of society so long as the new philosophy fails to occupy this important vantage-ground. We come then to the final conditions with which the modern synthesis must comply. Without neglecting the spheres of Thought and Action it must also comprehend the moral sphere; and the very principle on which its claim to universality rests must be derived from Feeling. Then, and not till then, can the claims of theology be finally set aside. For then the new system will have surpassed the old in that which is the one essential purpose of all general doctrines. It will have shown itself able to effect what no other doctrine has done, that is, to bring the three primary elements of our nature into harmony. If Positivism were to prove incapable of satisfying this condition, we must give up all hope of systematization of any kind. For while Positive principles are now sufficiently developed to neutralize those of Theology, yet, on the other hand, the influence of theology would continue to be far greater. Hence it is that many conscientious thinkers in the present day are so inclined to despair for the future of society. They see that the old principles on which society has been governed must finally become powerless. What they do not see is that a new basis for morality is being gradually laid down. Their theories are too imperfect and incoherent to show them the direction towards which the present time is ultimately tending. It must be owned, too, that their view seems borne out by the present character of the Positive method. While all allow its utility in the treatment of practical, and even of speculative, problems, it



seems to most men, and very naturally, quite unfit to deal with questions of morality.

**In human nature, and therefore in the Positive system, Affection is the preponderating element**

But on closer examination they will see reason to rectify their judgment. They will see that the hardness with which Positive science has been justly reproached, is due to the speciality and want of purpose with which it has hitherto been pursued, and is not at all inherent in its nature. Originating as it did in the necessities of our material nature, which for a long time restricted it to the study of the inorganic world, it has not till now become sufficiently complete or systematic to harmonize well with our moral nature. But now that it is brought to bear upon social questions, which for the future will form its most important field, it loses all the defects peculiar to its long period of infancy. The very attribute of reality which is claimed by the new philosophy, leads it to treat all subjects from the moral still more than from the intellectual side. The necessity of assigning with exact truth the place occupied by the intellect and by the heart in the organization of human nature and of society, leads to the decision that Affection must be the central point of the synthesis. In the treatment of social questions Positive science will be found utterly to discard those proud illusions of the supremacy of reason, to which it had been liable during its preliminary stages. Ratifying, in this respect, the common experience of men even more forcibly than Catholicism, it teaches us that individual happiness and public welfare are far more dependent upon the heart than upon the intellect. But, independently of this, the question of co-ordinating the faculties of our nature will convince us that the only basis on which they can be brought into harmonious union, is the preponderance of Affection over Reason, and even over Activity.

The fact that intellect, as well as social sympathy, is a distinctive attribute of our nature, might lead us to suppose that either of these two might be supreme, and therefore that there might be more than one method of establishing unity. The fact, however, is that there is only one; because these two elements are by no means equal in their fitness for assuming the first place. Whether we look at the distinctive qualities of each, or at the degree of force which they possess, it is easy to see that the only position for which the intellect is permanently adapted is to be the servant of the social sympathies. If, instead of being content with this honourable post, it aspires to become supreme, its ambitious aims, which are never realized, result simply in the most deplorable disorder.

Even with the individual, it is impossible to establish permanent harmony between our various impulses, except by giving complete supremacy to the feeling which prompts the sincere and habitual desire of doing good. This feeling is, no doubt, like the rest, in itself blind; it has to learn from reason the right means of obtaining satisfaction; and our active faculties are then called into requisition to apply those means. But common experience proves that after all the principal condition of right action is the benevolent impulse; with the ordinary amount of intellect and activity that is found in men this stimulus, if well sustained, is enough to direct our thoughts and energies to a good result. Without this habitual spring of action they would inevitably waste themselves in barren or incoherent efforts, and speedily relapse into their original torpor. Unity in our moral nature is, then, impossible, except so far as affection preponderates over intellect and activity.

**The proper function of Intellect is the Service of the**

True as this fundamental principle is for the individual, it is in public life that its necessity can be demonstrated most irrefutably. The problem is in reality the

**Social  
Sympathies**

same, nor is any different solution of it required; only it assumes such increased dimensions, that less uncertainty is felt as to the method to be adopted. The various beings whom it is sought to harmonize have in this case each a separate existence; it is clear, therefore, that the first condition of co-operation must be sought in their own inherent tendency to universal love. No calculations of self-interest can rival this social instinct, whether in promptitude and breadth of intuition, or in boldness and tenacity of purpose. True it is that the benevolent emotions have in most cases less intrinsic energy than the selfish. But they have this beautiful quality, that social life not only permits their growth, but stimulates it to an almost unlimited extent, while it holds their antagonists in constant check. Indeed the increasing tendency in the former to prevail over the latter is the best measure by which to judge of the progress of Humanity. But the intellect may do much to confirm their influence. It may strengthen social feeling by diffusing juster views of the relations in which the various parts of society stand to each other; or it may guide its application by dwelling on the lessons which the past offers to the future. It is to this honourable service that the new philosophy would direct our intellectual powers. Here the highest sanction is given to their operations, and an exhaustless field is opened out for them, from which far deeper satisfaction may be gained than from the approbation of the learned societies, or from the puerile specialities with which they are at present occupied.

In fact, the ambitious claims which, ever since the hopeless decline of the theological synthesis, have been advanced by the intellect, never were or could be realized. Their only value lay in their solvent action on the theological system when it had become hostile to progress. The intellect is intended for service, not for empire; when it

imagines itself supreme, it is really only obeying the personal instead of the social instincts. It never acts independently of feeling, be that feeling good or bad. The first condition of command is force; now reason has but light; the impulse that moves it must come from elsewhere. The metaphysical Utopias, in which a life of pure contemplation is held out as the highest ideal, attract the notice of our men of science; but are really nothing but illusions of pride, or veils for dishonest schemes. True there is a genuine satisfaction in the act of discovering truth; but it is not sufficiently intense to be an habitual guide of conduct. Indeed, so feeble is our intellect, that the impulse of some passion is necessary to direct and sustain it in almost every effort. When the impulse comes from kindly feeling it attracts attention on account of its rarity or value; when it springs from the selfish motives of glory, ambition, or gain, it is too common to be remarked. This is usually the only difference between the two cases. It does indeed occasionally happen that the intellect is actuated by a sort of passion for truth in itself, without any mixture of pride or vanity. Yet, in this case, as in every other, there is intense egotism in exercising the mental powers irrespectively of all social objects. Positivism, as I shall afterwards explain, is even more severe than Catholicism in its condemnation of this type of character, whether in metaphysicians or in men of science. The true philosopher would consider it a most culpable abuse of the opportunities which civilization affords him for the sake of the welfare of society, in leading a speculative life.

We have traced the Positive principle from its origin in the pursuits of active life, and have seen it extending successively to every department of speculation. We now find it, in its maturity, and that as a simple result of its strict adherence to fact, embracing the sphere of affection, and making that sphere the central point of its synthesis. It is

henceforth a fundamental doctrine of Positivism, a doctrine of as great political as philosophical importance, that the Heart preponderates over the Intellect.

**Under Theology  
the intellect  
was the slave  
of the heart;  
under  
Positivism, its  
servant**

It is true that this doctrine, which is the only basis for establishing harmony in our nature, had been, as I before remarked, instinctively accepted by theological systems. But it was one of the fatalities of society in its preliminary phase, that the doctrine was coupled with an error which, after a time, destroyed all its value. In acknowledging the superiority of the heart the intellect was reduced to abject submission. Its only chance of growth lay in resistance to the established system. This course it followed with increasing effect, till after twenty centuries of insurrection, the system collapsed. The natural result of the process was to stimulate metaphysical and scientific pride, and to promote views subversive of all social order. But Positivism, while systematically adopting the principle here spoken of as the foundation of individual and social discipline, interprets that principle in a different way. It teaches that while it is for the heart to suggest our problems, it is for the intellect to solve them. Now the intellect was at first quite inadequate to this task, for which a long and laborious training was needed. The heart, therefore, had to take its place, and in default of objective truth, to give free play to its subjective inspirations. But for these inspirations, all progress, as I showed in my *System of Positive Philosophy*, would have been totally impossible. For a long time it was necessary that they should be believed absolutely; but as soon as our reason began to mould its conceptions upon observations, more or less accurate, of the external world, these supernatural dogmas became inevitably an obstacle to its growth. Here lies the chief source of the important modifications which theological belief has successively

undergone. No further modifications are now possible without violating its essential principles; and since, meantime, Positive science is assuming every day larger proportions, the conflict between them is advancing with increasing vehemence and danger. The tendency on the one side is becoming more retrograde, on the other more revolutionary; because the impossibility of reconciling the two opposing forces is felt more and more strongly. Never was this position of affairs more manifest than now. The restoration of theology to its original power, supposing such a thing were possible, would have the most degrading influence on the intellect, and, consequently, on the character also; since it would involve the admission that our views of scientific truth were to be strained into accordance with our wishes and our wants. Therefore no important step in the progress of Humanity can now be made without totally abandoning the theological principle. The only service of any real value which it still renders, is that of forcing the attention of Western Europe, by the very fact of its reactionary tendencies, upon the greatest of all social questions. It is owing to its influence that the central point of the new synthesis is placed in our moral rather than our intellectual nature; and this, in spite of every prejudice and habit of thought that has been formed during the revolutionary period of the last five centuries. And while in this, which is the primary condition of social organization, Positivism, proves more efficient than Theology, it at the same time terminates the disunion which has existed so long between the intellect and the heart. For it follows logically from its principles, and also from the whole spirit of the system, that the intellect shall be free to exercise its full share of influence in every department of human life. When it is said that the intellect should be subordinate to the heart, what is meant is, that the intellect should devote itself exclusively to the problems which the heart suggests, the ultimate object being to find proper satisfaction for our

various wants. Without this limitation, experience has shown too clearly that it would almost always follow its natural bent for useless or insoluble questions, which are the most plentiful and the easiest to deal with. But when any problem of a legitimate kind has been once proposed, it is the sole judge of the method to be pursued, and of the utility of the results obtained. Its province is to inquire into the present, in order to foresee the future, and to discover the means of improving it. In this province it is not to be interfered with. In a word the intellect is to be the servant of the heart, not its slave. Under these two correlative conditions the elements of our nature will at last be brought into harmony. The equilibrium of these two elements, once established, is in little danger of being disturbed. For since it is equally favourable to both of them, both will be interested in maintaining it. The fact that Reason in modern times has become habituated to revolt, is no ground for supposing that it will always retain its revolutionary character, even when its legitimate claims have been fully satisfied. Supposing the case to arise, however, society, as I shall show afterwards, would not be without the means of repressing any pretensions that were subversive of order. There is another point of view which may assure us that the position given to the heart under the new system will involve no danger to the growth of intellect. Love, when real, ever desires light, in order to attain its ends. The influence of true feeling is as favourable to sound thought as to wise activity.

**The subordination of the intellect to the heart is the *Subjective Principle* of Positivism**

Our doctrine, therefore, is one which renders hypocrisy and oppression alike impossible. And it now stands forward as the result of all the efforts of the past, for the regeneration of order, which, whether considered individually or socially, is so deeply compromised by the anarchy of the present time. It

establishes a fundamental principle by which true philosophy and sound polity are brought into correlation; a principle which can be felt as well as proved, and which is at once the keystone of a system and a basis of government. I shall show, moreover, in the fifth chapter, that the doctrine is as rich in esthetic beauty as in philosophical power and in social influence. This will complete the proof of its efficacy as the centre of a universal system. Viewed from the moral, scientific, or poetical aspect, it is equally valuable; and it is the only principle which can bring Humanity safely through the most formidable crisis that she has ever yet undergone. It will be now clear to all that the force of demonstration, a force peculiar to modern times, and which still retains much of its destructive character, becomes matured and elevated by Positivism. It begins to develop constructive tendencies, which will soon be developed more largely. It is not too much, then, to say that Positivism, notwithstanding its speculative origin, offers as much to natures of deep sympathy as to men of highly cultivated intellects, or of energetic character.

***Objective basis  
of the system;  
External Order  
of the World, as  
revealed by  
Science***

The spirit and the principle of the synthesis which all true philosophers should endeavour to establish, have now been defined. I proceed to explain the method that should be followed in the task, and the peculiar difficulty with which it is attended.

The object of the synthesis will not be secured until it embraces the whole extent of its domain, the moral and practical departments as well as the intellectual. But these three departments cannot be dealt with simultaneously. They follow an order of succession which, so far from dis severing them from the whole to which they belong, is seen when carefully examined to be a natural result of their mutual dependence. The truth is, and it is a truth of great importance, that Thoughts must be systematized before



Feelings, Feelings before Actions. It is doubtless, owing to a confused apprehension of this truth, that philosophers hitherto, in framing their systems of human nature, have dealt almost exclusively, with our intellectual faculties.

The necessity of commencing with the co-ordination of ideas is not merely due to the fact that the relations of these, being more simple and more susceptible of demonstration, form a useful logical preparation for the remainder of the task. On closer examination we find a more important, though less obvious reason. If this first portion of the work be once efficiently performed, it is the foundation of all the rest. In what remains no very serious difficulty will occur, provided always that we content ourselves with that degree of completeness which the ultimate purpose of the system requires.

To give such paramount importance to this portion of the subject may seem at first sight inconsistent with the proposition just laid down, that the strength of the intellectual faculties is far inferior to that of the other elements of our nature. It is quite certain that Feeling and Activity have much more to do with any practical step that we take than pure Reason. In attempting to explain this paradox, we come at last to the peculiar difficulty of this great problem of human Unity.

The first condition of unity is a subjective principle; and this principle in the Positive system is the subordination of the intellect to the heart: Without this the unity that we seek can never be placed on a permanent basis, whether individually or collectively. It is essential to have some influence sufficiently powerful to produce convergence amid the heterogeneous and often antagonistic tendencies of so complex an organism as ours. But this first condition, indispensable as it is, would be quite insufficient for the purpose, without some objective basis, existing

independently of ourselves in the external world. That basis consists for us in the laws or Order of the phenomena by which Humanity is regulated. The subjection of human life to this order is incontestable; and as soon as the intellect has enabled us to comprehend it, it becomes possible for the feeling of love to exercise a controlling influence over our discordant tendencies. This, then, is the mission allotted to the intellect in the Positive synthesis; in this sense it is that it should be consecrated to the service of the heart.

I have said that our conception of human unity must be totally inadequate, and, indeed, cannot deserve the name, so long as it does not embrace every element of our nature. But it would be equally fatal to the completeness of this great conception to think of human nature irrespectively of what lies outside it. A purely subjective unity, without any objective basis, would be simply impossible. In the first place any attempt to co-ordinate man's moral nature, without regard to the external world, supposing the attempt feasible, would have very little permanent influence on our happiness, whether collectively or individually; since happiness depends so largely upon our relations to all that exists around us. Besides this, we have to consider the exceeding imperfection of our nature. Self-love is deeply implanted in it, and when left to itself is far stronger than Social Sympathy. The social instincts would never gain the mastery were they not sustained and called into constant exercise by the economy of the external world, an influence which at the same time checks the power of the selfish instincts.

**By it the selfish affections are controlled; the unselfish strengthened**

To understand this economy aright; we must remember that it embraces not merely the inorganic world, but also the phenomena of our own existence. The phenomena of human life, though more modifiable than any others, are yet equally subject to invariable laws; laws

which form the principal objects of Positive speculation. Now the benevolent affections, which themselves act in harmony with the laws of social development, incline us to submit to all other laws, as soon as the intellect has discovered their existence. The possibility of moral unity depends, therefore, even in the case of the individual, but still more in that of society, upon the necessity of recognizing our subjection to an external power. By this means our self-regarding instincts are rendered susceptible of discipline. In themselves they are strong enough to neutralize all sympathetic tendencies, were it not for the support that the latter find in this External Order. Its discovery is due to the intellect; which is thus enlisted in the service of feeling, with the ultimate purpose of regulating action.

Thus it is that an intellectual synthesis, or systematic study of the laws of nature, is needed on far higher grounds than those of satisfying our theoretical faculties, which are, for the most part, very feeble, even in men who devote themselves to a life of thought. It is needed, because it solves at once the most difficult problem of the moral synthesis. The higher impulses within us are brought under the influence of a powerful stimulus from without. By its means they are enabled to control our discordant impulses, and to maintain a state of harmony towards which they have always tended, but which, without such aid, could never be realized. Moreover, this conception of the order of nature evidently supplies the basis for a synthesis of human action; for the efficacy of our action depends entirely upon their conformity to this order. But this part of the subject has been fully explained in my previous work, and I need not enlarge upon it further. As soon as the synthesis of mental conceptions enables us to form a synthesis of feelings, it is clear that there will be no very serious difficulties in constructing a synthesis of actions. Unity of action depends upon unity of impulse, and unity of design; and thus we find

that the co-ordination of human nature, as a whole, depends ultimately upon the co-ordination of mental conceptions, a subject which seemed at first of comparatively slight importance.

The subjective principle of Positivism, that is, the subordination of the intellect to the heart is thus fortified by an objective basis, the immutable Necessity of the external world; and by this means it becomes possible to bring human life within the influence of social sympathy. The superiority of the new synthesis to the old is even more evident under this second aspect than under the first. In theological systems the objective basis was supplied by spontaneous belief in a supernatural Will. Now, whatever the degree of reality attributed to these fictions, they all proceeded from a subjective source; and therefore their influence in most cases must have been very confused and fluctuating. In respect of moral discipline they cannot be compared either for precision, for force, or for stability, to the conception of an invariable Order, actually existing without us, and attested, whether we will or no, by every act of our existence.

**Our conception of this External Order has been gradually growing from the earliest times, and is but just complete**

This fundamental doctrine of Positivism is not to be attributed in the full breadth of its meanings to any single thinker. It is the slow result of a vast process carried out in separate departments, which began with the first use of our intellectual powers, and which is only just completed in those who exhibit those powers in their highest form. During the long period of her infancy Humanity has been preparing this the most precious of her intellectual attainments, as the basis for the only system of life which is permanently adapted to our nature. The doctrine has to be demonstrated in all the more essential cases from observation only, except so far as we admit argument from

analogy. Deductive argument is not admissible, except in such cases as are evidently compounded of others in which the proof given has been sufficient. Thus, for instance, we are authorized by sound logic to assert the existence of laws of weather; though most of these are still, and, perhaps, always will be, unknown. For it is clear that meteorological phenomena result from a combination of astronomical, physical and chemical influences, each of which has been proved to be subject to invariable laws. But in all phenomena which are not thus reducible, we must have recourse to inductive reasoning; for a principle which is the basis of all deduction cannot be itself deduced. Hence it is that the doctrine, being so entirely foreign as it is to our primitive mental state, requires such a long course of preparation. Without such preparation even the greatest thinkers could not anticipate it. It is true that in some cases metaphysical conceptions of a law have been formed before the proof really required had been furnished. But they were never of much service, except so far as they generalized in a more or less confused way the analogies naturally suggested by the laws which had actually been discovered in simpler phenomena. Besides, such assertions always remained very doubtful and very barren in result, until they were based upon some outline of a really Positive theory. Thus, in spite of the apparent potency of this metaphysical method, to which modern intellects are so addicted, the conception of an External Order is still extremely imperfect in many of the most cultivated minds, because they have not verified it sufficiently in the most intricate and important class of phenomena, the phenomena of society. I am not, of course, speaking of the few thinkers who accept my discovery of the principal laws of Sociology. Such uncertainty in a subject so closely related to all others, produces great confusion in men's minds, and affects their perception of an invariable order, even in the simplest subjects. A proof of this is the utter delusion into which most

geometricians of the present day have fallen with respect to what they call the Calculus of Chances; a conception which presupposes that the phenomena considered are not subject to law. The doctrine, therefore, cannot be considered as firmly established in any one case, until it has been verified specially in every one of the primary categories in which phenomena may be classed. But now that this difficult condition has really been fulfilled by the few thinkers who have risen to the level of their age, we have at last a firm objective basis on which to establish the harmony of our moral nature. That basis is, that all events whatever, the events of our own personal and social life included, are always subject to natural relations of sequence and similitude, which in all essential respects lie beyond the reach of our interference.

**Even where not modifiable, its influence on the character is of the greatest value**

This, then, is the external basis of our synthesis, which includes the moral and practical faculties, as well as the speculative. It rests at every point upon the unchangeable Order of the world. The right understanding of this order is the principal subject of our thoughts; its preponderating influence determines the general course of our feelings; its gradual improvement is the constant object of our actions. To form a more precise notion of its influence, let us imagine that for a moment it were really to cease. The result would be that our intellectual faculties, after wasting themselves in wild extravagancies, would sink rapidly into incurable sloth; our nobler feelings would be unable to prevent the ascendancy of the lower instincts; and our active powers would abandon themselves to purposeless agitation. Men have, it is true, been for a long time ignorant of this Order. Nevertheless we have been always subject to it; and its influence has always tended, though without our knowledge, to control our whole being; our actions first, and subsequently our thoughts, and