

RECONCILING ORDER AND PROGRESS: AUGUSTE COMTE, GUSTAVE LE BON,
ÉMILE DURKHEIM, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVISM IN FRANCE, 1820-1914

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2014

Major Professor: Amelia Lyons

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the philosophy of positivism in nineteenth century France. Based on an empirical vision of society, positivism advocated values of rationality, progress, and secularization. In that way, it stood as one of the defining systems of thought of the modern era. I discuss, however, an undercurrent of anxiety about those same values. Positivism's founder, Auguste Comte, argued that all sciences would become unified and organized under universal principles and empirical standards. He viewed the human mind as becoming more rationalized throughout history. In his later career, however, he argued that rationalism was a destructive force and that a new form of secular religion was necessary to establish morality and order. I argue that this transition from science to religion represents an underlying anxiety of the nineteenth century. Intellectuals from different sides of the political spectrum viewed progress as positive, but also limited. They argued that something beyond science, in the realm of the religious, the metaphysical, or the subjective, was necessary for society. They expressed these concerns through the language of gender. Comte argued that women would be at the center of his religion. They would socialize and moralize men, making them part of a new unified, pacifist and orderly social whole.

I also discuss two later intellectuals, social psychologist Gustave Le Bon and pioneering sociologist Émile Durkheim. Le Bon represented the fin-de-siècle rejection of positivism. He began with positivist principles, but later argued that humanity was irrational and violent. He viewed the modern masses as a powerful force which threatened to destroy civilization. The other figure, Durkheim, rejected Le Bon's form of nationalist right-wing thought and formed

theories of social harmony, altruism, and a solidarity. He sought to reconcile egalitarian republican principles with positivist science. Despite their diverging theories, however, Le Bon and Durkheim employed similar assumptions about modernity and gender. Le Bon argued that European men were superior, and that all other groups shared an undeveloped mentality. Durkheim argued that men were social while women were simpler and mentally limited.

Their views, far from establishing an unproblematic hierarchy of gender and race, in fact expressed anxieties about the state of modernity. They identified women, the lower classes, and other societies with values of simplicity, unity, and tradition. They identified the modern, Western male individual with the problems of modern society: excessive rationalization, instability, and secularization. This sense of ambivalence about modernity reveals the central importance of positivism to understanding nineteenth century thought. Positivism sought to reconcile seemingly antithetical principles of order with progress, individualism with social unity, and morality with rationalization. In doing so, it established anxieties about the forces of change. Positivists advocated the most modern of principles, and sought to further the progress of civilization, but also identified those rationalized forces as problems in need of control. Positivism thus established its own undoing, which would come at the beginning of the twentieth century. In that era, intellectuals rejected purely scientific visions of the world in favor of subjective thought. I locate the origins of that rejection at the very foundations of positivist theory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Amelia Lyons, for encouraging me to pursue this topic and for providing comments on numerous drafts over the past year. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ezekiel Walker and Dr. Richard Crepeau. Their comments have allowed me to significantly improve the final version of the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1830s, French philosopher Auguste Comte (1789-1847) established one of the major philosophies of the century, positivism. He argued that all sciences were developing along the same lines, from a theological, to a metaphysical, and finally a positive stage. In their final form, they would adopt an empirical standard. The only true knowledge would be based on observation and the formulation of general laws. At this point, all disciplines had reached this final state, except for the social sciences. Comte argued that once positivism became complete, it would reconcile the divergent intellectual trends of the modern era, ending “the current intellectual disorder”¹ and “the state of crisis in which the most civilized nations have found themselves for so long.”² I discuss how Comte and two later scientists, social psychologist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) and sociologist Émile Durkheim, (1858-1917) used this idea of objective science to found theories of social order based on their ideas of social, racial, and sexual inequality. I also discuss another aspect of positivism. In his late career, Comte founded a secular religion, based on veneration of humanity. He argued that the modern era was overly-rationalized, and that his system would revive the role of the emotions.

Why did he adopt this anti-rationalist idea? Comte himself argued that his love for a woman named Clotilde de Vaux gave him a new understanding of the role of the emotions in human life.³ I argue, in addition, that it represented continuing anxieties over the power of

¹ Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive* (Paris: Bachelier, 1830), 1:49-50.

² *Ibid.*, 1:1-50. For the quote, see *ibid.*, 47-8.

³ Comte, *Système de politique positive: ou, Traité de sociologie, instituant la religion de l'humanité* (Paris: L. Mathias, 1851), 8-11.

rationalization. I frame this in the continuing legacy of the Enlightenment, and its debates on science, individualism, and equality. As Sudhir Hazareesingh has written, positivism “harked back to the Enlightenment's project of establishing a social and political order based on progress.”⁴ Positivism posited an objective understanding of human life and a secularized, scientific social order. Yet its belief in science was not absolute. Comte himself founded his social theory upon the two major strands of eighteenth century thought, both Enlightenment scientism and Romantic subjectivism. Though positivism came to represent a scientific, deterministic vision of the world, its practitioners in fact struggled with reconciling the fundamental forces of the modern era, order with progress, the individual with the collective, and rationality with ideals. Most importantly, positivists struggled with the role of science in society.

In Comte's religious work, he argued that reason was essentially destructive, and that the “heart” was the true guide of human nature. The point of positivism, far from perfecting rationality, was to establish “the ascendancy of the heart over the mind.”⁵ Interpretations of this shift have varied. Comte's early followers viewed his religion as a departure from the true, scientific positivism.⁶ Later work has viewed Comte's scientific and religious ideas as part of the same project.⁷ I follow this latter interpretation, but place it in a different context; I too argue that positivism involved both science and religion, but view their coexistence as a sign of the continuing anxiety over the ideas of the Enlightenment. Throughout his work, from his early

⁴ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79.

⁵ Comte, *Système*, 1:4-5.

⁶ Walter M. Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth-Century: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Repr., Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), 19-24. John Stuart Mill viewed Comte's religion as an inferior deviation from his earlier work. John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1961), 125-200.

⁷ Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24; Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3:582-4.

writings, he demonstrated an uncertainty over the nature of the social order, arguing that both rationality and morality were necessary.

I argue, in addition, that Comte expressed this anxiety in the language of gender. When he valorized rationality, he viewed men as superior and women as inferior, undeveloped and childlike. When he rejected rationality for subjective thought he valorized women as a superior, moral “guardian angels.”⁸ The tension over rationality continued throughout the history of positivism. I discuss two other figures, Le Bon and sociologist Durkheim, who adopted parts of Comte's theory. They began as empiricists, but demonstrated the same uncertainty over science. Le Bon used positivism to reinforce an idea of social inequality, in which the European man was the superior, intellectual leader of the world, but he viewed that reason as destructive, ruining society's solidarity. In his popular writing on crowd psychology, he rejected rationalism altogether, arguing that the man in the crowd reverted to a primitive, uncivilized state. Durkheim was the leading sociologist of his time, the first to establish the discipline as an academic science. He initially followed positivism and used empirical science to study the crisis of modernization. He viewed this crisis, again, in terms of gender; he viewed the modern man as losing his place in society, amidst the changes of modernization, while women remained in a serene state of tradition, outside of the social world.

These intellectuals all undermined the idea of reason, identifying men with superior rationality, but also a decadent intellectualism, and women with inferiority, but also with an innate morality or harmony. What did this recurring pattern of imagery mean? Did it reflect

⁸ Comte, *Catéchisme positiviste ou sommaire exposition de la religion universelle en onze entretiens systématiques entre une femme et un prêtre de l'humanité* (Paris: Carilian-Goery et Vor. Dalmont, 1852), 185.

ambivalence over change and progress? Was it an attempt to reinforce women's inferiority by identifying that inferiority with an idealized basis of society? Both were true. By identifying men as rational, these intellectuals could establish men's right to dominance. Conversely, by identifying women with tradition, they could form a critique of modernity, in which the feminine and uncivilized represented all that was lost in modern society. Importantly, the feminine and masculine were not opposed, but complementary principles; imagining modernity in gendered terms allowed intellectuals to conceive of an orderly progress, with the male and female spheres reconciling tradition with change.

How does this study contribute to the study of nineteenth century France? There are several answers. First, I update the historiography of positivism itself. There have been several studies of the philosophy, mostly from the mid-twentieth century.⁹ I incorporate more recent trends, such as gender, race, imperial, and social histories. In addition, there have been numerous works on Comte and Durkheim, and several about Le Bon, from the perspective of sociological theory.¹⁰ I place these intellectuals in a different context, the development of positivism, and use them to highlight the continuing concerns over the role of science in the nineteenth century. I have selected them because they all began with a positivist, scientific conception of human society before deciding that objectivity was insufficient; humanity needed a subjective, moral ideal to exist in society. This demonstrates the continuity throughout the early modern and

⁹ Simon, *European Positivism*; D.G. Charlton, *Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 63-70; Leszek Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, trans. Norbert Guterman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1986).

¹⁰ Mike Gane, *Auguste Comte* (London: Routledge, 2006); Anthony Giddens, *Durkheim* (Hassock, Sussex, The Harvester Press, 1978); Stjepan G. Mestrovic, *Emile Durkheim and the Reformation of Sociology* (Totawa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988).

modern periods, in the debates between the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment, the liberals and the Ultras in the Restoration, and challenges to positivism in the fin-de-siècle. Throughout, the same ideas remained in contention: rationalism, universalism, equality and progress.

This point leads to the final question: why positivism, specifically? What does this philosophy reveal that others do not? If the ideas of these intellectuals—concerning gender, race, and science—were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, what makes positivism a uniquely important means to understand the centuries thought? I argue that the answer is in Comte's stated goal, “to reconcile order and progress.”¹¹ He sought to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable: tradition and change, the individual and the collective, and rationality with morality. In that way, positivism takes on a new importance, not as the peak of nineteenth century optimism and belief in science, but an idea at the center of the century's anxieties about modernity. Comte and his followers existed at the divide between the empirical and the subjective, at the forefront on the development of the major ideas of the time, in debates on gender difference, imperialism, and democratization. For that reason, I connect them to a longer history, spanning the period from the eighteenth century to the post-World War I era. Their importance is also apparent in Comte's other formulation of his phrase: “Love for principal, order for basis, and progress for goal.”¹² That additional phrase, “love,” reveals the underlying tension in the positivists' thought. These intellectuals all came to the conclusion that science and progress, though positive, could not suffice to create a social order. There had to be something else, subjective and perhaps irrational,

¹¹ Comte, *Appel aux conservateurs* (Paris: Victor Dalmont, 1855), viii.

¹² Comte, *Système*, 1:321.

to guide human life. That the century's thought as a whole reached the same conclusions, leading to the rejection of positivism, reveals the particular importance of positivism. It was an idea which advanced the most modern of principles, yet undermined itself, creating the basis for its own undoing.

Background: The Eighteenth Century

The most obvious way to examine the history of positivism would be to begin with its intellectual predecessors. According to Leszek Kolakowski, positivism developed throughout the early modern period, in the work of René Descartes, David Hume, Jean le Rond D'Alembert, and others.¹³ Walter Simon takes a more narrow approach, identifying positivism with the Comte and his followers in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ I have chosen a different framework for understanding this history, centered not on positivism's tenets, but on the debate over science and rationality.

This clash came about in the early modern debates on the Enlightenment. The leaders of that movement advocated a set of revolutionary ideas: equality, materialism, and a rationalist reconstruction of society.¹⁵ Initially, it formed a universal idea of human nature. According to Descartes and subsequent philosophers, the human mind was universal. Society advanced, but

¹³ Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason*, 11-46.

¹⁴ Simon, *European Positivism*, 3-8.

¹⁵ Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-17.

human nature remained essentially the same.¹⁶ With the mid-eighteenth century, however, philosopher Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot extended the idea of progress to include both the individual and the social. He viewed humanity as essentially progressive. With the growth of civilization, the human mind itself became superior. He viewed progress as developing in a straight line, which would lead to the total civilization of the world.¹⁷ He thus established two key points; first, that humanity was universal but unequal. Because different societies advanced at different rates, non-Western peoples represented the stages of the past.¹⁸ Second, he established the link between rationality and morality. His follower, Marquis de Condorcet, advanced this idea further. He viewed history as a linear development, resulting in the development of the human mind.¹⁹ He viewed scientific and moral progress as one and the same; in his utopian future, human nature would be perfected. The current evils of inequality and crime would disappear and humanity would serve the ideal of scientific advancement.²⁰ There are obvious problems inherent to these ideas. By arguing for universal equality, Enlightenment philosophers in fact established the imperialist thinking of the following century. As Turgot argued, Europeans represented the leaders of civilization, and thus had to spread their

¹⁶ An early interpretation, from J.B. Bury, argues that the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns originated an idea of cultural progress, but not human perfectibility. J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origins and Growth* (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1920), 98-112. Adam Smith viewed societies as developing through stages, but rejected the idea of universal progress or intellectual advance. Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25-35.

¹⁷ Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 22-36.

¹⁸ Robert Nisbet, "Turgot and the Contexts of Progress," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119, no. 3 (June 1975), 217-18.

¹⁹ For Condorcet's idea of the stages of intellectual development, see Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*. 2nd. e (Paris: Agasse, 1895), 1-15.

²⁰ Manuel, *Prophets of Paris*, 96-100.

enlightenment to the rest of the world.²¹

Critics contested these universalist ideals throughout the century. In the early eighteenth century, Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico rejected Descartes's idea of universal truth, instead arguing for knowledge as subjective, and cultural ideas as fluid and changing. He argued that cultures changed over time, passing through stages, and had to be understood on their own terms. He argued that history was not linear, but cyclical; over time, a people rose up out of a primitive state, became civilized, and then declined. The final stage was a return to the primitive state.²² This theory continued in the nineteenth century, in the work of Le Bon, among others.²³ Another eighteenth-century intellectual, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, rejected Enlightenment optimism for a subjective, anti-rationalist philosophy.²⁴ He argued that the civilizing process, far from perfecting humanity, instead increased its inherent flaws: greed, selfishness, and desire for power.²⁵ Western society was degraded beyond hope.²⁶ In contrast to Condorcet's belief in a future utopia, he valorized the beginnings of society, in its primitive state, as the most perfect form of human life.²⁷ He argued that, in the modern period, strong nationalist belief was necessary. Most philosophers viewed humanity as inherently social, and solidarity as spontaneous. Rousseau, in contrast, argued that the government had to impose moral standards, and love of the country, to

²¹ Ibid., 41-2.

²² Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21-88.

²³ H. Stuart Hughes discusses the resurgence of cyclical historical theory in the late nineteenth century. H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 36-50.

²⁴ Berlin, *Critics*, 93-100.

²⁵ Graeme Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment: A Republican Critique of the Philosophes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 41-53.

²⁶ Ibid., 106-11.

²⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*." *Modern Philology* 21, no. 2 (November 1923), 179-81.

form individuals into a society.²⁸

The reaction against the Enlightenment increased in the latter half of the century. The French counter-Enlightenment viewed intellectual debates as a contest for the fate of society itself. They believed that religion was the foundation for royal power and moral order and that the atheism of the Enlightenment threatened to undermine that order.²⁹ In Germany, Johann Gottfried von Herder argued that each society represented its own ideas and values, and that all norms were equally valid.³⁰ By the time of the French Revolution, these debates established a set of ideological oppositions, between the universal and the particular, stability and progress, and most importantly, traditional belief and enlightenment. Comte, despite his belief in progress, in fact adopted the counter-Enlightenment's characterization of the philosophers. He viewed their revolutionary thought as essentially destructive.³¹ He adopted the mission of replacing their abstract ideas with concrete observation, and turning revolutionary ideas into the basis for order.

The French Revolution could only add to fears of the destructive power of rationality. The revolutionaries believed that they could recreate the individual and the social at once, forming society into a new, egalitarian unity.³² They created the idea of a total break, in which the future society would have no precedent.³³ This idea of discontinuity haunted the following century's thought. As early as 1789, British philosopher Edmund Burke saw the Revolution as threatening to unravel society's fabric; revolutionaries rejected tradition and reality in favor of abstract,

²⁸ Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment*, 55-68.

²⁹ Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28-42.

³⁰ Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 57-67.

³¹ Comte, *Cours*, 35-61.

³² Mona Ozouf, "La Révolution française et l'idée de l'homme nouveau," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Colin Lucas (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 2:213-19.

³³ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 25-51.

rationalist ideas. This was harmful. Destroying the current order would destroy all forms of civility, demoralizing the population and releasing their inherent violence.³⁴ Burke thus prefigured some of the fears of the following century; that civilization was superficial, and that excess rationalization would undermine society's delicate order. After the violence of the Terror, scientists rejected radical change and Enlightenment thought.³⁵ They redefined human nature, not as universal and perfectible, but as limited and unequal.³⁶ They viewed the family as providing a new stability to balance and control the individual's life.³⁷

After the end of Napoleon's government in 1814, both the liberal and conservative factions sought to restore a sense of coherence to history; the liberals, by integrating the Revolution into an idea of historical progress,³⁸ and the monarchy and far-right Ultras, by erasing the Revolution and adopting an idealized vision of the Old Regime.³⁹ This development, as Darrin McMahan argues, represented a continuation of the previous century's debates on Enlightenment.⁴⁰ The conservatives, like their predecessors, argued for particularism, tradition, and continuity. They valorized the past and cultural identity. They argued that change had to be gradual, rather than rapid, and had to follow a natural order.⁴¹ By Comte's era, the ideas of the

³⁴ Frank M. Turner, "Introduction," in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xi-xxxvii.

³⁵ Sean M. Quinlan, "Physical and Moral Regeneration after the Terror: Medical Culture, Sensibility and Family Politics in France, 1794-1804." *Social History* 29, no. 2 (May 2004), 139-147.

³⁶ Manuel, "From Equality to Organicism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 1 (January 1956), 58-62.

³⁷ Quinlan, "Physical and Moral Regeneration," 146-151.

³⁸ Stanley Mellon, *The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 16-18.

³⁹ François Furet, *Revolutionary France 1770-1880*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 294-8; Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (University of California Press, 2000), 39-62.

⁴⁰ McMahan, *Enemies of the Enlightenment*, 154-7.

⁴¹ René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 44-55.

Enlightenment and Revolution continued to shape perceptions of history. There were two ideas; one, a rationalist, revolutionary idea of change, and the other, a Romantic idea of continuity and organic development. Comte is significant, for this thesis, because he attempted to synthesize these two ideals, to historicize progress and created an empirical, rather than abstract idea of revolution.

Modernity and the *Femme au Foyer*

A key idea stands out in these debates: the uncertain role of the individual in modern society. Some took an optimistic view, arguing that progress would liberate human nature, freeing the person from the corruption of the old order. Others were more cautious; they viewed tradition as the basis for morality, and change as destabilizing the individual's nature. In all of these ideas, however, the individual was male. Two developments contributed to this idea. First, as Thomas Laqueur and others have argued, the eighteenth century saw the development of a new idea of sexual difference. In the pre-modern era, intellectuals and doctors had viewed the sexes as physically similar, and all forms of biology as analogous. New medical thought identified women and men as totally incommensurable. Every aspect of their bodies was totally different.⁴² Parallel to this, debates on women's abilities also took a new turn. In the early modern *Querrel des femmes*, early feminists argued for women's abilities, and their opponents

⁴² Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 4-21, 149-50; Londa Shiebinger, *The Mind has no Sex?: Women in the origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 191-206.

argued for their limits.⁴³ By the eighteenth century, both sides adopted the idea of women's difference and moral superiority.⁴⁴ This was the ideology of gender complementarity, which continued into the coming century and beyond.⁴⁵

Lieselotte Steinbrügge argues that the feminine ideal emerged as a response to modernization; in the face of social change, rationalization, and revolution, the idea of femininity represented tradition, morality, and emotion.⁴⁶ This is apparent in Rousseau's theory. He argued that modernity corrupted men, but that women could resolve it. He argued that the ideal, domestic woman would moralize men, influence them emotionally, and integrate them into society.⁴⁷ Women represented an ideal of the natural, outside of society. This could serve as a critique of the modern, but I argue that it also represented a way to conceive of the social order. The revolutionaries of 1789 sought to reform society through marriage, establishing equality between the sexes.⁴⁸ The following regimes, the Directory and Empire, limited this liberal ideal and sought a return to patriarchy.⁴⁹ They too revealed an anxiety of masculine nature; the post-Thermidor regime, viewing the male individual as a problem in need of control, identified the

⁴³ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24-7.

⁴⁴ Steinbrügge discusses the shift in feminist debate. Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10-20. For the idea of feminine superiority, see Marlene LeGates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1976), 21-39.

⁴⁵ Camille Robcis discusses the structuralist idea of the family as the foundation of society. This idea played a part in the debate on civil unions in the 1990s. Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 239-61.

⁴⁶ Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex*, 105-7.

⁴⁷ Nicole Fermon, "Domesticating Women, Civilizing Men: Rousseau's Political Program," *The Sociological Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (August 1994), 431-42.

⁴⁸ Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 47-92.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 249-305.

family as the way to moralize him.⁵⁰ This ideal of moral femininity became dominant in the following century. It viewed women as at once greater and lesser than men; they were weaker in every way, but this weakness was the source of their superiority. Thus, the physicians of the Napoleonic era argued that women were entirely reproductive, ruled by biology. This function weakened them and limited them to the home.⁵¹ It also established their value; intellectuals of all sorts, from feminists to antifeminists, positivists to Romantics, from the left to the right, viewed women's domestic role as the key to society.⁵² This meant that women were judged by a single standard, whether or not they lived up to that function. Thus, two images emerged; the good woman, who moralized society, and the bad woman, who corrupted it.⁵³

In the nineteenth-century ideology of gender complementarity, women were weak and inferior, but also altruistic and morally superior. The union of the two natures, the masculine and feminine, founded society and its moral basis.⁵⁴ This idea of complementarity was a way to envision order amidst change. Indeed, the nineteenth century brought numerous transformations,

⁵⁰ Quinlan, "Men without Women? Ideal Masculinity and Male Sociability in the French revolution," in *French masculinities: History, Culture, and Politics*, eds. Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 43.

⁵¹ Yvonne Knibiehler, "Les Médecines et la «nature féminine» au temps du Code Civil," *Annales. Economies, Societal, Civilisations* 31, no. 4 (1976), 829-36.

⁵² James McMillan discusses the ubiquity of the idea of the woman as educator in the home James H. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 50-2. For feminist uses of maternalism, see Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *The American Historical Review* (June 1984); Patrick Kaye Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up! The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 79-82; Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 133-4. For Jules Michelet's antifeminist idea of the domestic woman, see *ibid.*, 158-61.

⁵³ For these two images in Rousseau, see Barbara Corrado Pope, "The Influence of Rousseau's Ideology of Domesticity," in *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to Present*, eds. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 136-8.

⁵⁴ This analysis uses three examples, Comte as well as historian Jules Michelet and socialist Pierre Joseph Proudhon. For Michelet's idea of women's nature, see Jules Michelet, *L'Amour*, 7th ed. (Paris: Librairie de L. Hatchette, 1870), 52-8, 74-9. For his idea of the family as the basis of society, see *ibid.*, 1. For Proudhon's description of women's nature, see Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la révolution et dans l'église* (Bruxelles: A LaCroix et Verboeckhoven, 1868-1870), 4:132-58; Proudhon, *Pornocratie, ou Les Femmes dans les temps modernes* (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1875), 4-34. For his corresponding idea of the family, see Proudhon, *Justice*, 19-46.

in society, culture, politics, and thought. Historians such as Mary Louise Roberts have demonstrated how gender, and specifically the woman, stood for ideas about changes throughout society.⁵⁵ This is apparent in the three subjects of this thesis. Comte described women as naturally selfless.⁵⁶ Le Bon referred to their “charming weakness.”⁵⁷ Durkheim viewed their mental simplicity as a virtue. All three sought to discredit feminism; they argued for women’s natural inferiority, as well as their normal place in the home.

Their views also represented a vision of stability. The family linked opposite principles of change and tradition, weakness and strength, superiority and inferiority. For Comte, the paternalistic relationship between the sexes founded “chivalry”⁵⁸ as the basis of society. Gender complementarity thus represented an ideal, not just of hierarchy, but of unity. It defined the normal order of things, also serving as a criticism of the imperfect state of modern society. Importantly, this involved men as well as women. The *femme au foyer* defined the perfect, selfless and moral women. I argue that it also served as a criticism of men and modernity as a whole. By viewing women as moral and tradition, these intellectuals identified men with the qualities of modernity: rationalization, secularization, and social instability. They viewed these qualities as necessary, but also problematic.

Gender thus served as a useful tool for understanding modernity because it united both principles, of tradition and change in a complex way. It made one sex superior, but viewed both

⁵⁵ For Roberts's argument, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 213-14. For similar arguments, see Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 36-60; Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 71-118.

⁵⁶ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 276-7.

⁵⁷ Gustave Le Bon, “La Psychologie des femmes et les effets de leur éducation actuelle,” *Revue Scientifique* no. 15 (October 1890), 451.

⁵⁸ Comte, *Système*, 1:256.

with ideals necessary for society's coherence. On this topic, I draw upon work that has analyzed gendered representations of modernity and tradition, and in particular the historiography of gender in the fin-de-siècle.⁵⁹ I contribute in several ways. First, I discuss how ideas of both masculinity and femininity formed a coherent representation of modern society. Second, I discuss how these representations demonstrated anxieties over progress, rationalization, and bourgeois society. Third, I place the anxieties over the male individual in modern society, in a longer framework. I argue that throughout modern history, from the Enlightenment to World War I, intellectuals used the idea of the masculine individual to understand the destructive and dehumanizing effects of modernization. Finally, I argue that gender and race, as well as gender, were part of this critique. For Comte, Africans were “the loving race”⁶⁰ and the lower class had “a superior morality.”⁶¹ Both represented a counterpoint to the decadence of bourgeois modernity.

Positivism and the Problem of Modernity

The first chapter is about the founder of positivism, Comte. In his early work of the 1820s and 1830s, he viewed all of history in intellectual terms. He argued that the metaphysical school,

⁵⁹ For the former, see Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ross, *Fast Cars*. For the latter, see Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁰ Comte, *Systeme*, 3:576.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1:132.

which he identified with the Enlightenment, had destroyed the thought of the theological era, but had failed to found a new system; thus, a form of “mental anarchy”⁶² reigned. The solution, according to Comte, was positivism; it would replace abstract theories with empirical observation, allowing a truly objective form of government. Scientists would take over the control of society and all political divisions and disagreements would fade, replaced by a rationalist consensus. There was more to his theory. As Mary Pickering has argued, Comte's system was “spiritual” from the beginning.⁶³ This is apparent in his view of gender. He identified women with morality and men with rationality. Initially, he viewed the latter principle as superior, but he later argued that emotion was more important to human nature. He founded a religious system in the 1840s and 1850s, based on the ideals of morality, subjectivity, and emotionalism. He idealized women as the true representatives of human nature, embodying altruism and caring, the principles which he sought to establish in society. I argue that Comte represented an iteration of the debate on rationalization. He viewed science as the basis for society, but then rejected it, turning to a nostalgic idea of a feminine, traditional past.

Was this concern over rationalism limited to Comte? On the contrary, I argue that it shaped the development of positivism for the rest of the century. After his death in 1857, the organized positivist movement split into two; one group, following Émile Littré, rejected Comte's religion and promoted his earlier, scientific thought. Another group, under Pierre Lafitte in France and Richard Congreve in England, accepted his later religious work.⁶⁴ This split

⁶² Comte, “October 5, 1843,” in *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à John Stuart Mill, 1841-1846* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1877) 183.

⁶³ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 1:5.

⁶⁴ For the positivist movements in France, see *ibid.*, 3:49-50. For positivism in Great Britain, see Simon, *European Positivism*, 48-64.

remained for the rest of positivism's history. Within each group, questions on positivism's nature remained alive. Should positivism be purely scientific? Should it be a religion? Within the religious school, there were debates on whether it should be an organized religion, or simply a set of principles.⁶⁵ On the scientific side, Littré rejected Comte's religion, but accepted his moral ideas.⁶⁶ This debate on religion reflected a larger concern which became prominent in the coming decades.

Littré played a key role in the positivist republicanism of the generation that founded the Third Republic in 1870. This generation abandoned the revolutionary thought of their predecessors and turned to ideals of gradual progress, secularization, and social stability.⁶⁷ By the last decades of the century however, positivism had come to represent all of the worst aspects of scientism.⁶⁸ Some philosophical trends argued for more subjective, intuitive ideas of knowledge.⁶⁹ Others argued that science was limited and religion was necessary for society.⁷⁰ Finally, these trends took on a political meaning in the political clash of the Dreyfus Affair. (1894-1906) The pro-Dreyfus left adopted universal values and positivism, while the right

⁶⁵ Ibid., 48-68.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 19-39.

⁶⁷ Hazareesingh discusses Littré's role in the formation of moderate republicanism. Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic*, 24-81. Mona Ozouf discusses the republicans' desire for a moderated revolutionary tradition, which would incorporate a sense of history and a gradual idea of change. Ozouf "L'Idée républicain et l'interprétation du passé national," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 53, no. 6 (1998), 1078-81. For their ideas of social order and secular education, see Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 521-7.

⁶⁸ H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (Repr., New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 38-41.

⁶⁹ Mary Jo Nye, "Gustave LeBon's Black Light: A Study in Physics and Philosophy in France at the Turn of the Century," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 4 (1974), 163-9; Roberts A. Nye, "Two Paths to a Psychology of Social Action: Gustave Le Bon and Georges Sorel," *The Journal of Modern History* 45, no. 3 (September 1973), 415-19; Antonio Aliotta, *The Idealistic Reaction against Science*, trans. Agnes McCaskill (London: Macmillan and co., Limited, 1914); Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*.

⁷⁰ Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 239-49; Harry W. Paul, "The Debate over the Bankruptcy of Science in 1895," *French Historical Studies* (Spring 1968), 302-6.

adopted anti-intellectualism and idealized visions of the nation.⁷¹ In a broader perspective, this division represented a familiar clash over the role of reason in society. It changed over time, taking on new meanings, but it represented the same concern over the loss of tradition and the creation of a rationalized society. Notably, this was not a concern limited to the right; the left also saw the dangers of scientism in the fin-de-siècle and adopted forms of Idealism and metaphysical thought.⁷²

The two following chapters discuss a figure on one side of this political divide. The first is Gustave Le Bon, the right-wing anthropologist and social psychologist. He began his career as a positivist. He used a Social Darwinist conception of society to argue that struggle and inequality were necessary for society. In his words, “to live is to struggle.”⁷³ Yet his work highlights one of the underlying questions about the meaning of progress: did scientific progress create morality or destroy it? According to Le Bon, progress was in fact double; scientific and technological advance rapidly transformed society, but human nature itself, and its sense of morality lagged behind. This was a problem, because while science destroyed religious conceptions of the world, no new ideas arrived to replace them. Western civilization was in a state of transition, losing its unifying beliefs and solidarity.

The symbol of this decadence was the modern crowd. Le Bon argue that the masses were taking over society, “act[ing] like the microbes which decompose debilitated bodies or

⁷¹ For the left's universalism and the rights nationalism, see Maurice Agulhon, *The French Republic, 1879-1992*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 85-6. For intellectualism vs. anti-intellectualism, see Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 135-68.

⁷² Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of the Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 33-7; Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 257-90.

⁷³ Le Bon, *Aphorismes du temps present*, in *Lois Psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, rev. ed. (Repr., Paris: Les Amis de Gustave Le Bon, 1978), 250.

cadavers.”⁷⁴ He described their threat in gendered and racialized terms. Crowds were impressionable and mercurial, like women and primitives, and exposed the innate irrationality of human nature. Unconscious forces, and not rationalist decisions, drove history. He viewed this unconscious as a negative force; it was responsible for the disasters of the modern era, in the form of revolution. Yet it also represented the solution to the decadence of the West. Le Bon argued that France had to adopt irrational ideas in order to revive itself. It had to defend the nation. In this way, Le Bon is an example of the development of the nationalist right in the 1890s.

The final chapter is about sociologist Emile Durkheim. In contrast to Le Bon, Durkheim was politically on the left and supported the Third Republic government. He adopted positivist thought, but viewed it as problematic; by the 1880s, positivism had taken elitist and authoritarian forms. For that reason, Durkheim updated positivism to reconcile it with the values of the republic. He rejected Le Bon’s Social Darwinist vision of social development and argued that society existed outside of the realm of nature. The individual was essentially social and race was irrelevant. Like Le Bon, however, he shared the fin-de-siècle idea of social decline. He argued that excessive social change weakened solidarity and norms and led to rising unhappiness. Once again, this idea of modernity was gender-specific; Durkheim argued that the ills of progress effected men, while women remained outside of modern society, in a simpler state. He reiterated the common idea of men as modern and social, and women as traditional and ahistorical.⁷⁵ Yet this made men the problem. Durkheim, like Comte and Le Bon used the idea of the modern man

⁷⁴ Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 2nd. ed. (Paris: Felix Alcan, Éditeur, 1896), 6.

⁷⁵ For discussions of this idea, see R.A. Sydie, *Natural Women, Cultured Men: A Feminist Perspective on Sociological Theory* (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1987); Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 36-60.

to represent the loss of tradition in the modern world.

During the events of the Dreyfus Affair, Durkheim found a solution to the problem of modernity: religion. Like others of his time, he viewed religion as the basis of morality, but viewed it as inevitably declining in an era of rationalization. A purely scientific perspective was inadequate. But he believed that a new, secular form of belief could replace religion. In his lectures on education of the early twentieth century, he described a secular moralism, founded on an idea of individualism. In contrast to earlier conceptions, he argued that this individualism would be altruistic and social. He conceived of the person as a part of the collective, and belief in the individual as a way of supporting social solidarity. In the same era, he began studies on the societies of Australia and North America. He believed that, by studying the most primitive and undeveloped form of culture and religion, one could understand the basis for modern society as well. It would reveal the basis for society. In this work, Durkheim rejected contemporary ideas of unilinear development and naturalistic understandings of social development. He argued that each society followed its own development and that social norms were constructed and contingent rather than inevitable. Yet this failed to change his conceptions of social norms; he still defended ideas of racial and sexual hierarchy, but on social, rather than natural terms. He argued that women had to remain in traditional roles because those roles were part of society's structure.

These chapters end in 1914, but the conclusion discusses Le Bon and Durkheim's responses to the war. Despite their differing theories, they became part of the wartime consensus, viewing the war as ending the decadence of the Belle Époque. Here at last was the solution to the problems of modernity. Of course, this perspective was short-lived; the effects of the war finally

separated the idea of scientific and moral progress. Science, rather than creating moral progress, instead led to dehumanization and unprecedented destruction.⁷⁶ Positivist theory ended. Even so, I suggest ways in which the ideas of the nineteenth century, on the family, gender, and the nation, continued to influence twentieth and twenty-first century thought. Ultimately, I place positivism in a larger framework; not just as an important idea of the nineteenth century, but one which took part in debates that continued throughout the modern era, from the eighteenth-century to the present.

⁷⁶ I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 162-6; Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 365-80.

CHAPTER ONE

“TO FORM AND PERFECT MEN”: AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE ORIGINS OF POSITIVISM

Auguste Comte has long posed a problem of interpretation. In his early career, he argued that human knowledge was advancing toward an objective, empirical state, and that a new science of society would reorganize and rationalize human life. He later rejected all of these principles. He argued that reason was wholly destructive, and that subjective ideas of morality and religion would provide the basis for a new society. How can one reconcile these widely divergent theories? I argue that the key is to understand his critique of the Enlightenment. He viewed modern history as a period of intellectual revolution in which the progressive forces of science and philosophy wiped away the older, theological way of thought. Revolutionary thought provided the basis for a new conception of society, but remained limited; it advanced false ideas of liberty and equality, which created only destruction. Comte's goal, then, was to take up and improve on the work of the eighteenth century.

The first section of this chapter argued that in the 1820s he adopted the liberal thought of the eighteenth century, but transformed its egalitarianism into arguments for inequality. He argued that progress improved human nature, but human nature was then unequal throughout the world. The second section discusses his more anti-liberal thought of the 1830s. He argued that women and men were complementary, but unequal, and that women had to remain under men's power. In this way, Comte provides an example of ideological transformation, showing how liberal turned to authoritarian thought. The following chapters demonstrate the same

transformation, as positivism became part of both far-right and republican thought.

The final section discusses the greatest shift in his thought, from empiricism to religious thought. This last period, I argue, represented a new iteration of his criticism of reason. He argued that the woman, rather than inferior, represented a new ideal for humanity, standing for virtues of unity, morality, and tradition. Where he had once viewed reason as incomplete, he came to argue that reason itself was the problem. The rational man was corrupt and the emotional woman was the solution. I argue that all of his thought, from his early scientism to later religion, was part of the same critique of modernity. His views on women exemplify this concern. As Mary Pickering has demonstrated, Comte began as a feminist following the feminism of the Enlightenment, before rejecting feminism for patriarchal thought, and then adopting the feminism of the 1848 era.⁷⁷ I follow this interpretation, but argue that there were underlying continuities as well. Throughout his career, Comte viewed women as symbols of tradition and morality. They would save man by socializing and moralizing him.

As studies of women's history have demonstrated, such ideas could serve to subordinate women.⁷⁸ Because these views identified the woman as perfect and the man corrupt, women had to serve men by ameliorating their nature. I argue, in addition, that Comte's feminine ideal was also a critique of modernity and masculinity. He identified women with the stability that was lost in modern society. The true change in Comte's theory was in how he expressed his concern about progress and rationalization. When he sought to create a scientific hierarchy, he viewed

⁷⁷ For this analysis, see Pickering, "Angels and Demons in the Moral Vision of Auguste Comte," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 2 (July, 1996), 10-40.

⁷⁸ Maternalist ideology imposed duties onto women and made them responsible for society. See for example Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop* 5 (1978), 9-65; Amelia H. Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole: Algerian Families and the Welfare State during Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

women as undeveloped inferiors, but when he turned to Romantic ideas of emotionalism, he valorized women's altruism and criticized men's egoism. These ideas set the stage for the later nineteenth century rejection of positivism. Comte thus represents the underlying tensions in scientific thought. Even at the beginning of positivism's development, its founder viewed pure empiricism as limited.

From Ideology to Knowledge: The Problem of Political Division after the Revolution

As Lynn Hunt argues, the French Revolution's idea of remaking France destroyed the old consensus on society, in which the monarchy was the only possible government. In its place, new ideas for reforming society developed which created various political factions, socialism, republicanism, and others. She states that "rather than expressing an ideology, therefore, revolutionary politics brought ideology into being."⁷⁹ This division grew in subsequent years, creating new, contrary ideas of the French past. Liberals argued that the progress of liberty led inevitably to the Revolution and the current government. They reversed the meaning of revolution, from a break with the past, to a link in history, and from the destruction of monarchy to the foundation of liberal monarchy.⁸⁰ Ultimately, they made revolution an orderly

⁷⁹ Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 12-13.

⁸⁰ Previously, the Ideologues rejected history and viewed the present as the most important subject. Ceri Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet* (London: Routledge, 1993), 13-14. Under the restoration, Germaine De Staël, François Guizot and others integrated the revolution into a historical context. Mellon, *Political Uses of History*, 7-26. They argued that it led to the Restoration charter, and that they had become the defenders of order, against the seditious Ultras, who took the place of the revolutionaries. *Ibid.*, 47-8. They rejected the revolutionary liberalism, with its abstract ideals, and wanted to create a more realistic theory,

phenomenon.

In contrast, the conservatives rejected the idea of progress and viewed the Old Regime as a stable, unchanging ideal.⁸¹ They adopted the idea of the revolution as an ahistorical break. For them, it had no basis in the past, had no popular support, and represented an Enlightenment scheme against the monarchy.⁸² Where the liberals integrated the revolution into the nation's history, the conservatives tried to erase it. After Napoleon's Hundred Days, (March-July 1815) the government attempted to suppress revolutionary and imperial signs and symbols, to make the public forget the recent past.⁸³ As Sheryl Kroen argues, royalists wanted to erase the Revolution, to return to a time when monarchy was the only possible government.⁸⁴ Together with the liberals, they wanted to redefine politics, to make a divided society seem unified again.

Philosopher Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825) provided another means to unity. He argued that over time, a civilization grew and established itself, but came into conflict with the rise of the next state of civilization. New intellectuals challenged the established social order, creating a revolution. He identified the current era as one of these periods of disorder, which would resolve itself in a period of "synthesis." This process repeated over time, making history itself a process of continual revolution, in which power was always uncertain and never fixed. Following Condorcet's idea of teleological history, Saint-Simon believed that there was a solution to revolution: scientific government.⁸⁵ In Saint-Simon's theory, the productive parts of society,

grounded in political reality. This meant ending the revolution and establishing stable politics. Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 291-3.

⁸¹ Crossley, *French Historians*, 6-8.

⁸² Mellon, *Political Uses of History*, 68-72.

⁸³ Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 282-4; Kroen, *Politics and Theater*, 39-58.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

⁸⁵ Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 219-34.

workers and bourgeoisie, would institute a new kind of peaceful revolution, using science to rationalize society.⁸⁶ They would reform the class system, basing it on nature rather than tradition.⁸⁷ They would end political division, replacing dangerous ideology with exact science.⁸⁸ In this way, Saint-Simon hoped to resolve the problem of modernity, not by erasing revolution, but by transforming all of history into a single dialectical revolution. For him, change created disorder, conflicting ideas and systems, but these would come together into a unified whole. History was not just fixed, but limited. It would end as science turned change into stability, difference into unity, and ideas into knowledge.

Saint-Simon's protégé, Auguste Comte, adopted this theory of history. In 1820, he wrote an essay in which he explained the rise and fall of the Old Regime. According to Comte, this order developed in the late medieval era, with the establishment of the religious and royal power. At the same time, its opposition came into being: industry and positive science. These forces coexisted at first, but conflict was inevitable.⁸⁹ Like Condorcet, Comte saw history as an inevitable process, leading toward revolution. He argued that the modern era saw the progressive forces challenge the established order, eventually undoing the Old Regime's social order.⁹⁰ Following Saint-Simon, he took a more pessimistic view of the Revolution and its ideology. He argued that liberal ideas of sovereignty were false and destructive. They served a useful purpose,

⁸⁶ For his definition of industrials and their use of scientists, see Manuel, *Saint-Simon*, 256-60. For his idea of science as a way to avoid revolution, see *ibid.*, 272-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 243-6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 275-7.

⁸⁹ Comte, "Sommaire appréciation de l'ensemble du passé moderne," in *Système de politique positive: ou, traité de sociologie, instituant la religion de l'humanité* (Paris: L. Mathias, 1851), 4:4-10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-19.

ending the old order, but could not found a new one.⁹¹ In this way, Comte continued the well-established discourse of order against progress, but took a new approach. Earlier liberals, such as Turgot and Condorcet, imagined liberal values as inherently positive, resulting in a utopian society. At the same time, they viewed the intellect as creating progress. It grew over time, passing from a primitive to a scientific state.⁹² In this way, liberalism appears empirical; it reflected the growing understanding of human nature.

Comte, in contrast, used the idea of progressive empiricism to reject liberal as well as conservative values, ultimately arguing for a political science that transcended politics. To do so, he re-imagined human nature and society. Liberalism had imagined society as universal; the same standards applied at all times. Comte, in contrast, argued that each period was unique, with its own standards.⁹³ It developed over time, leading to superior forms. Human nature developed in the same way. Like Condorcet, he viewed it as becoming superior over time, taking on a more equal form. Yet, unlike earlier theorists, he viewed social nature and the natural state as the same, rather than in conflict. Progress, rather than the gradual unveiling of natural equality, recreated nature into a superior state. He argued that education and industrialization would improve human nature, giving people the rationality and work ethic that they would need to be free. Without those qualities, however, they had to remain under external control. This established several things: that individuals are unequal, that human nature is malleable and progressive, and, most importantly, that human beings were a historical, rather than universal, phenomena. This meant

⁹¹ Comte, "Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société," in *Système*, 4:51-4.

⁹² Turgot originated the idea of the three stages, in which the mind passes toward a positive state. Manuel, *Prophets of Paris*, 31-3. Condorcet similarly argued all historical development led toward the development of modern European science. Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 1-15.

⁹³ Comte, "Plan des travaux," 101.

that, to govern society, one had to understand its overall development and current state. For that reason, Comte proposed a new, rationalized form of government, in which the progressive forces, scientists and industrialists, would take power. The scientists would create a political science modeled on natural science, which would abolish ideas of representation and public interest. In the new system, “the government of things replaces the government of people.”⁹⁴ The industrialists would provide the material forces necessary to run society.⁹⁵ This system would achieve the Enlightenment dream of scientific government, but stripped of the harmful forces of ideology. In Comte’s view, royalism represented early, theological thought. Liberalism represented the next stage, metaphysics.⁹⁶ Both were obsolete. Positivism would institute an empirical form of politics, which would understand history as a scientific phenomenon, following scientific laws, and moving along a fixed course. Political theory would give way to scientific facts, and doctrine to theory. Ultimately, this meant that conflict and disagreement would end, replaced by consensus and cooperation.

Even as Comte rejected the Enlightenment idea of human equality, he created another one, based on his concept of progress. Since the late eighteenth century, scientists such as Pierre Jean George Cabanis and Franz Joseph Gall had developed idea of inequality based on physiology.⁹⁷ Saint-Simon viewed some races as innately inferior and unable to progress.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁹⁵ Ibid., “Plan des travaux,” 72-3.

⁹⁶ Comte, “Sommaire,” 78-9.

⁹⁷ Cabanis and Bichat created a new idea of physiological inequality, in which ones traits and setting determine one’s mental ability. Manuel, “From Equality to Organicism,” 58-62. Gall’s phrenology determined that women were mentally weaker based on cranial shape. Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 16-19; Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815-1848* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 64. Roussel and Virey argued that women’s nervous nature made them less capable of thought. Knibiehler, “Les Médecines,” 835-7.

Comte rejected this idea. He argued that biology was limited to the natural person in his primitive state. The modern person transcended that existence, becoming largely social in nature.⁹⁹ He thus viewed humanity as progressive; because social change ameliorated their nature, and their nature corresponded to their social role, he viewed a change over time as a total change in nature. Humanity, again, became more rational, tending toward a fixed end point of superiority. This was not, however, truly universal. He believed that all people and all societies had the same course of development, but that they existed in unequal states in the present time.¹⁰⁰ He followed the idea, from Turgot, Condorcet, and Saint-Simon that different societies represented different stages of development.¹⁰¹ Unlike those earlier theorists, he made no argument for Europe's need to spread its modernity to the less advanced.¹⁰² He viewed change as relative, with each stage as a coherent whole. No institution was inherently good or bad, unless it outlived its usefulness.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the less advanced were not ready for modern norms, such as modern rights.¹⁰⁴ Progress had to be gradual and natural, rather than abrupt. This rejection of civilizing ideology would later serve to support ideas of imperial control. Here, however, his

⁹⁸ Staum notes that he contradicted this view in his later work. Staum, *Labeling People*, 19-20.

⁹⁹ Comte's argument is a response to Cabanis's work on biology. Comte, "Plan des travaux," 124-9.

¹⁰⁰ Comte rejected Montesquieu's idea of climatic determinism, instead arguing that social development happens the same way everywhere. Climate influences, but does not transform this development. *Ibid.*, 106-8.

¹⁰¹ Turgot argued that all people followed the same development, but that some remained behind. Ann-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Baron de Laune "Tableau philosophique des progrès successifs de l'esprit humain," in *Oeuvres de Turgot et documents le concernant* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1913-1923), 1:217-18. He used American Indians as an example of early social development. Turgot, "Plan de deux discours sur l'histoire universelle," in *Oeuvres de Turgot* (Paris: Giillaumin, 1844), 2:629-33. Condorcet constructed his theory of progress by comparing different societies as stages in development, with the Europeans as the modern stage. Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 3-12. Saint-Simon argued that all people made up a progression from leading toward greater civilization. Staum, *Labeling People*, 20.

¹⁰² Like Turgot and Condorcet, Saint-Simon viewed imperialism as spreading progress. Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 26-30; Patricia M.E. Lorcin, "Imperialism, Colonial Identity, and Race in Algeria, 1830-1870: The Role of the French Medical Corps," *Isis* 90, no. 4 (December 1999), 658-9.

¹⁰³ Comte, "Plan des travaux," 115-16.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

interest was fixed firmly in Europe. Other societies, for him, served to reflect the European past, as verification of his universal theory of progress.¹⁰⁵

How did one identify progress? For earlier Enlightenment intellectuals, one key sign was the status of women. They argued that women's roles improved over time, and even contributed to the furthering of morality in society.¹⁰⁶ Some, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, used the concept of enlightenment to justify giving women equal education and rights. She argued that women played a key role, as mothers and wives, and needed to become rational in order to instill virtue and morality into their families.¹⁰⁷ Mary Pickering argued that Comte's early work followed this early form of feminism.¹⁰⁸ Comte argued that women in primitive society were subjugated and lived as "beasts of burden." The march of progress inevitably increased their status, but more work was necessary. Currently, men kept them under a brutal regime, using violence to dehumanize them. The result was that women were as oppressed as the lowest parts of society, including slaves and serfs. Because, however, progress was inevitable, their state would improve. Reflecting his larger pacifist, utopian vision, he argued that the current masculine culture, with its culture of violence, would end, bringing about greater freedom for both women and men.¹⁰⁹ Pickering views this as his early feminist stage, prior to his turn to patriarchal thought in the 1820s.¹¹⁰ He did become less favorable to women's liberation, but I argue that it represented a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁶ For these ideas, see Sylvania Tomaselli, "The Enlightenment Debate on Women," *History Workshop* no. 20 (August 1985), 106-21.

¹⁰⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Deirdre Shauna Lynch, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 5-9.

¹⁰⁸ She argues that Comte followed Enlightenment feminism, including the idea of women's moral superiority. Pickering, "Angels and Demons," 11-12.

¹⁰⁹ This comes from an 1819 letter. Comte, *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à M. Valat. 1815-1844* (Paris: Dunod, 1870), 85-7.

¹¹⁰ Pickering, "Angels and Demons," 10.

continuation of, rather than a contradiction with, his feminist belief. To understand why, one must return to the feminism of the Enlightenment.

Feminists such as Condorcet, Olympe de Gouges, and Wollstonecraft argued that women had the same mental abilities, reason, and perfectible nature as men, and should gain the corresponding rights and duties.¹¹¹ But women were not currently equal; patriarchal society ruined their nature, making them superficial, greedy, and treacherous.¹¹² Women's inferiority represented the decline of civilization, just as their progress represented the improvement of society as a whole. They became the keys to modernity, both symbolizing and creating civilization. It was this last point that introduced the problem; though Enlightenment feminism blamed men for oppressing women, it linked women to the decline of society. In Wollstonecraft's argument, women's ignorance was the one thing that could hold back enlightenment.¹¹³ In de Gouges's argument, women's abject state caused "public misfortunes and the corruption of governments."¹¹⁴ Wollstonecraft envisioned an alternative to this corrupt woman: a rational, moralized, masculine woman, who could reform society as a whole.¹¹⁵ Thus, one sees Rousseau's idea of complementarity inverted; where he used to argue for controlling and limiting women, they argued for freeing women. They nevertheless laid the basis for a new patriarchy. By contrasting ignorance with morality, these feminists prefigured the nineteenth century idea of the good and bad woman. In addition, because women could restore society through the home,

¹¹¹ For their arguments, see Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 9-13; Condorcet, "Droit de cité," 121-2; Olympe de Gouges, "The Rights of Woman," in John R. Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabby: Olympe de Gouges's Rights of Woman* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2011), 30-4.

¹¹² Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 9-13, 21-5; de Gouges, "Rights of Woman," 34-7.

¹¹³ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 5-9.

¹¹⁴ De Gouges, "Rights of Woman," 31.

¹¹⁵ Wollstonecraft wanted to give women the rationality and virtue of men. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 25-36.

nineteenth century thinkers argued that women had to be kept there, free from the corruption of modernity. At the start of the 1820s, Comte still followed Wollstonecraft's vision of liberation. Later, however, he would use the same idea of women's moralizing role to support women's subjugation.

The Cours de Philosophie Positive

The turning point came in 1825, when Comte married a woman named Caroline Massin. She was working as a prostitute at the time, and by marrying her, he saw himself as a noble protector, saving her from her abject lifestyle.¹¹⁶ Soon, however, they came to a disagreement; he believed that women should be meek and compliant, but she refused to submit. Faced with this strong-minded woman, he condemned her as immoral and treacherous. According to Pickering, this represented the end of his feminist aspirations and his turn to patriarchal thought.¹¹⁷ It seems possible, however, that it may have simply revealed his feminism as abstract and theoretical, without any real conviction. In his earlier career, he had defended the interests of what he saw as the oppressed parts of society.¹¹⁸ Massin, as a poor but intelligent woman, fit this vision of the noble victim perfectly. Indeed, Pickering states that he "was attracted to the idea of rehabilitating a fallen woman, which was one of the leading themes of the literature of the epoch."¹¹⁹ When she resisted his ideas, however, she broke his fantasy; he was faced with an actual person, not an

¹¹⁶ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 1:215-23.

¹¹⁷ Pickering, "Angels and Demons," 12-16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:143-6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:316-18

ideal who would follow his vision. He subsequently formulated a new image of women, not as superior, but as irrational, childlike and undeveloped. Yet the romantic vision did not die.

Instead, he divided the female population into two; the treacherous, sexual woman, like Massin, and the familiar archetype of the loving and submissive mother and wife.¹²⁰ He had particular use for the latter in the era of the July Monarchy, which reinforced the theme of social crisis.

The July Monarchy highlighted the forces of division in modern society. Numerous groups voiced their diverging visions for social reform. The Utopian Socialists argued for reorganizing industry.¹²¹ The early feminist movement formed and argued for improvements in women's status.¹²² Social economists studied the ills of urban life.¹²³ The discourse of social struggle grew, with this iteration placing the bourgeoisie against the workers. Each side demonized the other; liberals saw the workers as a revolutionary force, and the labor movement adopted this image, viewing themselves as the new liberals and the bourgeoisie as the new unproductive nobility.¹²⁴ Just as these discourses began to develop, in 1830, Comte published his *Cours de philosophie positive*, in which he outlined a way out of the current crisis using positive science.

The problem, for Comte, was to reconcile the existence of division with his ideal of unity. The answer was to employ two theories of history: one linear, the other dialectical. First, he

¹²⁰ Ibid., 26-7.

¹²¹ For their ideas of reforming industry through education and association, see Pamela Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 107-29.

¹²² For the origins of the feminist movement, see Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism*, 61-88.

¹²³ Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (Rutgers University Press, 1992), 38-48.

¹²⁴ For the image of workers, see Catherine Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 38-42. For the workers' own ideology, see William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 214-16.

argued that the human mind progressed over time. It began in a theological state, which attributed causality to higher powers, then a metaphysical state, which turned to abstract principles, and finally a positive state, which abandoned absolute causes in favor of empirical observation.¹²⁵ In the last stage, the science of sociology would allow for the creation of rationalized government under the guidance of scientific experts. Unfortunately, the current era saw the stages in conflict. Various doctrines, the royalists, republicans, and liberals were at odds, and this created the impression of crisis. As Comte, wrote, “The current disorder of ideas is due, in the final analysis, to the employment of these three radically incompatible philosophies.”¹²⁶ The solution was a new dialectical theory. In it, he argued that the two contrary forces, theological order and metaphysical progress, would come together under a positivist synthesis.¹²⁷ Thus, he adopted the progressive theories of the eighteenth century, but in a more conservative form. History, rather than leading toward endless improvement and infinite change, led from thesis to synthesis, and toward a defined end. In an era of continuing social and political conflict, his theory promised a way to understand and finally end the state of revolution.

In his system, there were in fact two sets of forces: not just “order and progress,” but order and disorder. In the former, Comte would bring together and unify the dangerously divergent politics of the modern era. In the latter, implicit within this, he would replace modern politics altogether. Disorder meant not just dysfunction but disagreement itself. They became, in fact, practically synonymous. Because he identified political ideologies with different stages of intellectual development, and the coexistence of different stages as a fundamentally disordered

¹²⁵ Comte, *Cours*, 1:3-5.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:49-50.

¹²⁷ For the quote, see Comte, *Cours*, 3:9. He argued, positivism would resolve the conflict between the two forces. *Ibid.*, 20-1. It would unify thought and create a new system, see *ibid.*, 1:47-50.

mind, he was able to cast disagreement as chaos, and unity as the creation of absolute consensus and the end of political conflict. In this system, the only possible end was scientific government. He took the liberal idea of history, which meant progress as increasing liberty and equality, and used it to reject liberal values altogether. In contrast to Condorcet, who imagined future progress as the development of the Revolution,¹²⁸ Comte viewed revolution as simply a means to a new, scientific hierarchy and authority. Where Condorcet imagined intellectual progress as the development of egalitarianism, the idea of universal human nature,¹²⁹ and the improvement of the popular mind,¹³⁰ Comte identified it as reinforcing his idea of hierarchy. The key difference was their concept of the social; for Condorcet, the liberal, the social was inevitably based on the individual, but for Comte, the authoritarian intellectual, the single person had no place. If the human race improved, it need not include all of its member. He viewed women as outside of the social realm, and thus incapable of progress.

Comte rejected his earlier ideas of women's liberation, instead arguing that women's minds remained fixed in an inferior state.¹³¹ Because of that, they could not run businesses, take leadership roles, or hold any kind of power, even in the home.¹³² Furthermore, this was a historical inevitability which could never change. For evidence, he used the animal kingdom, in which the female was always inferior.¹³³ He used human history, in which women were always

¹²⁸ Condorcet's work on progress represented the hope that the future would achieve the ideals of the revolution, though it had failed in his present era. Keith Michael Baker, "On Condorcet's 'Sketch.'" *Daedalus* 133, no. 3 (Summer 2004), 61.

¹²⁹ Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 261-7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 255-6.

¹³¹ Comte, "October 5, 1843," in *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à John Stuart Mill*, 185-6.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 186.

¹³³ Comte, "November 14, 1843," in *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à John Stuart Mill*, 201-2.

under men's power.¹³⁴ Where other oppressed groups, such as feudal serfs, had become free, women still remained under patriarchal authority. For that reason, he argued that women's social inferiority corresponded to natural inferiority, and that they had to remain in the home.¹³⁵ He separated women from his general idea of historical change. In general, he believed that institutions and beliefs changed as time passed, but for women he used precedent to justify the continuance of existing practices.

Comte's theory figured women as an outsider in society, separate from the rest of the human race. Where humanity was social, women were biological.¹³⁶ Where humanity improved over time, becoming more rational, women remained the same or regressed.¹³⁷ They were outside of his idea of history and outside of his vision of human development altogether. He argued that women were not just inferior, but in some way inhuman. Equality was impossible because "the feminine sex" existed "in a state of continual childhood, which further removes it, under the most important regards, from the ideal type of the race."¹³⁸ In this way, he used one of the principles of recapitulation theory: that everyone developed along a single line of improvement, but that only some, in this case men, reached the end point.¹³⁹ That end point, in effect, became the standard upon which all were compared, the "great human type."¹⁴⁰ Vincent

¹³⁴ Comte, *Cours*, 3:568-70.

¹³⁵ Comte, "October 5, 1843," 188-9.

¹³⁶ Vincent Guillin argues that Comte's idea of women's inferiority as biological contradicted his larger sociological methodology. Vincent Guillin, *Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill on Sexual Equality: Historical, Methodological and Philosophical Issues* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 19-22.

¹³⁷ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 1:627.

¹³⁸ Comte, *Cours*, 4:570.

¹³⁹ For discussions of this theory in the later nineteenth century, see Russett, *Sexual Science*, 50-6; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), 113-19.

¹⁴⁰ Comte, "October 5, 1843," 184-5.

Guillin views Comte's idea of women as contradicting his general theory.¹⁴¹ Comte cast women as a separate category, outside of social change. As Comte's misogynist rhetoric indicates, however, this exclusion was entirely intentional, and in fact represents a continuing theme in sociological theory: the assumption that men were social and women natural.¹⁴²

It was also a key component of his larger social theory. He argued, reflecting his rejection of liberalism, that the family, and not the individual, formed the smallest unit of society. He viewed this as the site of socialization. The family brought together the genders in a complementary union, moralizing and socializing the individual.¹⁴³ This theory represented the transformation of feminism into patriarchalism. Comte continued Wollstonecraft's idea of women as a civilizing force, but used it to argue for their continued subjugation. In his view, women were greater in emotion and morality, but incapable of intellectual progress, and were naturally suited to a purely domestic existence.¹⁴⁴ Comte thus represents the universality of the ideology of gender complementarity, which supported wildly varying agendas, from feminism to antifeminism.¹⁴⁵ In Comte's work, complementarity established, not just the basis for gender relations, but the development of society itself. To resolve the crisis of modernity, he had to create a structure of order which would still allow for both individual and social progress. By making the family the basis for society, however, he introduced a problem: it had to resist modern change, but as a social institution, it had to be progressive. He resolved that contradiction

¹⁴¹ Guillin, *Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill*, 19-22.

¹⁴² R.A. Sydie discusses this assumption. R.A. Sydie, *Natural Women*, 1-4.

¹⁴³ Comte, *Cours*, 4:559-62.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:571-3.

¹⁴⁵ Feminists such as Flora Tristan and Ernest Legouvé used complementarity ideology. Karen Offen, "Ernest Legouvé and the Doctrine of 'Equality in Difference': A Case Study of Male Feminism in Nineteenth-Century French Thought," *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 2 (June 1986), 463-7.

with his theory of complementarity. He argued that the family, though it changed throughout history, always rested on a timeless foundation of gender inequality.¹⁴⁶

Carole Pateman argues the liberal theory of social contract created an idea of the individual as universal and equal, while relegating women to a subordinate position.¹⁴⁷ Comte continued the same theme, but translated to an illiberal form. Unlike liberal and feminist thought, in which the category of universal human nature often hid a masculine bias, Comte's theory brought human difference to the fore. For humanity to be progressive but women traditional, and the family progressive yet fixed, he had to separate women from his social theory. They had a different nature, based on the natural itself; as men progressed and became more public, women would lag behind, becoming more firmly entrenched in the home.¹⁴⁸ With the sexes thus divided, he identified progress as effectively masculine, and the idea of feminist progress as a contradiction in terms. Where contemporary feminists saw women's equality as a part of the overall development of human civilization, Comte identified it as a primitive impulse, leading toward an inferior state. He argued that in nature, only inferior organisms had gender equality. As phenomena developed, sexual disparity grew.¹⁴⁹ Using these terms, he argued that feminism was unnatural and doomed to failure. In his correspondence with the leading feminist of his day, John Stuart Mill, Comte disparaged Mill's feminism as a mere passing "phase," representative of the era's general "mental anarchy."¹⁵⁰ He suggested that, just as he had once believed in

¹⁴⁶ Comte, *Cours*, 4:566-8.

¹⁴⁷ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 219-31.

¹⁴⁸ Comte, "October 5, 1843," 190.

¹⁴⁹ Comte, "November 14, 1843," 201-2.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 206. For the latter quote, see Comte, "October 5, 1843," 183.

Wollstonecraft's ideas, but had grown past it, Mill would as well.¹⁵¹ In reality, Comte's misogyny was the true phase, a transitional stage toward his next vision of women's civilizing role.

Though he dismissed it as a passing phenomenon, Comte still viewed feminism as a real threat to society. It would take women out of their domestic role, thus putting them in competition against men. In that situation, they could not hope to succeed, and would reveal their inferiority.¹⁵² In this way, feminism would serve a useful purpose: it would highlight the need for domesticity. It would also have harmful effects on society, by lessening women's feminine nature, diminishing their "charm," and thus weakening the attraction that men felt for them.¹⁵³ Here, Comte revealed the two bases for his support of domesticity: not just natural, but utilitarian. He argued that women could not leave the home. The reason, he believed, was that women were inferior and could not compete. To support this idea, however, he pointed to history: women had never freed themselves, so they were inferior. His argument about nature was in fact circular; he believed that women had to be domestic because they were inferior, and that they were inferior because they were domestic. In contrast, the utilitarian argument—that women had to stay in the home to support society—had a strong basis: the home was the foundation of society, and change would threaten it. Yet, to base his ideas on utility would reveal his system as biased and subjective, not based on objective observation of nature. To support the idea of domesticity as natural, he had only one foundation: biology. In general, he viewed biology as a limited factor in social study. He criticized earlier studies, centered on the single

¹⁵¹ Comte, "November 14, 1843," 206.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 205.

person, and argued for the importance of environment.¹⁵⁴ But when he supported women's inferiority, he used natural science and analogies with other species.¹⁵⁵ This reveals his ambivalent view of women's nature. He viewed them as a socializing, moralizing agent, but they were also asocial. This was because, for Comte, women were essentially passive objects, meant to inspire feelings, but possessing no subjectivity of their own.

The Religion of Humanity

Since the 1830s, industrialization and social change had opened debates on class and gender in French society. First, social scientists studied the problem of the lower classes, vilifying them and representing their lifestyles as unhealthy and dangerous.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, the workers' movement challenged bourgeois values, identifying the workers as the key to regenerating society.¹⁵⁷ Feminism caused similar divisions. In the 1840s, leading to the 1848 Revolution, feminism adopted a maternalist idea and based its claims on women's different nature.¹⁵⁸ In response, a new wave of antifeminism attempted to reinforce women's

¹⁵⁴ Comte, *Cours*, 1:94-5, 3:270-1.

¹⁵⁵ Comte, "July 16, 1842," 175.

¹⁵⁶ For social economists' views on the poor's responsibility, see Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris*, 38-9. For the association of poverty with revolution, see David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 7-10. For studies of disease in the lower-class, see Janet R. Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France: The Musée Sociale and the Rise of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 228-31.

¹⁵⁷ Sewell, *Work and Revolution*, 216-17.

¹⁵⁸ Feminists now used the idea of maternity to make their claims. Moses, *French Feminism*, 133-4. Deroin glorified mothers, using the idea of the Virgin Mary, and presented their role as virtuous and vital for society. Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 70-1. Ernest Legouvé, though a moderate feminist, also glorified women's maternal role as well as physical

subordination. In this work, from Michelet and Proudhon, women appear dangerous and corrupting, and thus had to be limited to the home.¹⁵⁹ Thus, after the Revolution, there were two contrary discourses on change: one that challenged existing hierarchies, and the other attempting to reinforce them. Comte, because of his conservative and antifeminist views, could have followed the second discourse. Instead, his 1850s work adopted the ideology of the workers and women's movements. To understand why, it is necessary to review his career in the 1840s, prior to the revolution.

There were two basic reasons for the shift in his thought. The first is related to his career, and the second to his personal relationships. In the early 1840s, he held a position as teacher at the Ecole Polytechnique.¹⁶⁰ Due to his critical stance against the faculty and administration, he soon faced hostility and eventually lost his job.¹⁶¹ In this context, he rejected the role of scientists and elite education in modern society. He viewed this education as overly esoteric and intellectually harmful,¹⁶² and that the privileged classes were too conservative to follow positivism.¹⁶³ The popular classes, in contrast, were the ideal subject for education.¹⁶⁴ They were simpler, with “common sense”¹⁶⁵ and practical social interests.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, they were outside of the distracting influences of society¹⁶⁷ and represented a “clean slate.”¹⁶⁸ For that reason, he

superiority. Karen Offen, “Ernest Legouvé,” 465-71.

¹⁵⁹ For Michelet, see McMillan, *France and Women*, 91-2, 195-7. For Proudhon, see Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up!*, 43.

¹⁶⁰ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 2:15-18.

¹⁶¹ For his criticism, see *ibid.*, 2:21-2, 28-9, 35. For the response, see *ibid.*, 2:35, 56-9.

¹⁶² Comte, *Discours sur l'esprit positive* (Paris: Carilian-Goeury et Vor. Dalmont, 1844), 83-5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 93-4.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-3.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 86-8.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

created a new, more egalitarian form of positivism. It was egalitarian for two reasons: first, because it would be open to the wider public,¹⁶⁹ and second, because it was based on “universal common sense”¹⁷⁰ and a subjective approach.¹⁷¹ Comte valorized the common people, not just as morally, but also intellectually superior to elites. He argued that they would serve to ameliorate the problems of modern science by expressing a general, educated critique of current studies.¹⁷² They took a central place in his new theory of the 1840s, along with another group that he saw as powerless: women.

The model for Comte's new gender ideology was another poor but educated woman, Clotilde de Vaux. When he met her, she hardly fit his image of the *femme au foyer*. Though she held some traditionalist beliefs, she was also living separated from her husband and was seeking an independent career as a writer.¹⁷³ As Pickering has argued, his initial feelings had little to do with Romantic ideals. “The story of Auguste Comte and Clotilde de Vaux is basically the tale of a man trying to force a woman to accept his sexual advances and his desire to be the center of her universe, while she makes every effort to resist him and create her own autonomous life.”¹⁷⁴ Subsequently, he found a way to interpret her lack of interest as a sign of feminine nobility, the key to his salvation. According to Pickering, “He claimed that by her superior virtue, she had rid him of his crude male sex drive and transformed him into the virtuous champion of humanity.”¹⁷⁵ He thus realized his dream of gender complementarity as the way to social regeneration; he was

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 70-1.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 45-6.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁷² Ibid., 80-2.

¹⁷³ For de Vaux's background, see Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 2:133-47.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 2:143.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 2:149-51.

the corrupt man, in need of saving, and she was the idealized woman, existing to serve him.

If this repeated his earlier views, however, there was an innovation; where his earlier positivism had attributed gender difference to nature, he came to view it as fluid and constructed.¹⁷⁶ Echoing the revolutionary idea of reforming the family, he argued that marriage brought together the two sides of humanity, with the wife giving men feminine traits and the husband giving the woman masculine traits.¹⁷⁷ This did not mean, however, that he challenged gender norms. On the contrary, he adopted a more overtly utilitarian argument, claiming that women had to remain in the home. De Vaux represents this contradiction. Though she convinced him of women's intellectual abilities, he nevertheless used her to create a more circumscribed vision of women's nature.¹⁷⁸ After her death in 1846, he instituted a religion in her memory, involving a set of rituals.¹⁷⁹ This became the basis for his new form of religious positivism, in which he adopted subjective and spiritual thought. Here, once again, he viewed women as morally pure and ideal. He wrote less about the more negative vision of the woman, though he did argue that a woman not under male control would develop masculine vices, such as "pride and vanity."¹⁸⁰ In general, however, he reversed his earlier vision; where he had identified the male as the ideal person, he now created the idea of woman as the representative of humanity. As Offen has argued, however, this style of idealization "placed women on pedestals from which they were forbidden to descend."¹⁸¹ In this way, he continued to argue for the kind of domestic hierarchy which he had attempted to impose on Massin.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 2:192-9.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 2:192-9.

¹⁷⁸ For her influence on his view of the female mind, see *ibid.*, 2:193-4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 2:454.

¹⁸⁰ Comte, *Système*, 193-4.

¹⁸¹ Offen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 102.

When Comte created his Religion of Humanity, it appeared to be a contradiction. His earlier work had defined humanity as becoming more rational and more scientific, leaving religion behind. By the 1850s, however, he argued that the human race was becoming more religious over time,¹⁸² and that emotion, and not the intellect, was the most important aspect of human nature.¹⁸³ Despite this shift in rhetoric, his basic goal remained the same: to create unity. In this case, it was through religion and women, rather than science and rationality. To create his new positivism, he reformulated the idea of progress. Rather than the development of masculine rationality, it meant the increase of feminine emotion. Second, it meant transferring his theory of social unity to a religious basis. Whereas earlier, he argued that scientific thought would unify humanity under a coherent system of thought, he now argued that religion would form the foundation for community. Like science, it would bring people together under an idea, but it would first need to become unified. He believed that currently, religions were coming together and becoming more similar. Positivism would complete the process, creating a universal religion.¹⁸⁴ Because he defined femininity as constructive, he reversed his earlier thought and made masculinity the destructive force in society. Rationalism, rather than the means to future synthesis, instead resulted in the current era's "disastrous anarchy."¹⁸⁵

Comte's solution was to make the emotions dominant in human nature.¹⁸⁶ It would create "universal love," further integrating the person into the collective.¹⁸⁷ Women were the key.

¹⁸² Comte, *Système*, 3:10.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1:16-17.

¹⁸⁴ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 1-4.

¹⁸⁵ Comte, *Système*, 1:15.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:17.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:49-50.

Comte argued that men would pray to women, their “guardian angels,”¹⁸⁸ who would moralize¹⁸⁹ and socialize them.¹⁹⁰ Women would represent the human race itself. Comte believed that humans had to be socialized in stages: through the family, to the larger society,¹⁹¹ and through the woman, to humanity in general.¹⁹² First, men would worship women in a private setting. Then, he would worship humanity as a whole.¹⁹³ This would lead to a more unified human race. Nations would dissolve and city states would take their place.¹⁹⁴ Europe would come under a common, positivist government. Then, this would expand to the rest of the world, creating a unified global society encompassing all races. In this way, he reiterated Saint-Simon's concept of a universal civilizing mission, but with a religious basis.¹⁹⁵

In a way, Comte seemed to undermine the old hierarchies. He still viewed men, Europeans and the elite classes as representing power and intellect in various ways,¹⁹⁶ but came to view those qualities in more negative terms. In his view, the intellect was dangerous and needed to be subordinate. Power, as well, had to be reined in. For that reason, he wanted all large governments and empires¹⁹⁷ to end and a form of chivalry to be instituted.¹⁹⁸ Along with this, he wanted the qualities of morality and sociability to be dominant, qualities which he identified with

¹⁸⁸ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 185.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁹⁰ For women as creating solidarity, see Comte, *Système*, 63-4.

¹⁹¹ For this process, see *ibid.*, 2:180-90.

¹⁹² Comte, *Catéchisme*, 182-3.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 182-3.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182-3.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁹⁶ He referred to Europeans as “the intelligent race.” Comte, *Système*, 3:575-6. Men were physically and intellectually superior to women. Comte, *Catéchisme*, 276-7. Business leaders were superior to the workers in his social system. *Ibid.*, 213-14.

¹⁹⁷ For his rejection of modern imperialism, see Comte, “A Monsieur A. Williamson, professeur de chimie à l'Université de Londres,” in *Correspondence inédite d'Auguste Comte* (Paris: Société positiviste, 1903-1904), 119.

¹⁹⁸ For his argument for chivalry, see Comte, *L'Ensemble du positivisme*, 250.

the subordinate parts of society. He viewed women as representing morality and emotion, making up “the greatest personification of humanity.”¹⁹⁹ This was similar to his older view. Then, he had viewed women as moralizers. Here, however, he viewed them as corresponding to positive thought itself. He argued that women thought in simpler, more general and “abstract” terms,²⁰⁰ which defined his new form of positivism. For that reason they were not necessarily inferior, and in fact represented a progressive force. Workers played a similar role. They too were moral and emotional,²⁰¹ and they too had valuable, unique intellectual contributions.²⁰² They had a practical, social understanding which would aid positivism.²⁰³

In this new theory, women who previously had been an almost inhuman aberration, became humanity itself. This was true in literal terms, in his representation of the human race as a woman.²⁰⁴ It was true in theoretical terms as well. As he argued that history led to unity and solidarity, with the mind developing toward an essentially moral ideal. Women were all of these things: moral, emotional and social. Yet there was a further complication: women did not own those characteristics, but simply inspired them. They were emotional, but the key was that they could develop men's emotion.²⁰⁵ They were moral, but mostly inspired morality in men. They were not, in fact, social at all, but only socialized men through the man's own feelings. The ultimate symbol of this was the “déesse,” Comte's vision of humanity. As he explained, she

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 253.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 218-19.

²⁰¹ Comte, *Système*, 1:136-8.

²⁰² For his defense of working class intellect, see Comte, *L'Ensemble du positivisme*, 182-4.

²⁰³ Comte, *Système*, 1:137-8.

²⁰⁴ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 207.

²⁰⁵ Comte, *Système*, 1:259-60.

would be represented in the form of a thirty year old woman holding a child.²⁰⁶ This was, in fact, Comte's muse, de Vaux.²⁰⁷ He used her image to create a universal muse, which would inspire and enlighten men throughout society. This had several implications. First, by identifying women with this idea, he idealized them as perfect, but also removed all subjectivity. Men, through women, would become part of society. This created an idea of elite men as problematic: they were disorderly, individualized, and overly-intellectual. This served to undermine ideas of hierarchy, but it also reinforced them in a concrete way. First, because these men were problematic, they needed others to serve them. For that reason, women and the working class were essentially there to guide and moralize elite men, and had no purpose of their own. As Comte argued, women's role was “to form and perfect men.”²⁰⁸

Second, because elite men were problematic, and women and workers perfect, he argued that hierarchy was not only necessary, but beneficial to the subordinate groups. In his view, power was indeed corrupting; it held back progress and kept the privileged classes from moving forward. For that reason, workers and women could never have power or active roles. It would ruin their unique virtues. Workers had to remain in their current status, outside of authority, in order to maintain their moral role.²⁰⁹ Women had to remain in the home, under male care, in order to be feminine.²¹⁰ He suggested that they wanted this to be so. In contrast to contemporary concerns over the role of women and workers, and these groups own efforts to improve their status, Comte represented their lives as idealized, simple, and fixed. Thus, working life was

²⁰⁶ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 207.

²⁰⁷ Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 2:391.

²⁰⁸ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 202.

²⁰⁹ Comte, *Système*, 1:133-4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:248.

leisurely and easy, giving them time to think and moralize their superiors.²¹¹ Women, as well, favored a domestic role and rejected the feminist movement.²¹² There was a contradiction. He argued that women would welcome patriarchal care, but he also suggested that it was a burden which they had to learn to accept.²¹³ He wrote that “[women's] education will prepare them to understand that domination, far from elevating them, will degrade them by attaining for them the elevation that they must only gain through love.”²¹⁴ In this way, he reversed meanings to achieve his ends, remaking power as weakness, subordination as elevation, liberation as subordination, and social construction as nature.

Ultimately, the point was to create a coherent system. For that reason, the individual had to serve the collective.²¹⁵ In this case, the individual was the man, and the ideal was the woman. She had a natural, unchanging quality. Throughout the progression of history, she sought a single ideal: a strong domestic culture. Progress, in fact, meant the development of this system, in which the man increasingly took her under his care.²¹⁶ Thus, Comte combined the two ideas, the constructed and the natural; it came about over time, but somehow corresponded to women's nature. He reconciled this through his new definition of progress, which meant “the development of order.”²¹⁷ Thus, progress was not really change, but a return to the origins of human

²¹¹ He argued that the working class would not have the concerns that distracted the higher classes. Comte, *L'Esprit du positivisme*, 86-7.

²¹² Comte argued that women rejected the feminist movement. Thus, he erased their active role. Comte, *Système*, 1:244-5.

²¹³ He quoted Aristotle on this point, stating that “the principal strength of the woman is her ability to overcome the difficulty of obeying.” Thus, they were better at serving others, but it was nevertheless a challenge. Comte, *Catéchisme*, 287.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

²¹⁵ His ideal was a selflessness and devotion to society. *Ibid.*, 267-8.

²¹⁶ Comte, *Système*, 1:248-9.

²¹⁷ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 107-8.

thought.²¹⁸ Women would take on a role that was somehow theirs from the start.

In a way, women represented the past. He argued that they favored and tried to maintain the values of the medieval era.²¹⁹ In another way, they were the future: they represented the unity of humanity that would come about. Despite that, they were simply an image. He argued that only a woman could represent humanity.²²⁰ Yet only a man could be fully part of it. Women, again, would unify men into a collective humanity. Thus, it becomes clear that, although a woman stood for the human race, men were the real subjects, and the only ones who would actually make up the collective. Women, after all, would remain in the home, protected from society. Men, in contrast, would have to venture out into the world. That was the real danger: men, unlike women, were agents. That was why they were problematic.

Comte's idea of history viewed male nature as a problem from the beginning. He argued that women's place became increasingly improved throughout history, from Greek civilization, to the Roman and finally the medieval periods. Over time, domesticity formed and the woman took a greater part in the home.²²¹ The Middle Ages was the pinnacle of this development. It saw the rise of a moral and religious system that elevated their role and brought their "emancipation."²²² After this point, there was an unfortunate decline. Modern civilization rejected the medieval era and turned to the ancient.²²³ Women continued to maintain the emotional ideals of the Middle

²¹⁸ He argued that the beginning stage, fetishism, was an emotional system of thought. Positivism would return to this. Comte, *Système*, 3:93-4.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:516.

²²⁰ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 184-5.

²²¹ For the Greek period, see Comte, *Système*, 3:262-3. For the Roman, see *ibid.*, 3:357-9. For the Medieval, see *ibid.*, 3:451-2.

²²² For the quote, see *ibid.*, 3451-2.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 3:515-16.

Ages, to moralize society, but their efforts were in vain.²²⁴ Comte presented the course of women's history as simple and domestic. His vision of utopia would essentially return to that earlier course in bringing the woman into a more feminine society, which would ensure “the ascendance of the heart over the mind.”²²⁵ It is also essential to understand why he saw this as progress. It helped woman, who favored the morality of the Middle Ages and wanted to return to it.²²⁶ At the same time, he viewed it as improving men. In Comte's narrative, each civilization improved men by creating stronger domesticity.²²⁷ This reached its peak under the Middle Ages, in which wives and priests worked together to create a moralized, limited patriarchy.²²⁸ Throughout, the problem was male power. History worked to limit it and bring it under control. Thus, he valued chivalry, which created solidarity between the weak and strong in society.²²⁹ Unfortunately, after this, society became corrupted. More precisely, it became masculinized. It broke up, becoming divided and overly-intellectual. Comte's system would, ultimately, make society feminine again. It would elevate emotion and unity. In this light, the image of the *déesse* takes on a new meaning. She was perfection, of course, but an ideal not just for women, but for men as well. She was unity, emotion, caring: all qualities that Comte wanted to create in modern men.

This returns to the essential problem of power in Comte's system. It is clear that he created a hierarchy. When he imagined humanity as a woman, he set an ideal that would take

²²⁴ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 379-80.

²²⁵ For the quote, see Comte, *Système*, 1:9.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:205-8.

²²⁷ He criticized Greek civilization as sexually immoral and disrespectful to women. *Ibid.*, 3:357-9. Roman civilization increased domesticity and thus altruism. *Ibid.*, 3:370-2.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:451-2.

²²⁹ He explicitly stated that he wanted to return to the system of chivalry. *Ibid.*, 1:256. It is apparent is his ideal for society, “devotion of the strong for the weak, and veneration of the weak for the strong.” *Ibid.*, 1:296.

away their active role. When he argued that women had to stay in the home to moralize men, he did so to restrict their movement and power. When he argued that women had to be chaste to maintain their purity, he wanted to maintain a perfect feminine nature.²³⁰ Yet the point was not to fix women's nature, but to ameliorate that of men. Women represented an ideal for human nature, based on sociability and unity. In the home, family life would do two things: integrate the man and develop his emotions. The first took several stages: through ancestors, then siblings, then marriage, and finally fatherhood. The result would ultimately develop the man's feelings of solidarity and altruism.²³¹ These virtues, again, were feminine. He viewed women as essentially selfless and morally pure.²³²

Comte's rhetoric of women's greatness was hardly unique. The idea that women, because of their maternal nature, were destined for the home was dominant in the nineteenth century.²³³ There was, however, an innovation in Comte's work. Where others, such as contemporary antifeminist Jules Michelet, argued that women were inferior and had to be controlled, Comte created a more androgynous vision of society. According to Michelet, a man should marry a young woman and take over her life, becoming her "father," "brother," and "mother."²³⁴ Comte, in contrast, argued that women under positivism would exercise control over men, making them more like women. He argued that marriage would bring together the positive, complementary natures of the two sexes into a superior whole.²³⁵ Women would give feminine qualities to men

²³⁰ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 283.

²³¹ Comte, *Système*, 2:181-90.

²³² He characterized women as selfless. Comte, *Catéchisme*, 276-7.

²³³ Bidelman discusses this concept. Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up!*, 26-31.

²³⁴ Quoted in Moses, *French Feminism*, 161.

²³⁵ Comte, *Catéchisme*, 276-7.

and men would give masculine qualities to women.²³⁶ It was clear, however, which was the most important. As Comte established in his historical narrative, the modern era had created a crisis of masculinization. It had positive qualities, such as the creation of progress, but it was ultimately destructive. Thus, men were destructive and women constructive, corresponding to his two stages of the revolution, the metaphysical and the positive. The second part, again, needed to be emotional and moral. To achieve this, he theorized a new, moral power, to replace the old, political one. It would be based on the chivalric principal, “devotion of the strong for the weak, veneration of the weak for the strong.”²³⁷ This principal could be read several ways: as a justification for patriarchal power, as a paternalistic ideal of government, or as an idealization of altruistic sentiment. It was not, however, limited to the sexes, or the classes, or the races, comprised the whole of society.

In Comte’s argument, military power would end. Nationalism would end. Modern government would end. In their places, he hoped for a universal chivalry. Women, workers, and priests would renounce power.²³⁸ At the same time, each would hold influence over the other: women over philosophers and workers,²³⁹ the poor over the philosophers,²⁴⁰ and the priests over the wealthy and powerful.²⁴¹ Under the final positivist system, women and the working class would both take part in the international governing body.²⁴² Hierarchy would still exist, but its values would become fluid: primitive religion would be greater than European science, the poor

²³⁶ Ibid., 228-9. He stated that prayer to men would give women masculine “energy.” Ibid., 187.

²³⁷ Ibid., 296.

²³⁸ He stated that the priests, though they were “strong,” would make themselves weak. Ibid., 297.

²³⁹ Women would ensure the importance of the emotional element for these two other classes. Comte, *L'esprit du positivisme*, 198-9.

²⁴⁰ The workers' duty was to care for the philosophers in material terms. Ibid., 242.

²⁴¹ For their role in influencing government, see Comte, *Système*, 305-6. For their role and the public's role in limiting the wealthy class's power, see *ibid.*, 416-18.

²⁴² Comte, *L'esprit du positivisme*, 380-1.

greater than the powerful, and feminine weakness greater than masculine strength. This system was indeed imperialistic and authoritarian. He did want to define a role for everyone and bring everyone into the same system. Yet it was not imperialism based on a desire for power, but on a desire to end power struggle after years of government changes, revolts, and revolutions. He wanted, ultimately, to undo the masculine power of the modern era and replace it with what he saw as the stable, passive, pacific femininity of times past.

There are at least two ways to interpret Comte's gender ideology. In the first, Comte was an antifeminist who used his maternal ideal to oppress and limit the lives of real women. A contemporary, feminist Jenny D'Héricourt argued in 1860 that the sexes were more alike, and that women would see his supposedly complimentary views for what they were. She advised that one "be sure that every *true* woman will laugh at the raiment of clouds which you pretend to give her, at the incense with which you wish to asphyxiate her; for she cares no longer for adoration."²⁴³ Nearly a century later, philosopher Simone de Beauvoir argued that Comte's vision of the moral woman was indeed oppressive, and that "to identify Woman with Altruism is to guarantee man absolute rights to her devotion; it is to impose on women a categorical must-be."²⁴⁴ From the other perspective, which I have employed in this chapter, woman was only one half of Comte's vision of society. He identified women with morality and tradition, but men with all of the worst elements of modernity: egoism, corruption, and excessive rationalization. As this suggests, I view the two interpretations as one; to understand Comte's idea of the modern, one must understand his ideas of both women and men. In addition, though he criticized the

²⁴³ Jenny D'Héricourt, *A Woman's Philosophie of Woman; or Woman Affranchised. An Answer to Michelet, Proudhon, Girardin, Legouvé, Comte and Other Modern Innovators* (New York: Carleton, 1864), 130-1.

²⁴⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 268.

masculine aspect of modernization, he remained thoroughly patriarchal. He identified women with morality, but in a passive way; men were the true actors, and women their passive muses. His ideas thus reflected the feminine allegories of his time. As scholars have discussed, female figures often embodied virtues, such as reason, which they supposedly could not possess.²⁴⁵

Finally, Comte's concern over women's role became more pressing in subsequent decades. As de Beauvoir suggested, Comte's theory was prescriptive as well as descriptive. It made women responsible for society's welfare. In the fin-de-siècle, amidst fears of degeneration and population decline, two images of the woman emerged; the good mother and the New Woman. The former served society by having children while the latter abandoned her duty.²⁴⁶ This new iteration of a familiar antinomy reveals the dual nature of domestic ideology. It idealized women but also vilified them, making them both the saviors and corrupters of society.

²⁴⁵ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality, Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 90-100; Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair*, 155-6.

²⁴⁶ Fuchs discusses the valorization of maternity under the Third Republic. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris*, 56-8. For the New Woman as a symbol of population decline, see Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 66-7.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ILLUSION OF CIVILIZATION: GUSTAVE LE BON AND THE CRITIQUE OF POSITIVISM

Though he criticized revolutionary thought, Comte maintained many of the assumptions of the Enlightenment, including a belief in progress, reason, and science. He challenged and questioned these ideas, but he nevertheless believed that society could make the transition from a religious to a secular basis. In this light, Gustave Le Bon's psychological work appears to be the antithesis to everything for which positivism had stood. He argued that the intellect was powerless, progress was harmful, and that humanity was irrational. In his vision of modernity, the veil of civilization lifted and humanity returned to a state of violent struggle and destruction. "The man may hide his bloody instincts behind sonorous words, but whatever he does, these instincts are still terribly alive."²⁴⁷ Le Bon thus represents the fin-de-siècle's pessimism as well as its rejection of positivism.²⁴⁸ I argue that his ideas were more complex. From the beginning of his career, he held two competing theories; one, a positivist idea of science and progress, and the other, a criticism of positivism. I argue that this tension continued the basic uncertainties over modernity which were at the heart of positivism from the beginning. Later, he rejected positivism, but maintained a belief in the inevitability of change. Like Comte, he sought to reconcile forces of order and progress to found a new society. Yet the utopianism of the past was no longer viable. He argued, instead, for the subjective values of power, authority, and nation to maintain order. He

²⁴⁷ Le Bon, *L'Homme et les Sociétés: Leur origines et leur histoire* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1881), 91.

²⁴⁸ For the former trend, see Eugen Weber, *France, Fin-de-Siècle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1-26. For the latter, see Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*.

also used the language of gender to express his vision of modernity, but with a more masculine ideal. Where Comte viewed the Romantic qualities of feminine virtue as forming the new society, Le Bon advocated struggle, power, and domination.

The Failure of Reason

In contrast to Comte's pacifism, subsequent positivists in the Third Republic advocated ideas of racial struggle and domination. They viewed the West as subjugating or wiping out what they viewed as the lower races.²⁴⁹ Le Bon, who began his anthropological work in the 1870s, was characteristic of this era. He argued that a civilization's progress followed a natural path; like Darwinian evolution, change was slow and had to follow a set progression.²⁵⁰ Struggle was necessary for progress, and peace brought weakness.²⁵¹ The end result of development was inequality. He outlined a new study of craniology, in which the scientist would study, not the average skull size of each race, but the varying proportions of sizes within a population.²⁵² He used this to discover that, while lower races had generally similar sizes, the development of a race brought greater disparity. This was because progress itself was fundamentally anti-

²⁴⁹ Renan argued that Western nations should replace the poor with laborers from the other races. Ernest Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, ed. P.E. Charvet (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 62-3. Émile Littré argued that the higher races would expand and replace the less advanced. Émile Littré, "De l'Origine des sauvages," *La nouvelle revue* 5 (1880), 17-18. He argued that positivism would expand knowledge and rationalize the rest of the world. Littré, "Distribution future des langues et des nationalités sur le globe terrestre," *La philosophie positive* 22, no. 6 (May-June 1879), 332.

²⁵⁰ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 3-21.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 93-6.

²⁵² Le Bon, "L'Anthropologie actuelle et l'étude des races," *Revue scientifique* 28 (1881), 776-9.

egalitarian; industry created the intellectual elite while lowering the intelligence of the masses.²⁵³ Workers, peasants, and women remained in a primitive state while superior men became greater.²⁵⁴ They alone defined the place of a people in the overall hierarchy of races. His idea was important for several reasons. First, it created an empirical refutations of revolutionary ideas of equality. Second, it formed ideas of social inequality as not just analogous to, but a fundamental part of racial hierarchy. Finally, it represented the new, naturalistic idea of society in positivism. Where Comte had viewed society as a natural phenomenon, subject to scientific laws, Le Bon viewed it as itself based on nature. Human nature thus became transparent; one need only study the skull to see the development of hierarchy, and the rise of the superior European man. This man represented all of the virtues of the West: intellectual superiority and progress. Yet, while this man was intellectually superior, his intellect was a problem; Le Bon, like Comte, was ambivalent about the rational Western man.

Le Bon's theories exemplified the fin-de-siècle's ambivalent idea of modernity, which stood for both scientific achievement as well as social decline.²⁵⁵ Le Bon viewed the West as the progressive part of the world. It rose above all others, achieving heights of advancement. At the

²⁵³ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 397-407.

²⁵⁴ Le Bon, "Recherches anatomiques et mathématiques sur les lois des variations du volume du cerveau et sur leurs relations avec l'intelligence," *Revue d'anthropologie* 2 (1879), 54-104.

²⁵⁵ Many scholars have discussed this contradiction. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, eds. *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), ix-xiv; Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1-2; Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11-17; Forth and Elinor Accampo, "Introduction: Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France," in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle France: Bodies, Minds and Gender*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2-3.

same time, its very progress was self-destructive. Industrialization created prosperity for the bourgeoisie, but poverty for the workers.²⁵⁶ The family broke apart and traditional relationships failed.²⁵⁷ Religion and belief faded. In all of this, the West lost its unifying ideas, its “ardor and youth,” its “enthusiasm and energy,” and became decadent.²⁵⁸ Socialism posed a new problem. People saw this as progress, but it was really regress; it represented a return to a primitive communality, a flight from modern hierarchy.²⁵⁹ Though Le Bon described these problems as Western, they were also specific to French discourse. After the French loss of the Franco-Prussian War, intellectuals such as Ernest Renan viewed French culture as weak, unfit for the modern struggle for survival.²⁶⁰ Some argued for a new form of conflict to strengthen the nation: colonialism. It would strengthen the French man and revive the nation.²⁶¹ Le Bon sought a similar regeneration, but he saw contemporary colonialism as flawed. The French had attempted to spread their civilization to the rest of the world, but that was impossible because “only time can accomplish these great transformations.”²⁶² The British exploited India, ruining it and causing famine. Thus, the civilizing mission in fact led to a loss of civilization; Le Bon argued that “the European in the East loses all of his qualities and descends, in terms of morality, well below those whom he exploits.”²⁶³ In this way, Le Bon criticized, not just colonialism, but the idea of Western superiority itself. He identified the West with a decadent, enervated

²⁵⁶ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 397-407.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 302-4.

²⁵⁸ Le Bon, *Les Civilisations de l'Inde* (Rev. ed., Paris: Ernest Flammarion, Éditeur, 1900), 733-5.

²⁵⁹ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 407-12.

²⁶⁰ Renan argued that the victorious Germany represented a superior, authoritarian power. Renan, *La Réforme*, 36-40.

²⁶¹ Raymond F. Betts, *Tricouleur: The French Overseas Empire* (London: Gordon and Cremonesi, 1978), 40-2; William A. Hoisington, Jr., *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 20.

²⁶² Le Bon, “L'Algérie et les idées regnantes en France en matière de colonization,” *Revue Scientifique* no. 15 (October 1887), 456.

²⁶³ Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes* (Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1884), 652.

intellectualism. Arab civilization, in contrast, represented a primitive vitality and unity. They followed irrational religious ideas, but this irrationality provided their force; it gave them strength and unity. They retained “the solidity which we have lost.”²⁶⁴ Le Bon even questioned the ideal of rationality itself. He argued that “it is the character of a people, and not its intelligence, which inevitably determines its evolution in history.”²⁶⁵ He qualified this by stating that intelligence was more important in the long term,²⁶⁶ but his conviction seemed weak; he argued that barbarians could overcome decadent civilizations²⁶⁷ and that the East could one day rise up and economically surpass the West.²⁶⁸ Le Bon, like Comte, used the idea of the primitive to criticize the modern.

In a way, Le Bon's ideas are reminiscent of the Romantic tradition, which viewed each civilization as an organic whole with a fixed, unique development.²⁶⁹ Similarly, Le Bon viewed each society as particular. They each had a unique psychology and development, and could not adopt the culture of any other. Each had a unified spirit or “soul,”²⁷⁰ bringing the collective into solidarity. In India, a race was “a single being constituted by the reunion of thousands of constantly replaced individuals.”²⁷¹ This unity grew like a plant, and “the current state of a

²⁶⁴ Ibid., v.

²⁶⁵ Le Bon, “Rôle du caractère dans la vie des peuples,” *Revue Scientifique* 1, no. 2 (January 1894), 37.

²⁶⁶ Le Bon, *Arabes*, 669-74.

²⁶⁷ He used the example of the Roman Empire, a fitting example considering the contemporary symbolism of the modern French empire as heirs to the Roman legacy in North Africa. Le Bon, *Lois Psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (1927. Repr., Paris: Les Amis de Gustave le Bon, 1978), 127-8. For the Roman idea in colonialism, see Lorcin, “Rome and France in Africa: Rediscovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past,” *French Historical Studies* (2002), 296.

²⁶⁸ Le Bon, *L'Inde*, 729-33.

²⁶⁹ Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason*, 54-8.

²⁷⁰ Le Bon, *Lois Psychologiques*, 83-4.

²⁷¹ Le Bon, *L'Inde*, 75.

people is always the consequence of its past, like the plant is the consequent of the grain.”²⁷² Yet Le Bon was a positivist. He argued for viewing society as a scientific phenomenon, subject to scientific laws.²⁷³ Using Darwinism, he argued that the growth of a society, like the evolution of a species, had to be slow and gradual.²⁷⁴ In addition, he rejected the Romantic idea of the primitive. Though he criticized Western industry, he viewed people in undeveloped societies as savage and violent, similar to animals.²⁷⁵ Le Bon's thought is thus difficult to categorize; he valued tradition, but also progress, objectivity, but also the subjective. The key, once again, is the concept of rationality; he viewed rationalization as necessary for development, but also insufficient to found a social order.

Le Bon viewed rationalism as a dangerous force. It destroyed morality and perhaps society as a whole.²⁷⁶ Le Bon urged caution. He argued that it was the power of heredity which formed a people and its identity.²⁷⁷ Most importantly, it created a moral discipline. Hereditary influence was the reason why modern people retained their civilized state even when they left Western civilization.²⁷⁸ The forces of rationalization, in contrast, were destructive; like Comte, Le Bon viewed science as replacing religious conceptions.²⁷⁹ Unlike Comte, however, he viewed reason as insufficient. “Reason can teach man, but it cannot create a religion for him.”²⁸⁰ Because humanity still needed a religion, they found it in the dangerous ideas of the

²⁷² Le Bon, “Les Fuégiens,” *Bulletin de la Société de géographie* 7 (1883), 277.

²⁷³ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 1-5, 3-12.

²⁷⁴ Le Bon, *Les Premières civilisations* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1889), 12-17.

²⁷⁵ He argued that primitive people were similar to animals, and that Fuegians and Australians represented analogs to this state. Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 349-52.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 369-70.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 128-82.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 368-9.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 340-1.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 343.

revolutionary movement.²⁸¹ Le Bon used the death of religion as a symbol of the larger decline of civilization, which he expressed in the scientific idiom of the time. He wrote that Christianity followed the inexorable law in which everything “is born, grows, declines, and dies.”²⁸² Eventually, humanity would die out, and then the world would die.²⁸³ Everything followed the law of entropy; even belief.

Along with this thermodynamic idea of decline, he constructed a contrasting vision of progress; one which echoed the Enlightenment ideas of human perfectibility. He argued that, in time, humanity would become something new, with a totally moralized nature. National lines would break down and a global community would form.²⁸⁴ Even rationality could become constructive, and an empirical sense of heredity could found a religion based on the passing of generations.²⁸⁵ Was this a contradiction in Le Bon's thought? How could this eminently deterministic thinker have adopted the very utopianism which he so often rejected? It seems possible that his views simply represented the ambivalent nature of the century's idea of progress; like Comte, he saw progress as both constructive and destructive. He did adopt this ambivalence, but he also followed another aspect of Comte's vision; the division between the moral and the material.²⁸⁶

Le Bon argued that there were two forms of progress in society; the first, involving scientific and technological change, and the second involving the moral “character” of a people.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 342-3.

²⁸² Ibid., 341.

²⁸³ Ibid., 419-22.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 71-8.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 419-22.

²⁸⁶ Comte criticized Baron Haussmann's reforms for focusing on material, rather than moral, progress. Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 3:522-3.

Each moved forward, but at different rates; while science rapidly advanced, morality remained behind.²⁸⁷ Humanity, despite its advances, retained its violent and barbaric nature.²⁸⁸ There was thus a fundamental clash in development, with the scientific breaking down the old moral order without anything to replace it. In the future, humanity could attain a new synthesis in which the moral and the intellectual came into accord, but that time had not yet come. For the moment, society remained in a state of transitional crisis, not yet ready to advance. In this context, his rejection of the civilizing mission took on a new meaning. He argued that the less advanced, such as Indians, were unready for Western civilization. Similarly, the Western man himself, despite his civilized state, was unready for the very modernity which he had built. All of this supported a universal vision of hierarchy and authority; humanity was uncivilized, so it needed to be controlled, both in the metropole and in the colonies. Yet, though his theory was centered on the abstract, civilized man, he identified harmful change with those elements of the world which he viewed as traditional: women and non-Western people. He viewed them as the key to maintaining order; each had a fixed place in society, and would topple the social order if they left it.

The Defense of Inequality

After the mid-nineteenth century, both feminists and anti-feminists adopted a common

²⁸⁷ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 370-2.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 87-93.

idea of women's moral, maternal nature. Feminist Maria Deraismes argued that women served a vital function, creating unity and solidarity in the family.²⁸⁹ Others, such as anti-feminists Jules Michelet and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, viewed gender difference and marriage as founding morality and civilization.²⁹⁰ This reverence for the feminine did not, however, preclude virulent misogyny; Proudhon viewed the woman as a beautiful “representation of the ideal,”²⁹¹ but also as “an instrument of reproduction.”²⁹² Le Bon continued this idea of women as both superior and inferior, but incorporated an evolutionary, materialist perspective. He argued that women indeed had a basic altruistic nature. They sought to serve and to care for others, whether they were children, animals, or objects. He saw this not as a true morality, but as an animal-like instinct. He wrote that girls naturally had “a foundation of sweetness, sympathy, pity, and devotion to the weak and unfortunate, as instinctive for them as the bird's need to care for its eggs [*couver*].”²⁹³ Women's beneficence was natural but also limited. They desired to serve, but had no understanding of morality, and could not take public roles.²⁹⁴

He used similarly naturalistic language to denigrate women elsewhere. He argued that they had smaller brains and an instinctive nature, like gorillas and other animals.²⁹⁵ This primitive nature was vital; it made them caring and intuitive, making them the perfect helpers and servants of men. He argued that “the ingenious tenderness of the woman, her charming weakness, and her unthinking naïveté (*naïve inconscience*) makes life tolerable for the man

²⁸⁹ Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up!*, 81-2.

²⁹⁰ For their arguments, see Michelet, *L'Amour*, 1; Proudhon, *Justice*, 11-31.

²⁹¹ Proudhon, *Pornocratie*, 11.

²⁹² Proudhon, *Justice*, 4:134-5.

²⁹³ Le Bon, *L'Homme*, 351-2.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁹⁵ Le Bon, “Recherches,” 60-1.

crushed by the harsh labor of our refined civilization.”²⁹⁶ Furthermore, because women were intellectually inferior, similar to children, they were able to better understand and educate children.²⁹⁷ Thus, Le Bon's ideal was a totally altruistic woman who lived to serve others. He illustrated this with the case of birds that “contract indissoluble unions in which they demonstrate the most faithful and tender sentiments, and the love shown by the female for the male is so deep that she soon dies of grief when death takes him from her.”²⁹⁸ Some sought to change this natural order.

Le Bon education for girls as another example of blind belief in universalism. Republicans thought that education could remake the individual, shaping “every French mind into a single mold. One seeks to pour the minds of the blacks, Arabs, and Asians of our colonies into this same mold. One now wants to pour the minds of French women into it as well.”²⁹⁹ The result would be disastrous. He argued that equal education would overwhelm women, making them unhappy and physically ill. Ultimately, they would “sacrifice their years of beauty, of youth”³⁰⁰ as well as hopes for a family, for nothing. They could not compete professionally with men and would turn to nihilism. He wrote that their hopeless situation would make them “*déclassées*, thunderous rebels, enemies of men, of whom they see themselves as equal, and of the social order, of which they pretend to be victims.”³⁰¹ Le Bon argued, instead, for a limited education for women, which would “prepare them to be excellent wives.”³⁰² Was this a

²⁹⁶ Le Bon, “Psychologie des femmes,” 450.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 459.

²⁹⁸ Le Bon, “Recherches,” 61-2.

²⁹⁹ Le Bon, “Psychologie des femmes,” 450.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 456.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 456.

³⁰² Ibid., 456.

contradiction in Le Bon's thought? If women wanted to be mothers, and were naturally suited for it, then why was this special education necessary? He believed that the social order was based on nature, but that a powerful, irrational idea threatened it: equality. He viewed this as an all-encompassing idea which was spreading throughout the world.³⁰³

By the late 1880s, Le Bon had developed a complete theory of progress as the development of hierarchy. He argued that, as society developed, the races, sexes, and classes became more unequal. The superior man rose above the rest, claiming a place as the only true, mature individual of the world. All others remained in a state of primitive, savage or childlike underdevelopment. Several events brought a new theory to the fore. The republicans established universal suffrage,³⁰⁴ expanded colonization,³⁰⁵ and secularized education.³⁰⁶ In this context, Le Bon constructed a double idea of progress which led to both the growth of inequality and a contrary trend toward social leveling and equality. His target was the idea of universalism. He argued that it began in the European context, in the French attempts to spread their superior civilization to the rest of the world. When that failed, the French sought to transform their colonial possessions, remaking their subjects into French citizens.³⁰⁷ This was similarly futile. He argued that people had totally incompatible mentalities. The West was progressive and secular, while the East was traditional and archaic.³⁰⁸ The latter were “immobilized in an eternal

³⁰³ Le Bon, *Lois psychologiques*, 10.

³⁰⁴ Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 531-7.

³⁰⁵ For the establishment of the new empire, see Frederick Quinn, *The French Overseas Empire* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 107-64; Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 28-38.

³⁰⁶ Agulhon, *French Republic*, 21-3.

³⁰⁷ Le Bon, “Influence de l'éducation et des institutions européennes sur les populations indigènes des colonies,” *Revue Scientifique* no. 8 (August 1889), 230.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

dream,”³⁰⁹ incapable of entering the modern world. At this point, the false idea of universalism once again entered metropolitan society. Because they gave full education to their colonized subjects, the French would have to provide it for French women as well.³¹⁰ Here, again, the ideal of equality clashed with reality. He argued that women, like non-Western people were irrational and inferior, incapable of learning.

Le Bon thus constructed a thorough critique of egalitarian thought which set a stable idea of national identity and particularity, in which, against a destructive idea of universal human unity, which sought to remake the world in the image of the supposedly superior people. The latter idea, he argued, was the cause of all of modern history's greatest disasters, including war and revolution. He wrote that it was “this chimerical notion of the equality of men which has shaken the world, brought about an enormous revolution in Europe, launched America into a bloody war of secession and brought all of France's colonies to a state of lamentable decadence.”³¹¹ Le Bon wrote this statement in 1894, during a key transitional point in French history. By this time, the Third Republic was securely established. The government had moved toward the right, and the clash between the secularists and the Catholic conservatives had abated.³¹² Yet several cracks had begun to appear in this stability. The popular movement in support of General Georges Boulanger developed, based on militarism and anti-German sentiment, and seemed to challenge the government.³¹³ It introduced a new populist, nationalist

³⁰⁹ This quote referred to India. Le Bon, “L’Inde moderne: comment on fonde une colonie, comment on la garde et comment on la perde” *Revue scientifique* no. 21 (November 1886), 656.

³¹⁰ Le Bon, “Psychologie des femmes,” 450.

³¹¹ Le Bon, *Lois psychologiques*, 10.

³¹² Agulhon, *French Republic*, 48-61.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

right.³¹⁴ At the same time, a number of far left movements developed. Socialism grew in power and anarchists staged a series of bombing attacks.³¹⁵ In this context, Le Bon found a new symbol for the disastrous power of equality: the crowd.

“The Era of Crowds”

Despite the relative stability of the Third republic government, new scientific theories added a new dimension to existing fears of the revolutionary masses.³¹⁶ Psychologists Jean-Martin Charcot and Hippolyte Bernheim formulated theories of suggestion in which the unaccountable forces of subconscious influence drove the individual's actions.³¹⁷ Debora Silverman argues that their work introduced an idea of irrationality into popular discourse and “[called] into question the Enlightenment legacy of self and social mastery.”³¹⁸ In this context, Le Bon formed a theory of the collective as the new power in modern society. The old political elite faded in importance. The masses emerged in their place, ushering in “the ERA OF CROWDS.”³¹⁹ Like previous commentators, Le Bon viewed the masses as inferior; he argued that they lacked reasoning ability³²⁰ and required strong government.³²¹

³¹⁴ William D. Irvine, *The Boulanger Affair Revisited: Royalism, Boulangism, and the origins of the Radical Right in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12-18.

³¹⁵ Agulhon, *French Republic*, 70-5.

³¹⁶ For earlier fears of the crowd, see Jaap Van Ginneken, *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics 1871-1899* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 20-48; Gay L. Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 52-4.

³¹⁷ Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, 78-91.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

³¹⁹ Emphasis in original. Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, 3.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-1.

Yet this was more than mere class prejudice. Le Bon viewed the crowd as an all-encompassing theory, representing the basic irrationality of humanity. He argued that when the man entered the crowd, he lost his civilized nature, “descend[ing] several degrees on the scale of civilization.”³²² This was true for everyone, regardless of intelligence and education. “The suffrage of forty academics is no better than that of forty water carriers.”³²³ The collective descended to the level of its least intelligent members, which Le Bon characterized in gendered and racialized terms. He argued that the crowd was “feminine”³²⁴ and emotionally unstable, like a woman.³²⁵ It was illogical,³²⁶ like “completely primitive beings.”³²⁷ This was clearly a criticism of a democratic society in which the voice of the masses drowned out the elite.

Le Bon's theory was more than anti-democratic; he described the superior man, not just as losing his privilege, but his intelligence as well. This revealed the underlying irrationality of the mind, in which “the role of the unconscious is immense and that of reason is very small.”³²⁸ Le Bon viewed irrationality as a universal guiding force of history.³²⁹ Its form, however, was changing. Where once, the nation and religion were humanity's key illusions, it was now the illusion of equality in the socialist movement.³³⁰ Le Bon's figure of the man in the crowd

³²¹ Ibid., 42-3.

³²² Ibid., 20.

³²³ Ibid., 169.

³²⁴ Ibid., 27.

³²⁵ Ibid., 38.

³²⁶ Ibid., 101.

³²⁷ Ibid., 24-5.

³²⁸ Ibid., Vi-vii.

³²⁹ He wrote that “logic and reason have never been the true guide of people.” Le Bon, *Psychologie du socialisme* (1902. Repr, Les Amis de Gustave le Bon, 1984), 15-16.

³³⁰ For the decline of patriotism, see *ibid.*, 29-30. He argued that socialism was taking the place of religious belief. *Ibid.*, 17.

represented the fate of the individual at this “period of transition and anarchy,”³³¹ standing amidst the dehumanizing forces of modernity. Where Comte had viewed bourgeois culture as the dehumanizing element, Le Bon identified dehumanization with the illusion of the labor movement, which sought a return to primitive communism.³³²

Le Bon described socialism as an irrational impulse, “a reaction of the collectivity against individuality, a return to the past.”³³³ It sought to bring about homogeneity, which Le Bon attributed to racial others and the European past. Anarchism, similarly, would bring about a primitive society. The latter would dismantle modern society altogether, reducing it to a primitive state.³³⁴ From there, “humanity would pass through each of the forms through which it had to successively cross: savagery, slavery, barbarity, etc.”³³⁵ Each movement threatened to impose an unnatural equality by either restructuring society or removing the structure all together. The two actions appear synonymous for Le Bon, because for him the true mark of civilization was hierarchy. In this sense, socialism, along with the civilizing mission, formed a unified challenge to hierarchy. While the civilizing mission and gender equality threatened to elevate the inferior elements in society, these revolutionaries sought to bring down that which was superior. The result was the same in all cases: leveling, and thus savagery. Yet the origin of this problem was not in the empire, but in the events of 1789.

The idea of heredity was central to nineteenth century thought. Degeneration theory posited modernity as disease, with social ills translating to physical ills, passing from generation

³³¹ Le Bon, *Foules*, 2.

³³² He called socialism “a simple reversion toward inferior forms of existence.” Le Bon, *Psychologie politique et la défense sociale* (Repr., Les Amis de Gustave Le Bon, 1911), 316-17.

³³³ Le Bon, *Socialisme*, 22.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

to generation.³³⁶ Revolution followed the same pattern. It grew from unhealthy settings, spread like a disease, and reappeared over time, in new forms.³³⁷ For Le Bon, all of history passed in the same way. Revolution, that supposed break with the past, in fact did little; equality and modern rights would have happened anyway, as part of general modernization. Its only real accomplishment was its massive death toll.³³⁸ He viewed the Revolution as part of continuity, as a manifestation of a continuing process of social disorder based on irrationality and social influence. The various revolutionary actions, from the September Massacres to the Commune, were simply various forms of mass psychology, revealing an underlying savagery within human nature.³³⁹ He wrote that “among many people ferocity is a restrained, but never repressed, instinct.”³⁴⁰ For that reason, revolution became the key to modern history, representing modernity itself; first, because it stood for the general rise of mass power, and second, because it became an unending repetition, standing for the cyclical process of modern degeneration. Revolution also played a more active role. Though its attempts at modernization were futile, it still had a disastrous impact. By attempting to impose equality, it contradicted the normal development of society, which was toward greater hierarchy.³⁴¹ This hierarchy, in turn, was responsible for continuing progress; he argued that only elite intellectuals could further the

³³⁶ Ruth Harris discusses the idea of social setting as causing degeneration. Ruth Harris, *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 51-5.

³³⁷ For the idea of poor neighborhoods as breeding revolution, see David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 9-10. For the theme of revolution as symbol of degeneration, see Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 59-72; Harris, *Murders*, 77-8.

³³⁸ Le Bon, *Politique*, 197.

³³⁹ For his analysis of the two events as manifestations of crowd psychology, see Le Bon, *Foules*, 147-52. For the idea of irrationality as guiding the revolutionary masses, see Le Bon, *La Révolution française et la psychologie des révolutions*, (Rev ed., Paris: Les Amis de Gustave Le Bon, 1983), 52-9.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 228-2.

course of civilization.³⁴² Without them, Europe would lose its superior nature, based on continual advancement, and would regress to an inferior stage.

In summary, Le Bon's ideas appear to be in complete accord, from his argument against the civilizing mission to his argument against revolution. His theories legitimized social norms and discredited drastic change. He saw progress as tending toward greater inequality, so attempts to impose equality meant a reversion to a primitive state. Revolution then appeared regressive, moving against his idea of progress. Le Bon's theory system located racial superiority exclusively in the civilized European male. This man was the only one with the intellect and the rationality to understand the world around him and to act on it. He held the right to power over what he viewed as the inferior people of the world: women, workers, and other races. Yet Le Bon's ideas were more complicated. First, the European male was not rational, but savage. Revolution did not contradict historical development, but advanced its course. Le Bon thus held two contradictory theories, one conservative and the other rejecting stability as impossible. The rest of this chapter will analyze this contradiction.

The Decline of the European Man

Le Bon's idea of progress, more than simply justifying imperialism and patriarchy, represented ambivalence about man's role in modern society. Le Bon argued that modern hierarchical society represented change and progress because it involved male elites rising above

³⁴² Ibid., 232.

the collectivity and asserting control over the inferior elements. Le Bon viewed this as a delicate balance, which he represented through the language of race. He discussed a fixed, racialized “national character.”³⁴³ He used this against socialism, portraying the latter as an undesirable change.³⁴⁴ The movement would end with disaster, bringing about class conflict.³⁴⁵ He viewed society as being at stake, identifying the current order with order itself. He identified that order, in turn, with racial identity. He wrote that “the anarchy and social struggles which we have described manifest above all among peoples that have attempted to break with their past and of which the mentality has consequently lost its stability.”³⁴⁶ This represents his rejection of the Enlightenment idea of universal human perfectibility. As he argued concerning the civilizing mission, one could not change human nature. It had to evolve on its own over time. He applied the same argument to French society. The French Revolution, he argued, represented the false idea that laws could change society.³⁴⁷ Equality was unnatural. It contradicted progress and the normal development of society.³⁴⁸ It appears that the key idea is nature. He divided the idea of progress into two: one a natural progress that led to inequality and male superiority, and the other an unnatural progress that led to equality and the breakdown of society. This latter, he argued, was not progress at all. “What many minds blinded by chimeras consider progress is simply regression toward inferior forms of existence.”³⁴⁹ He discredited the idea of equality by identifying it as both natural and unnatural. It was natural because it was driven by instinct, and

³⁴³ Le Bon, *Lois psychologiques*, 15-16.

³⁴⁴ Le Bon, *Socialisme*, 14.

³⁴⁵ Le Bon, *Politique*, 314.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 313.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-2, 50-2.

³⁴⁸ Le Bon, *Révolution*, 227-8, 230-2.

³⁴⁹ Le Bon, *Politique*, 317.

led to an early state of society. It was unnatural because it contradicted his idea of progress, which moved forward away from that state. Yet he naturalized it in another sense. Though he argued that revolution could not affect any real change, and that its goals were impossible, he also viewed equality as a real problem. Any attempt at social change seemed poised to bring about primitive homogeneity. This was true for socialism and revolution. It was even true, implicitly, for gender equality and the civilizing mission. Progress was thus delicate and could be overturned at any moment. As such, patriarchy was delicate as well. The European man, he argued, could be brought down to a feminine, savage level by stepping out of the social order. Even symbolically leaving that order, by joining the homogeneous crowd, could return him to man's evolutionary starting point. Progress was thus natural and unnatural, inevitable but uncertain, progressive but regressive.

If Le Bon's imperialist progress was weak and imperiled, then the “unnatural” form of progress in contrast appeared eminently natural. Revolution was not just failure because its ideals were impossible, but because they represented the inevitable course of historical development. In his view, the Old Regime started a policy of government expansion that continued through the 1789 revolution, through the subsequent years to the current socialist movement.³⁵⁰ This series of developments, though seemingly marked by conflict and frequent change in regime, was instead a single line of development. It brought state centralization and expansion, culminating in the socialist vision of society.³⁵¹ That latest iteration was thus inevitable, part of a “natural phase of evolution.”³⁵² For Le Bon, it was ultimately about the rise of government and the diminution of

³⁵⁰ Le Bon, *Lois psychologiques*, 85-6.

³⁵¹ Le Bon, *Socialisme*, 141-2.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 171.

the individual.³⁵³ The result was disastrous, and “the weakest traces of initiative, of individual liberty, [are] suppressed.”³⁵⁴ It was also universal, common to all ideology. He argued, “all these parties: republicans, monarchists, socialists, etc., have, as I have already said, an identical conception of the state.”³⁵⁵ In this way, it was beyond politics, a characteristic of the French race.³⁵⁶ The French believed in the power of government and education.³⁵⁷ They believed in universalism and that “all men are made the same and should consequently think and feel the same way.”³⁵⁸ The problem, then, was the idea of intervention and change. It, again, contradicted racial development. It was also part of that same development and racial identity. History, after all, was the product of irrationality.³⁵⁹ The crowd brought these ideas together. It was specific to the French race, representing its nature. Collective influence worked on a subconscious level, driving its members regardless of their individual qualities. For that reason, the crowd represented not just the inferior part of the population, but the basic racial identity of the nation. Thus, by making these developments universal, inevitable, and racial, Le Bon placed savagery in the past, present, and future of modern society.

Humanity, Le Bon argued, began with a “crowd.”³⁶⁰ Then, over time, it developed into a civilization. “The crowd became a people, and this people would be able to leave barbarity.”³⁶¹ It was ultimately social structure that defined modernity and racial identity. Other races were

³⁵³ Ibid., 151, 154-5.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 42.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 138.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 129.

³⁵⁷ He wrote that they believed in “Statism.” Le Bon, *Révolution*, 224. For his statement about education, see Le Bon, *Psychologie de l'éducation*, (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1905), 5-6.

³⁵⁸ Le Bon, *Socialisme*, 129.

³⁵⁹ He argued, “It is above all with sentiments and beliefs that men govern themselves and make history.” Le Bon, *Politique*, 29. Religion plays a major part. Le Bon, *Socialisme*, 15-16.

³⁶⁰ Le Bon, *Foules*, 189.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 189.

inferior because they were “crowds.” European races, in contrast, became individuals, their identity defined by stratification. This stratification then began to break down. Religion and nationalism declined. Europeans lost their former “ardor and youth.”³⁶² The result was a general weakening of society and loss of social solidarity.³⁶³ “Having arrived at a certain level of power and complexity, civilization stops growing, and, when it no longer grows, it is soon condemned to decline.”³⁶⁴ Thus, civilizing was an action, constantly resisting the contrary force of de-civilizing. The latter brought about the modern-day moment, defined by the rise of crowds. The entire process was inevitable. “Passing from barbarity to civilization in following a dream, then declining and dying when that dream has lost its force, such is the cycle of the life of a people.”³⁶⁵ It was really the life of men. Le Bon viewed modernity as feminizing and de-civilizing, which implicitly excluded his idea of the feminine and uncivilized. In addition, because women and non-Europeans could never attain true civilization, they could not take part in this arc of progress and regression. Instead, the European man was the sole subject of history. He was the only one who could move forward, so he was the only one who could fall behind. Yet, by positioning him within this arc, Le Bon seems to undermine his superiority. Man became superior through the development of intelligence, by rising above the inferior elements. Le Bon's idea of progress was exactly the opposite. It led to the rise of central power, the loss of the individual and his masculine strengths. It led, above all, to a loss of civilization: the element that set the European male apart. The crowd was symbolic of that process. Daniel Pick argues, “The

³⁶² Le Bon, “L'Inde moderne,” 657.

³⁶³ Le Bon, *Foules*, 190-1.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

crowd inverted the law of evolution and moved from present to past.”³⁶⁶ It also inverted the order of representation and made the European male subject to imperialist discourse.

The positivist idea of history was predicated on the idea of the Western man as perfectible, capable of reaching a state of objectivity from which he could view and guide the development of the rest of the world. Anne McClintock discusses this vision of history in imperialist culture, in what she labels “panoptical time.” She argues that representations of the civilizing process cast the Western man as an invisible observer, viewing the paths of the lesser people, as representations of the past, moving forward in history.³⁶⁷ Le Bon's idea of the crowd inverted these ideas in every way. In his argument, the rational man became the visible object, rather than the unseen subject, and acted out his course of development. This man lost his rationality and became analogous to primitives, in the same way that primitives were analogous to his own past in panoptical time. In addition, because the crowd mind was representative of his racial nature, it cast savagery as the man's normal state, and thus made rationality impossible. This was the central point of Le Bon's work. He viewed the masses as an unstoppable, destructive, and all-consuming force.³⁶⁸ One could not improve them, because laws were powerless against nature.³⁶⁹ One could not use reason, because the irrational forces of “sentiment and beliefs” had the greatest power over events.³⁷⁰ Thus, Le Bon viewed history as leading toward inevitable decline. He followed Comte's vision of abstract, scientific history, but updated

³⁶⁶ Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 92.

³⁶⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.

³⁶⁸ He referred to crowds as “microbes that break down debilitated bodies or cadavers.” Le Bon, *Foules*, 6. He viewed democracy as irreversible. *Ibid.*, 168-9.

³⁶⁹ Le Bon, *Politique*, 50-1.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

for the fin-d-siècle, based on the era's sense of decline.

Though he deemed the positivist idea of reshaping human nature impossible, his vision of controlling humanity appeared easier. Because crowds were weak-willed and impressionable, a leader could control them by employing simple ideas.³⁷¹ This could be dangerous because crowd leaders were often mentally ill demagogues.³⁷² But crowds also presented an opportunity. Le Bon argued that, “always ready to rise up against a weak authority, the crowd submits to a strong one.”³⁷³ Thus, the government had to take a strong stand. It needed to suppress the socialist threat.³⁷⁴ It had to impose stronger criminal punishment.³⁷⁵ Most of all, it had to understand the forces of psychology, which would allow it to “lead men and manage events.”³⁷⁶ Le Bon presented his studies as the means to maintain order against the forces of decline. He gave those in power a choice between two futures, one in which they took control of the chaotic masses, and one in which the masses took control of them.³⁷⁷ This was also gendered. In the latter, modernity became feminized, with the superior man dissolving into a homogeneous inferiority. In the former, masculine modernity took over this feminine chaos, which existed both in the crowd and in man himself, and created a new order. Le Bon divided this vision into absolutes, into order and disorder. This made modern society constantly threatened and undermined, in need on reinforcement. In addition, by placing man into this delicate position, he promoted a specific vision of masculinity based on power and struggle.

³⁷¹ Le Bon, *Foules*, 51-9.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 105-6.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 142-3.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁷⁵ Le Bon, *Politique*, 265-72.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 307.

³⁷⁷ He wrote that “crowds are somewhat like the sphinx of the ancient fables; one must resolve the problems of their psychology or resign oneself to be devoured by them.” Le Bon, *Foules*, 90.

Le Bon formed a Social Darwinist idea of masculinity. This had a particular meaning in the era after the Franco-Prussian War. Renan argued that the German man was superior to the French, and that “the German victory was the victory of the disciplined man over one who is not, of the respectful, attentive, methodical man over one who is not.”³⁷⁸ He saw the French man was decadent and obsolete, weakened by his very culture. In the subsequent years, this sense of weakness took various forms; the idea of depopulation, degeneration, and social change. It remained, as well, a male problem; Christopher Forth argues that during the fin-de-siècle commentators viewed modern life itself as “feminizing,” taking away the man's strength and fitness.³⁷⁹ Le Bon, like many others, had a solution: “force.”³⁸⁰ He argued that struggle was natural and normal, whether in colonial conflict or class conflict.³⁸¹ It was necessary for a society's strength.³⁸² Without it, there would be a failure to develop, like in Africa, or decadence, like in India.³⁸³ Furthermore, it would increase in the future. He wrote that the coming era would feature a number of conflicts, including both “wars of race and wars of ideas.”³⁸⁴ To survive amidst this tumult, France would need to maintain its strength; “Those who want to survive must remain the strongest.”³⁸⁵ This meant, above all, maintaining its national sentiment and “soul.” Here, he echoed the ideas from German idealism, of a reality based on will and a nation based on

³⁷⁸ Renan, *La Réforme*, 39.

³⁷⁹ Forth, *Dreyfus Affair*, 8.

³⁸⁰ Le Bon, *Politique*, 320.

³⁸¹ For his views on colonial conquest as natural, see Le Bon, *Socialisme*, 275-7. For his idea of class domination, see *Ibid.*, 290-1.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁸³ For his views of Africans, see *ibid.*, 276. He argues that lack of war had left India overpopulated. Le Bon, *Politique*, 82-3, 86-7.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 318.

an idea.³⁸⁶ Le Bon argued, it was a nation's "will" that drove it to greatness.³⁸⁷ Thus, the current decline was a moral, rather than material failing, and could be remedied as such. It was modern ideas—socialism, feminism, and above all equality—that drove France to ruin. To be revived, France needed only to return to its old values of tradition and inequality; in effect, to restore the French man to power. At the same time, this also meant creating a new man. Like Friedrich Nietzsche, Le Bon theorized an individual who existed in constant struggle, using his extraordinary will to shape reality.³⁸⁸

Le Bon's thought represents a turning point in modern thought. He exemplified the fin-de-siècle rejection of rationalism and liberalism.³⁸⁹ He argued that modernization, rather than creating a utopian state, instead led to degeneration. The individual was violent and savage under his veneer of civilization. The masses were chaotic and dangerous. Even though he dismissed idealizations of progress, he was not a conservative. He believed in ideas of change, revolution, and regeneration, but on a different basis; irrational ideals and beliefs, rather than scientific truths. This was the key to Le Bon's lasting impact on Europe. He viewed the masses as chaotic and irrational, but also identified this irrationality as the true driving force of change. Law, revolution, and traditional politics were bankrupt. Only the force of illusion, and the ideal of the nation, mattered. Le Bon's era was a transitional point, between the ideas of the old right and the

³⁸⁶ For the idea of will, see Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 537-50. For this idea of the nation, see Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), 35-9.

³⁸⁷ Le Bon, *Politique*, 327.

³⁸⁸ For a discussion of Nietzsche's idea of the individual, see Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, 537-58.

³⁸⁹ For this development and Le Bon's role, see Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1986), 32-9.

new, populist, nationalist right, which founded fascism.³⁹⁰

As Stanley Payne has argued, fascism rejected liberalism, but not the Enlightenment; fascism continued the latter's belief in regeneration and renewal. The difference was that this regeneration would be based on irrational principles. Fascism argued for values of youth, power, and masculinity.³⁹¹ It sought a new form of nationalist revolution.³⁹² It followed the basic ideas of positivism, in its quest for a modern social order, while rejecting its rationalist basis entirely. Le Bon is important to understanding the development of these ideas, and the transition between seemingly antithetical systems of thought. Liberal thought formed the basis for positivism, which transformed into conservatism, and finally a radical, revolutionary right. One idea consistently reappeared: to create a new society, one had to create a new man. Le Bon's man was an entirely new ideal, suited to a nationalist era; not the caring, domestic man of Comte's ideal, but a solitary, individualistic man who struggles to maintain his place in an ever-changing world.

³⁹⁰ Irvine, *Boulangier Affair Revisited*, 3-18.

³⁹¹ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London: Routledge, 2000), 8-9.

³⁹² Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 15-21.

CHAPTER THREE

RECONCILING THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE: ÉMILE DURKHEIM AND THE CREATION OF REPUBLICAN POSITIVISM

By the late nineteenth century, positivism had reached the peak of authoritarianism; where it was once a synthesis of liberal and conservative impulses, it had developed into a right-wing philosophy based on Social Darwinist struggle. Because of its fluid and multiform tenets, however, positivism, could not be contained in a single category of ideology. Beginning in the 1880s, sociologist Émile Durkheim adopted Comte's science, but balanced its scientism with Kantian individualism in order to forge a moral science for the Republic.³⁹³ Durkheim's goal was to revive France after the crisis of the Franco-Prussian War. This meant understanding the crisis, in its social forms, and taking action to resolve it. As a republican and supporter of the revolutionary tradition, he could not accept the conservative theories of Le Bon and others. As a result, Durkheim's project meant moralizing positivism in a way that would reconcile republican values and scientific study, the individual and the collective, and social stability and progress.

His work had a major impact on several fields, including academic sociology, cultural ethnology, and secular education.³⁹⁴ But this chapter argues that there were continuities between earlier positivists and Durkheim. It draws upon several areas of historiography, including work

³⁹³ For Kant's influence, see Dominick LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher* (1972; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 8-19.

³⁹⁴ Conklin discusses his role in the development of ethnology. Alice L. Conklin, *In The Museum of Man: Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 51-5. For his role in secular education, see Phyllis Stock-Morton, *Moral Education for a Secular State: The Development of Moral Laïque in Nineteenth Century France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 139. For the establishment of academic sociology, see Terry Nichols Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 162-3.

that discusses the existence of race, class, and gender in Durkheim's theories and work that discusses the coexistence of racial and gender inequality in French universalism.³⁹⁵ This chapter, by analyzing a key theorist of the Third Republic who stood at the turning point of the development of social science, seeks to analyze the process of intellectual change in greater detail. It argues that Durkheim, though he sought to reform positivism, in fact continued many of its standard ideas, including universal development, gender and racial hierarchy, and a focus on order. As Jennifer Lehmann has argued, Durkheim seemed to have two theories, one individualist, and the other incorporating difference and inequality. She identifies this contradiction with the underlying problem of liberalism.³⁹⁶ This chapter places him in a different context, not only in liberal thought, but the changing nature of positivism. It will analyze the contradictions in his work in three periods of his work: his early studies of modern individualism, his work on suicide, and his later work on primitive society.

³⁹⁵ For analyses of race in Durkheim, see Carole Reynaud Paligot, *La République raciale: Paradigme racial et idéologie républicaine (1860-1930)* (2006. Repr., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), 192-4; Staum, *Nature and Nurture in French Social Sciences, 1859-1914 and Beyond* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 142-3. For gender in Durkheim's work, see Jennifer M. Lehmann, *Durkheim and Women*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press). For the exclusionary aspect of universalism, see Scott, *Paradoxes*; Jeremy Jennings, "Citizenship, Republicanism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France," *British Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 4 (October 2000): 575-597.

³⁹⁶ For Lehmann's analysis of gender, race, and class in Durkheim's work, see Lehmann, "The Question of Caste in Modern Society: Durkheim's Contradictory Theories of Race, Class, and Sex," *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 4 (August 1995), 568-80. She identifies Durkheim's idea of individualism as representative of the "more general dilemmas of liberalism." *Ibid.*, 580-1.

Durkheim's Theory of Individualism

Like previous positivists, Durkheim sought to moralize society through the individual. After experiencing the crisis of the Franco-Prussian War firsthand, when the German army occupied his home town of Épinal, he adopted the mission of reviving modern France.³⁹⁷ Where Comte sought to ensure stability through technocratic government, and Le Bon sought to control the masses through psychology, Durkheim rejected scientism in favor of a liberal morality. There were two primary influences on this; first, the ideas of his teacher, Charles Renouvier, who advocated subjectivism and a social individualism, and second, the socialist movement, with its focus on social organization.³⁹⁸ Durkheim combined these ideas, positivism, socialism, and individualism, to create a new theory of socialization in which social progress, rather than threatening the individual person, in fact created his existence. In his first major work, 1893's *De la Division du travail sociale*, Durkheim argued that early civilization had been simple and homogeneous. The single person was essentially a member of the collective, lacking individuality. They came together in a primitive, “mechanical” solidarity, in which similarity created cohesion.³⁹⁹ Then, population rose, diversification developed, and a new form of societal structure appeared. Durkheim borrowed the theory from Spencer, in which all phenomena grew more complex over time, but used it in a dramatically different way.⁴⁰⁰ Spencer argued that

³⁹⁷ Steven Lukes discusses the war's influence on his idea of regenerating the French nation. Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study* (London: The Penguin Press, 1973), 39-42.

³⁹⁸ For Renouvier's influence, see *ibid.*, 54-7.

³⁹⁹ Émile Durkheim, *De la Division du travail sociale: étude sur l'organisation des sociétés supérieures* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1893), 138-9.

⁴⁰⁰ For Spencer's theory of “cosmic evolution,” see Mike Hawkins *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 83-4.

society mirrored the natural state, and a social form of Darwinian selection had to remove the weak in order for progress to take place.⁴⁰¹ In contrast, Durkheim used another aspect of evolutionary theory: the growth of biological diversity.

In the late nineteenth century, scientists such as Alfred Espinas and Edmond Perrier created theories of evolution which emphasized force of solidarity.⁴⁰² Durkheim followed the same line of reasoning and argued that animal life could not remain in a state of struggle. As species came into conflict over resources, they became more diverse, allowing for closer coexistence. In the same way, human population growth created the development of social diversification, which created interdependence and prevented conflict.⁴⁰³ This resulted in several features of modernity, including organic solidarity. Durkheim argued that, while in early society people had been interchangeable, in the modern era they formed more of an integrated system.⁴⁰⁴ Individuals no longer made up identical segments, like in a simple phenomenon, but parts of a complex whole, like the organs in a higher life form.⁴⁰⁵ In addition, the development of society replaced the state of nature with a social realm. In a natural state, individuals were in competition and natural inequality created hierarchy. In modern society, the theme of struggle diminished and individuals became more equal. Durkheim wrote that “ultimately, what constitutes liberty is the subordination of external forces to social forces.”⁴⁰⁶ This social realm created the modern individual.⁴⁰⁷ He argued that primitive society was homogeneous, with a collective mind in place

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 83-5.

⁴⁰² Judith Surkis discusses these scientists' influence on Durkheim. Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 144-7.

⁴⁰³ Durkheim, *Division du travail*, 294-6.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 160-1.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 140-1.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 433-4.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 390-1.

of individual personality.⁴⁰⁸ As the division of labor took place, this primitive state declined and individuals took greater independent roles.⁴⁰⁹ The result was a greater specialization, greater difference, and a “cult of man.”⁴¹⁰ This individualism strengthened, rather than weakened solidarity, because it created more specialized bonds in which each person relied on the other.⁴¹¹ Similarly, solidarity could not threaten the individual, because society created the individual, rather than the reverse.⁴¹² In his natural state, man was essentially a “savage”⁴¹³ or an “animal.”⁴¹⁴ Society made the difference, adding to his nature, controlling his behavior, and creating new ways of thought.⁴¹⁵ It formed a collective intellect, involving a larger perspective and a form of understanding unattainable to the single person.⁴¹⁶ Ultimately, it made him what he was: an individual with a distinct personality, and, above all, part of humanity.⁴¹⁷ In a way, Durkheim rejected the hierarchical theories of positivists such as Le Bon. Where Le Bon viewed the collective as a dehumanizing force, Durkheim viewed it as the source of all progress and civilization. In other ways, however, Durkheim reiterated the same hierarchical thought. He viewed humanity as beginning in an animal state, then becoming individualized, and thus human.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 215-16.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁴¹⁰ For the functioning of the organic state, see *ibid.*, 197-8. In his study of suicide, he discussed the increasing role of individualism and respect for the individual life that comes about. Durkheim, *Le Suicide: Étude de sociologie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1897), 381-2.

⁴¹¹ Durkheim, *Division du travail*, 160-88.

⁴¹² Ibid., 453-4.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 388.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 386-7.

⁴¹⁵ Durkheim described society as a greater power, above the individuals, which controlled their behavior and exercised power over them. Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895), 8-11. He described the social connection as the defining feature of human nature. Durkheim, *Division du travail*, 385-6.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 321-2.

⁴¹⁷ He argued that it was the social that elevated the person above an animal state and made him into a part of humanity. *Ibid.*, 386-7.

Like his predecessors, Durkheim could not imagine this human state as truly universal, and instead applied it only to a category of European men.

Durkheim, like Le Bon, viewed history as leading toward the development of male superiority. He argued that women and men started life in a similar form, with common physical traits. Using recapitulation theory, he argued that the same was true for early humanity. Over time, men became more distinct, breaking off from this original androgyny to form modern gender difference.⁴¹⁸ Men were thus the progressive element in society, creating the modern state of social diversity. In contrast, he viewed women as not only remaining inferior, but in fact declining. Evolution caused their mental abilities to diminish. Humanity's original state of androgyny split in two, and “one would say that the two great functions of the psychic life became separate, that one of the sexes took the affective functions and the other the intellectual functions.”⁴¹⁹ There were thus two contradictions within Durkheim's thought. First, he created an idea of a universal individual, but identified it with the male person. Second, he based his idea of individualism on gender complementarity, which saw men and women as representing the two halves of human nature.

This was, in fact, not a contradiction. Though he held contrary ideas of universality and hierarchy, these were part of a singular vision of human development, in which the modern European man was the only true individual and the only true human. He argued that, in primitive society, people were essentially similar. They had similar physiologies and lifestyles, and lived as part of the collective. He cited Theodor Waitz's observation that African people were all similar

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 58-9.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 61-2.

by group, with matching physiology.⁴²⁰ Heredity was dominant in these societies. Because lifestyles and social divisions were simple and limited, hereditary traits could translate into social stratification. In modern society, however, this became untenable. Roles became more numerous and varied, making hereditary traits less important.⁴²¹ When this happened, human nature became more developed; instinct declined, racial characteristics faded, and the person became an individual.⁴²² This demonstrates the universalist form of Durkheim's racial thought. Rather than identifying Western individualism as the particular creation of a specific context, he viewed the Western individual as the universal end point of social development. Because Africans this Western norm, he viewed them as inferior and undeveloped.

Durkheim's theory rejected physiological ideas of race while recreating them on new, social terms. He divided humanity into two forms; one, an undeveloped, racial person, and the other a modern, individualized one. This served to elevate the European man to a state of superiority as well as to define him in republican terms. As Judith Surkis argues, Durkheim viewed modernity as the end of tradition and the rise of individual freedom.⁴²³ She writes that "For Durkheim, the modern individual was a self-made man, a product of his own efforts and talents and not reducible to his filiation."⁴²⁴ Durkheim thus created a vision of renewal which allowed for the possibility of recreating the person, and thus the society as a whole. At the same

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 142-6.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 354-6.

⁴²² Individualism developed. Ibid., 142-3. The role of instinct diminished. Ibid., 358-60. The social role of biology declined. Ibid., 372-3. This led to the development of humanity. He wrote that "the greatest distance that exists between the savage and the civilized come from no other source." Ibid., 386-8.

⁴²³ Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 125-6, 133-4.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 141.

time, however, his theory posed a problem; with tradition gone, there had to be a new basis for socialization. He addressed this need in his 1897 study of suicide.

Suicide and the Problem of Modernization

After the Franco-Prussian War, in the shadow of Germany's rising power, French intellectuals used the concept of degeneration to bring together what they saw as the various illnesses of modernity—mental illness, alcoholism, crime, and depopulation—into an idea of general social crisis.⁴²⁵ German intellectual Max Nordau represents this discourse. He argued that the increased pace of life, excess stimulation, and repeated revolutions weakened the French individual's nerves, leading to the increase in mental illness and poor health.⁴²⁶ The overall sense of the time, as Nordau stated, was one of aimlessness and decline.⁴²⁷ Durkheim's theories allowed him to study this crisis while avoiding the idea of national decline. He argued that each society had its own normal state, which could not be compared to any other. All standards were relative.⁴²⁸ This argument allowed Durkheim to reject both the nineteenth century idea of linear progress as well as its antithesis, the conservative vision of modernity as a problem. His theory was more nuanced, but it nevertheless reinforced a vision of modernity as a state of crisis. He

⁴²⁵ Robert A. Nye, "Sociology and Degeneration: The Irony of Progress," in *Degeneration*, 60. Nye argues that the perception of France's weakness compared to Germany influenced the idea of crisis. Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 138.

⁴²⁶ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 34-43.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-7.

⁴²⁸ Durkheim, *Les Règles*, 70-1.

wrote that society's normal state was the standard of health and that "anything which departs from this state of health is a morbid phenomenon."⁴²⁹ This idea meant that change itself could be harmful, which supported the imperialist idea, from Le Bon, of maintaining differences between societies. Indeed, Durkheim later rejected the contemporary colonial policy of assimilation and argued for a form of association.⁴³⁰ His theory also established that the contemporary rise in crime and suicide were pathological, part of a "general malaise."⁴³¹ Durkheim adopted an empirical means for studying the effects of this crisis: the suicide rate.⁴³² In his 1897 book, *Le Suicide*, Durkheim tested various factors that may have contributed to the increase in suicide, including race, mental illness, and climate, before rejecting all of them.⁴³³

This work represented a transformation in his form of positivism. Where he had previously used physiology to determine the different states of society, he now dismissed the individual's role altogether and argued that race was a meaningless concept with no real definition.⁴³⁴ Instead, he argued that society itself created social phenomena including the suicide rate.⁴³⁵ Using this criteria, he described three types of suicide, egoistic, altruistic, and anomic. In the first, a loss of solidarity led to rising suicides. He argued that social solidarity was essential to

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁴³⁰ Raymond Betts identifies Durkheim as contributing to theories of social difference which provided the basis for association, but he does not discuss Durkheim's colonial argument in his article, "L'Effort colonial." Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory* (1960. Repr., University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 60-2. For Durkheim's argument, see "L'Effort coloniale," *La Revue de Paris* 5 (September-October 1902).

⁴³¹ Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, viii.

⁴³² For his explanation of his methodology, see Durkheim, "Suicide et natalité: Étude de statistique morale," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étrangère* 13, no. 7 (1888), 446-7.

⁴³³ For his argument against mental illness, see Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, 20-53. For race, see *ibid.*, 54-68. For climate, see *ibid.*, 82-106.

⁴³⁴ For his rejection of social studies centered on the individual, see *ibid.*, ix-x. For his criticism of race as a social category, see *ibid.*, 54-8. He argued that "the word race no longer corresponds to anything definite." *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, x-xi, 106.

human life.⁴³⁶ It gave a person a reason to live and defined his nature as a “social man.” Durkheim wrote that “the social man is all there is of the civilized man.”⁴³⁷ Without solidarity, this man lost his connection and his purpose, resulting in greater suicide rates.⁴³⁸ The second, altruistic suicide, was based on the opposite problem, excessive solidarity, and drove the individual to commit suicide in the interest of the collective.⁴³⁹ The third type, anomic, came from a loss of social norms. As modernization and industry grew, social norms broke down and the individual lost his sense of place in society. His aspirations grew higher and, as they became unrealistic, he grew dissatisfied and became more likely to commit suicide.⁴⁴⁰

Durkheim was more interested in the two modern forms of suicide, egoistic and anomic. They represented the current social crisis, which was based on excessive change and instability. Durkheim argued that modernity and “civilization” were themselves not harmful. Only their abnormal form, marked by excessive change and the breakdown of standards, caused harm.⁴⁴¹ The answer, then, was to create greater solidarity to counter this trend. Durkheim had two solutions: first, the creation of professional associations, in order to socialize labor, and second, stronger marriage, which would incorporate the male subject into society and control his impulses.⁴⁴² Durkheim argued that egoistic suicide was the result of men without social connection. They lacked meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging. Marriage was the solution. It was stronger if it was more binding and more developed. That meant, first, that divorce would

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 223-30.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 228.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 226-30.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 236-9.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 267-87.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 420-3.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 429-42.

have to be outlawed, and second, that families should have more children.⁴⁴³ The other form of suicide, anomic, was more complicated, related to a flaw in masculine nature. Durkheim argued that the man normally had “unlimited desires.”⁴⁴⁴ If left without restraint, he would experience a “mal de l’infini,” or boundless desire.⁴⁴⁵ The solution, again, was marriage; the monogamous state would regulate his sexual desires and create greater contentment.⁴⁴⁶ This system appears simple; tradition broke down, so it had to be built back up, man was flawed, and so he had to be controlled. In a way, Durkheim echoed the older theme of women as the solution to modernity, in which their conservative and traditional qualities would moralize man and recreate him as a social actor. The difference, however, was that Durkheim viewed marriage as harmful to women. It had a “disastrous” effect on them, increasing their rate of suicide where it decreased that of men.⁴⁴⁷

Women were outside of Durkheim’s general theory. In his view, the modern crisis was about the decline of social solidarity and norms, and the consequent loss of society to individualism. For that reason, it was essentially a male crisis. When social solidarity’s hold diminished, men found themselves without purpose or identity. They lost an essential part of themselves, that which made them “civilized.” Without solidarity, they were left with only natural life, “that which contents children and animals.”⁴⁴⁸ This was not enough and it led to increasing unhappiness. It was, however, sufficient for those with less social natures, including

⁴⁴³ He argued that larger families would lower the suicide rate for both women and men. *Ibid.*, 195-214. Divorce also had to be prevented. *Ibid.*, 442.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 272-3.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 273-5. For the quote, see *ibid.*, 304.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 303-9.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 228-30.

primitive people, the elderly, and women.⁴⁴⁹ Concerning women, Durkheim wrote that “as she lives outside of the common life than man, the common life penetrates her less; society is less necessary for her because she is less impregnated with sociability.”⁴⁵⁰ In this simpler state, her needs were correspondingly simpler. He wrote that “with some practices of devotion, with some animals to care for, the *vieille fille* [spinster] has her life filled.”⁴⁵¹

Women were safe from anomie because their nature was not infinite, but limited. Men were more complex, not only more social, but more intellectual. This translated to greater sexual needs. Durkheim wrote that “love is for us a more mental than organic fact.”⁴⁵² For that reason, the man’s desires expanded without end, unless a woman limited them. Women, in contrast, had natural limits. He wrote that “in general, the sexual needs of the woman have a less mental nature, because in general, her mental life is less developed.”⁴⁵³ Because women were simple and limited, the regulatory function of marriage had a negative effect on them.⁴⁵⁴ Ultimately, marriage favored men over women because “one needs constraint and the other liberty.”⁴⁵⁵ Durkheim had to sacrifice one sex to save another. When he chose men, he presented it with little comment, as though it were expected. He briefly attempted to resolve the problem by arguing that women would become more socialized, and thus no longer subject to the harmful effects of monogamy. This presented a problem, however, because it contradicted his larger theory of

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 230-1.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 303.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 306.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 306-9.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 309.

specialization. To resolve it, he had to theorize a separate, feminine sphere of public society.⁴⁵⁶ More importantly, Surkis argues that it revealed a flaw in his logic; he viewed women as natural and limited to biology, but saw them as naturally part of marriage, which was a social institution.⁴⁵⁷ By making these arguments, Durkheim revealed the basic contradiction in his domestic ideology: that women had to create society, yet remain separate in it.

Women thus represented a contradiction in his work. He assumed the existence of a universal person who came about in a social setting, in the public sphere. Women demonstrated the existence of difference as well as the basic connection between the public and private, and thus undermined his theory of social development. The solution, for Durkheim, was to erase them from society and subsume the home within and a timeless category of tradition. In this way, Durkheim created a more subtle form of patriarchy than his positivist predecessors. Where Comte and Le Bon argued that men had to control women and keep them in the home, Durkheim made male power, not only the basis of society, but the basic form of society itself. R.A. Sydnie argues that, in Durkheim's work, "'Society' is, in fact, a code word for the interests and needs of men as opposed to those of women."⁴⁵⁸ Like Le Bon, however, Durkheim's theory of superiority made the modern man a problem. By identifying men with modern society, he made them subject to the crisis of modernization and thus in need of a stabilizing element. The answer, again, was marriage. Surkis argues that it served as the basis for men's socialization, reconciling both stability and individualism.⁴⁵⁹ In creating this theory, however, Durkheim confirmed the

⁴⁵⁶ For his theory of women's future socialization, see *ibid.*, 443.

⁴⁵⁷ Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 151-4.

⁴⁵⁸ Sydnie, *Natural Women*, 46.

⁴⁵⁹ Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 133-4.

pessimism of the fin-de-siècle. It posited the man, not as fully autonomous, rational, and perfectible, but as a problem in need of discipline and regulation.

The Dreyfus Affair and the Formation of Secular Morality

Durkheim viewed the ideological conflicts of the Dreyfus Affair, not as signs of chaos and decline, as Le Bon had, but as forces for reviving French society. Politics aligned with ideals; the republicans, after turning toward conservatism, again identified with the values of the republic.⁴⁶⁰ As Dominick LaCapra argues, this shaped Durkheim's subsequent theory of solidarity. Durkheim viewed the Affair as a religious revival, and came to value "the importance of communal sentiment, collective ideals, and religious symbols in social life."⁴⁶¹ He viewed the Affair as strengthening this form of unity. It revived interest in politics, ending the "moral stagnation" of recent years.⁴⁶² For that reason, Durkheim adopted the mission of creating a secular ideology to support this faith.

Durkheim viewed militarism as the key obstacle to progress. He argued that the Franco-Prussian War brought it to the center of French life, instituting a religious worship of the army. War was not entirely harmful; it imparted a moral strength and "violent courage," but it was outmoded. In its place, Durkheim advocated an updated, intellectual masculinity, exemplified by

⁴⁶⁰ For the ideologies of the left and right, see Agulhon, *French Republic*, 82-95.

⁴⁶¹ LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim*, 73-6.

⁴⁶² Durkheim, "The Intellectual Elite and Democracy," in *Morality and Society*, 59-60.

intellectuals and scientists.⁴⁶³ This new figure, the intellectual, faced harsh criticism; conservatives such as Ferdinand Brunetière viewed it as representing modern egoism, as a threat to social cohesion.⁴⁶⁴ In response, Durkheim defined a new idea of the person, as both individual and social. To value the individual meant, not to value the single person, but the ideal of the individual, and thus the collective as a whole. It was an all-inclusive, universal individualism, in which the one stood for the many.⁴⁶⁵ He thus rebutted two contrary forms of conservatism; both Brunetière's militarism and Le Bon's elitist concept of individualism. The former argued that the modern individual threatened the collective, and the latter that the modern masses threatened the individual. Durkheim rejected both views with a single theory. He argued that the individual and the collective were never separate, that they grew together, and that reinforcing one in effect reinforced the other.

Durkheim's theories became more optimistic in this era. He saw the individual as the basis for a new social solidarity and believed that altruism and community were on the rise. His theory required a form of regulation, however, and education was the answer. In 1900, he argued that universities should establish a new focus on moral education and create a greater sense of solidarity for the students.⁴⁶⁶ In addition, they should open education to the lower classes and give them more practical knowledge.⁴⁶⁷ He gained the opportunity to institute his ideas in 1902,

⁴⁶³ Durkheim, "Une Enquête sur la guerre et le militarisme," *L'Humanité nouvelle: revue international; sciences, lettres, et arts* 1, no. 4 (1899), 50-2.

⁴⁶⁴ Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 334-6.

⁴⁶⁵ Durkheim, "Individualism and the Intellectuals," in *Morality and Society*, 44-51.

⁴⁶⁶ Durkheim, "Rôle des universités dans l'éducation sociale du pays," in *Congrès international de l'éducation sociale* (Paris Felix Alcan, 1900), 128-31.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 136-7.

when he assumed the chair of pedagogy at the Sorbonne.⁴⁶⁸ He argued, in his first course, that the education system had to create a new, secular morality. Up to that point, morality had been a primarily religious idea which relied on a divine basis for its laws. He argued, however, that pure secularization was not the answer. To replace religion, one had to separate it from the fundamentals of morality.⁴⁶⁹

The solution was to create a rationalized form of religion. He argued that society itself was a religious concept; god was based on the collective, and the soul on the social individual.⁴⁷⁰ In this way, he echoed a theme from Comte of updating religion for a secular world. Similarly, Durkheim saw it as a way to reform society. He argued that secular morality would have several effects, imposing discipline on the person, teaching him self-control, and creating a sense of altruism.⁴⁷¹ It was ultimately about control, but not a control that limited humanity. In effect, his morality would allow humanity to develop into its true form. Because the person was born of the collective, integrating him into the collective increased his liberty and individuality. Furthermore, because Durkheim defined the social as humanizing, he viewed socialization as creating, not just a new man, but also man as a person.⁴⁷² He asked, “Is not, for this reason, the civilized person a person to a greater degree than the primitive, and the adult more than the child?”⁴⁷³ This quote demonstrates that Durkheim's idea of universalism was founded on concepts of hierarchy.

⁴⁶⁸ Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 360.

⁴⁶⁹ This posthumous publication contains his lectures from 1902-3. Durkheim, *L'Education morale* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925), 10-13.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-20.

⁴⁷¹ He argued that discipline would counter the anomic effects of modernization. *Ibid.*, 43-53. His theory of altruism meant serving the greater collective. *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷² For solidarity as creating human nature, see *ibid.*, 82-3. For discipline as a requisite for liberty, see *ibid.*, 61-2.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 83.

Durkheim viewed education as a form of civilizing. To make that point, he drew an analogy between children, primitive people, and crowds. They all shared a chaotic, unbalanced structure, resulting in disorder. Children lacked focus, passing between thought and extreme emotional states. Primitive people too lived unstructured lives and were prone to anger. Thus, to educate a child meant to bring him into a modern state, passing through all of human history along the way.⁴⁷⁴ The teacher had to take a chaotic classroom, which resembled the violent “crowd,” and form it into a coherent group.⁴⁷⁵ Ultimately, this form of discipline, rather than diminishing individuality, created the modern individual. Durkheim wrote that “it is in submitting to rules and devoting himself to the group that [the individual] truly becomes a man.”⁴⁷⁶ In this way, Durkheim saw the student as becoming altruistic, but he also revised the meaning of the word. He argued that egoism and altruism were the same, because the self and the social were the same. One’s identity always existed in a larger setting, defining the other. For that reason, thinking of oneself meant thinking of the other, and the reverse.⁴⁷⁷

Durkheim formed a new idea of the individual and of masculinity. Earlier, Auguste Comte had defined women as altruistic and men as egoistic. Le Bon viewed the individual as masculine and the crowd as feminine. Durkheim rejected both ideas. He viewed the modern man, not as losing himself, and his civilization, in the masses, but as gaining in civilization by becoming part of it. Durkheim’s superior person was not only naturally altruistic, but naturally unbounded.⁴⁷⁸ The collective “penetrated” him and made him what he was, both a masculine

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 148-60.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 171-3.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 141-2.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 239-49.

⁴⁷⁸ Durkheim rejected Renan’s idea that altruism was unnatural. Ibid., 253-4.

person and a human subject.⁴⁷⁹ At this point in his career, Durkheim had a theory of how the person became modern. But he still needed to understand the origins of society, and thus its basic foundation. For that, he looked to primitive society.

The Universal in the Particular: Durkheim's Search for Social Unity

Two incompatible ideas underlay the formation of modern anthropological thought; one, the Enlightenment idea of universal progress, in which all societies formed part of a single development,⁴⁸⁰ and second, the Romantic idea in which all societies had their own, particular course of development.⁴⁸¹ The former idea influenced Comte's positivism and well as the development of British social evolutionism.⁴⁸² The latter influenced Le Bon. Durkheim, while opposed to Le Bon's irrationalism, in fact followed a similar idea of particularism. He rejected Comte's universal theory and argued cultures developed in their own way, with their own, incompatible norms.⁴⁸³ He appeared, however, to contradict this stance in practice. In his 1901 article, "De Quelques formes primitives de classification," he described the formation of modern thought, with contemporary societies standing for stages in a single process. It began with Australian, then North American, Chinese, and finally modern European classification. He

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁸⁰ For this idea, see Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 52-64.

⁴⁸¹ Berlin, *Three Enemies of the Enlightenment*, 5-20.

⁴⁸² For British Social Evolutionism, see Idus J. Murphree, "The Evolutionary Anthropologists: The Progress of mankind," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 105, no. 3 (June 1961).

⁴⁸³ For his rejection of Comte's universal idea, see Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, "Note sur la notion de civilisation," *L'Année sociologique* 12 (1909-1912), 48-9.

viewed the entire process in the familiar terms of the Enlightenment, as moving toward progress and rationalization.⁴⁸⁴ Was this a contradiction with his particularistic principles? Perhaps, but it also reflected his larger vision of cultural crisis. Durkheim viewed the modern era as a time of loss. Religion and belief faded.⁴⁸⁵ “The old gods age or die, and others are not yet born.”⁴⁸⁶ In this context, as W. Paul Vogt argues, Durkheim and his followers looked to primitive society as a solution to modernity.⁴⁸⁷ Durkheim, like Spencer, identified primitive people with unity; they were “perfectly homogeneous” and simple, “as close as possible to the origins of evolution.”⁴⁸⁸ Most importantly, they were religious. According to Durkheim, religion was the key to society; it brought people together, created solidarity, and formed the basis for modern science.⁴⁸⁹

This is the key to resolving the apparent conflict in Durkheim’s theory; he viewed primitive society, not as a stage in universal development, but as a representation of a unifying structure. In 1912’s *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, he argued that modern religion’s complexity obscured its origins.⁴⁹⁰ Australian beliefs, because they were “rudimentary and coarse,”⁴⁹¹ would thus reveal what was common to Western belief, reinventing knowledge of the spiritual in the same way that “single-celled beings . . . have transformed our current idea of

⁴⁸⁴ Durkheim and Mauss, “De Quelques formes primitives de classification: Contribution à l’étude des représentations collectives,” *L’Année sociologique* (1901-2), 4-72.

⁴⁸⁵ Durkheim, “Le Sentiment religieux à l’heure actuelle,” *Archives de sociologie des religions* 27 (January-June 1969), 76-7.

⁴⁸⁶ Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: le système totémique en Australie*, 2nd. ed. (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1925), 610-11.

⁴⁸⁷ W. Paul. Vogt, “The Uses of Studying Primitives: A Note on the Durkheimians, 1890-1940,” *History and Theory* 15, no. 1 (February 1976), 41-12.

⁴⁸⁸ Durkheim, *Vie religieuse*, 133-5.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 593-625.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

life.”⁴⁹² This comparative methodology had two consequences. First, it revealed Durkheim’s ambivalence about modernity. He followed Spencer in viewing progress as the development of heterogeneity, but also valorized principles of primitive unity and belief. He saw modernity as replacing religion with science,⁴⁹³ creating a “moral coldness.”⁴⁹⁴ Like Le Bon, Durkheim blurred the lines of the modern and traditional, but where Le Bon viewed both as forms of irrationality, Durkheim viewed them as sources of unity. He argued that religion founded the idea of society and represented social phenomena in spiritual language.⁴⁹⁵ Though religion was ending, belief would not. “There is no danger that the heavens will ever definitively depopulate, because it is we who populate them.”⁴⁹⁶ He argued that the working class culture was the solution, they created a new form of solidarity, with a new collective “warmth” which would regenerate modern society.⁴⁹⁷

Durkheim’s theories repeated the dialectic of the primitive and modern which reappeared throughout the nineteenth century. Durkheim, like Comte and Le Bon, supported ideas of progress and modernization, only to turn to an idea of the traditional in order to anchor society. It led him, like them, from positivism to a new, subjective form of thought. By the early twentieth century, diverse forms of thought, from Ernst Mach’s empiricism to William James’s pragmatism, rejected the positivist idea of objectivity. They viewed scientific knowledge, not as absolute representations of reality, but as practical, artificial tools for organizing an

⁴⁹² Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹³ Durkheim, “Les Sentiments religieuse,” 613-14.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁹⁵ Durkheim, *Vie religieuse*, 597-625.

⁴⁹⁶ Durkheim, “Les Sentiments religieuse,” 75-6.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 77.

understanding of reality.⁴⁹⁸ Durkheim followed this trend, viewing society as the basis for ideas of reality; “it is the rhythm of social life which is at the base of the category of time; it is the space occupied by a society which has constituted the concept of space.”⁴⁹⁹ Durkheim viewed Western civilization as rationalizing, but it retained an irrational basis. In this way, Durkheim separated his idea of society from nature, thus challenging the positivist idea of the unity of science. I argue, however, that far from undermining positivism’s defense of traditional social order, Durkheim’s theory simply established it on a social, rather than natural basis.

Durkheim introduced his comparative methodology in 1896, in his article “La prohibition de l’incest et ses origins.” As the title suggests, he sought to understand why societies banned sex between family members, and to do so he studied the example of modern totemic religion. He found that all members of a tribe viewed themselves as related to the totemic animal.⁵⁰⁰ The totem lived in each person, representing a divine power. Bleeding could release that power, threatening the entire community.⁵⁰¹ For that reason, menstruation presented a real danger. Women, during menstruation, had to retreat from the rest of the tribe, living in seclusion.⁵⁰² They did this, not because menstrual blood was evil or impure, but because it was powerful; they imagined that it represented a divine power, and that women themselves were superior in nature.⁵⁰³ Men feared coming into contact with women’s blood, and the forces of reproduction, so they set a restriction on all women of the tribe. Because the totem only applied to the tribe,

⁴⁹⁸ For Mach, see Kolakowski, *Alienation of Reason*, 114-25. For James and pragmatism, see *Idealistic Reaction*, 162-84. For conventionalism, see Mary Jo Nye, “Gustave LeBon’s Black Light,” 166-9.

⁴⁹⁹ Durkheim, *Vie religieuse*, 628.

⁵⁰⁰ Durkheim, “La prohibition de l’incest et ses origins,” *L’Année sociologique* 1 (1896), 1-3.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 48-53.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 41-4.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 55-6.

and their totem was the only one that had meaning to them, the men had to reproduce with women of other tribes.⁵⁰⁴

In this way, the incest prohibition developed and these societies set up a system of exogamy. This had two primary consequences for modern society. First, it created the current idea of moral domesticity. In this form, the family took on a regulatory role, creating relationships and moral responsibility. It became “the spirit of all collective discipline.”⁵⁰⁵ The home and sexuality subsequently separated.⁵⁰⁶ Second, exogamy separated the female and the male. Durkheim argued that in early societies, exogamy not only set women apart during menstruation, but also created an entirely different female culture.⁵⁰⁷ This separation continued in modern society, in the creation of separate modes of attire, lifestyle, and habits.⁵⁰⁸ In this way, Durkheim seemed to break with earlier positivists, who based their ideas of society on nature. Durkheim, in contrast, highlighted the role of social construction and argued that the current gender norms acquired their meaning based on circumstance. Yet he maintained their necessity for society. In a series of book reviews on feminism and women's history from the 1900s, he argued that women would only advance through a domestic role. Feminism was valid, but “the woman should seek equality in the functions which are part of her nature.”⁵⁰⁹ He rejected the idea that the modern family was harmful for women, instead arguing that it created their status, giving them their current importance. “The sentiments of respect for [the woman], which have continued to increase throughout history have origin, in large part, in the religious respect which

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 53-4.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 59-62.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 44-6.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁰⁹ Durkheim, “Review of Anna Lampèrière, “Le rôle sociale de la femme,” *L'Année Sociologique* 3 (1896), 391.

the home inspires.”⁵¹⁰ Progress would only come through the maintenance of tradition, and women's current roles had to remain the same.

As the preceding demonstrates, Durkheim’s break with Comte’s positivism was not absolute. He rejected social evolutionism and naturalistic arguments, but maintained many of their assumptions. He still ranked societies on a continuity of development. He still viewed social norms as natural, even if he no longer used the idea of nature. In a larger sense, the beginning of the twentieth century saw similarly ambivalent shifts; not a rejection of positivism, but instead a gradual transition to new ideas. American anthropologist Franz Boas is representative of this trend. In his 1911 study, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, he rejected the dominant theories of the nineteenth century: racial science and social evolutionism. He argued that cranial studies were false and that no link had been demonstrated between the mind and the skull, or between race and one’s level of civilization. Instead, he argued that the social and the racial each had a part to play and that one could not separate them. The mind did develop, becoming more rational over time, but it happened through social development. The mind itself, as a physical phenomenon, remained essentially the same.⁵¹¹ In addition, he argued that this development was not universal, as British anthropologists had argued. Instead, each development was based on a particular setting.⁵¹² Boas thus followed many of the same ideas as Durkheim, rejecting naturalism in favor of a social idea of difference. Like Durkheim, he also retained some nineteenth century

⁵¹⁰ Durkheim, “Review of Marianne Weber, *Ehefrau und Mutter in der Rechtsentwicklung*,” *L’Année Sociologique* 11 (1906-1909), 368.

⁵¹¹ Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 16-29, 95-123.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 174-96.

assumptions. He still wrote of a primitive and a civilized mind.⁵¹³ He even repeated Le Bon's assertion that Europeans had a greater number of larger skulls.⁵¹⁴

Boas's ideas were still too radical for Durkheim. Boas viewed the mind as universal, with modern people following the same psychic impulses. Durkheim agreed that racial inequality was false and that it was the setting that mattered, but he rejected the idea that "between the mentality of the primitive and the civilized, there is no essential difference but one of degrees."⁵¹⁵

Durkheim still viewed people as unequal, even if he used the idea of society instead of nature.⁵¹⁶

This disagreement represents changing ideas of human nature. In the eighteenth century, intellectuals had seen the person as universal, with the same qualities. In the nineteenth, they viewed the mind as unequal, changing in nature as civilization progressed. Boas represented a new idea, which was in fact a return to the early modern theory. It reached a new form in Claude Levi-Strauss's 1962 book, *The Savage Mind*, which argued that all forms of thought, whether primitive magic or modern science, were based on a similar desire for knowledge.⁵¹⁷ Durkheim's own work contributed to this idea of the mind. He viewed all form of thought, from religion to science, as forms of representation. But he was not ready to accept the idea of equality. He still thought in the positivist paradigm.

Durkheim's views of the mind illustrate that the difference between the universal and particular concepts of humanity was never absolute. Scholars have identified the early twentieth century as a period in which racial views grew more extreme. The idea of colonial assimilation,

⁵¹³ Ibid., 197-29.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 118-23.

⁵¹⁵ Durkheim, "Review of Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*," *L'Année sociologique* 12 (1909-1912), 31.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁵¹⁷ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (1966; repr., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 1-22.

in which colonized populations could become French, turned to the idea of association, in which there was indelible inequalities between people.⁵¹⁸ Durkheim played a part in this development. In his 1902 article on colonial policy, he rejected the false ideals of the civilizing mission, which he compared to a form of “religious proselytism”⁵¹⁹ It sought to spread French culture abroad, but this was impossible. He argued that each society had its own course of development, and “one cannot interrupt a race’s evolution without causing a profound trouble.”⁵²⁰ Instead, the French should adopt a more rational approach, exporting science and knowledge, the qualities which “impose European superiority and which legitimate our actions.”⁵²¹ This was part of the development of association theory in French colonialism, which saw cultural difference as fixed and unchangeable.⁵²²

Yet Durkheim was unwilling to follow it to its end. In 1910, anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl used Durkheim’s social methodology to create a theory of mental difference between peoples. He rejected Comte’s vision of progress, which posited a universal development, as well as the racial idea, which viewed individual nature as determining intelligence. Instead, following Durkheim, Levy-Bruhl argued that the collective mind had to be understood as a separate existence. It was the collective, and not the single person, which formed a peoples’ mentality. Thus, because the social developed and changed over time, the mind had to as well.⁵²³ The result was that there were two fundamentally different ways of thinking; the primitive, irrational, and

⁵¹⁸ Adas, *Machines*, 318-21; Betts, *Assimilation and Association*, 59-89.

⁵¹⁹ This article was published anonymously. “L’Effort coloniale,” 425-6. Gwendolyn Wright attributes it to Durkheim. Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 74.

⁵²⁰ Durkheim, “L’Effort,” 431.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 433-4.

⁵²² Betts, *Assimilation and Association*, 59-68, 253-5.

⁵²³ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1910), 1-21.

modern rational minds.⁵²⁴ Durkheim distanced himself from this view. He argued that, while thought did progress into different forms, these forms were closely related; religious thought created concepts which developed into modern science. He continued the positivist idea of human nature as progressive, and thus unequal, rather than Le Bon's idea of total cultural incompatibility.⁵²⁵ The subtlety of his argument reveals the complex nature of the debate on difference. It was not a matter of race versus social influence, or equality versus hierarchy, but about the nuances of social theory. Nevertheless, all of these theories set up a hierarchy of mentalities, contrasting a developed against an undeveloped humanity.

Four decades later, after the end of World War II, a group of prominent scientists worked together to discredit the ideas of race which had caused the war. In their statement for UNESCO on "The Race Question," they cast race as a fallacious belief. They argued that it was prejudice and irrationality, which could be ended through science and fact. Using their expertise, they argued that the physical and mental were two separate phenomena, and that culture, rather than biology, defined human difference.⁵²⁶ Of course, racism continued beyond the war. The new right under Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National adopted Le Bon's form of cultural race, which saw each society as a distinct, coherent whole which must remain apart. Le Pen argued that people are equal, but essentially different. He argued that attempting to integrate them would be harmful. It would threaten the nation as well as the foreign culture.⁵²⁷ Did this represent a new

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 447-55.

⁵²⁵ Durkheim, "Review of Lévy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*," *L'Année sociologique* 12 (1909-1912), 35-7.

⁵²⁶ UNESCO, *The Race Question*, no. 791 (Paris: 1950), 1-9.

⁵²⁷ For Le Pen and postwar racism, see Neil McMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 169-91. Tzvetan Todorov views Le Bon and others as originating this cultural idea of race. Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter

stage in the history of racism? Perhaps, but as this thesis has indicated, the idea of racial, cultural, and social difference interacted throughout the modern era. Theories of race and a universal humanity grew from the Enlightenment, coming together to form positivism's idea of human development. By the mid-nineteenth century, this idea split into two; one, a largely cultural anthropology, and the other a physical form which focused on racial inequality. Late nineteenth century scientists rejected physical studies, creating a social concept of difference, while a form of cultural racism formed. At the end of the Belle Époque, Durkheim's work represented the culmination of these ideas. It was a theory based on the social and cultural, but recreated racial difference and sexual difference in a subtle, social form. These developments support Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall's argument that French racism was based on a hierarchy of identity, and that "French assessments of the foreign are gauged according to a universal of perfection that is Frenchness."⁵²⁸ The key point in all of the positivists' work was defining belonging, identity, and solidarity; not drawing simple lines between races. It also supports Michael Adas's argument that race should be seen as only one way in which the West has viewed other societies.⁵²⁹

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 153-7.

⁵²⁸ Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, "Introduction: Race, France, Histories," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, eds. Peabody and Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

⁵²⁹ Adas, *Machines*, 12.

CONCLUSION

“FORGING A NEW FRANCE”: THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE END OF POSITIVISM

By the end of the Belle Époque, Gustave Le Bon appears to have fully renounced any traces of belief in the Enlightenment and its positivist legacy. He argued that the modern belief in science, rationality, and the intellect was false. Science was a “false god.”⁵³⁰ It “creates more mysteries than it resolves.”⁵³¹ He argued that it was the “creators of belief [who] drive history.”⁵³² “Nothing resists a strong and continued will; neither nature, nor men, nor even fatalism itself.”⁵³³ Despite his strident anti-rationalism, he continued his positivist belief in creating an intellectual synthesis to stabilize modern society. He argued that “reason,” while limited, played a role in “creat[ing] progress.”⁵³⁴ Belief was necessary, but as his earlier career demonstrated, he viewed society as losing its religious unity. How would France attain a new cohesion? Not through social reform or political change. He believed that “the only durable revolutions are those of thought.”⁵³⁵ With this, he reiterated a central problem of the modern world; to create a new society, one had to create a new man. As usual, Le Bon’s solution was war. With the advent of World War I, Le Bon found the source of the true revolution, replacing the false revolution of 1789.

⁵³⁰ Le Bon, *Aphorismes*, 246.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 252.

The “Battle of Wills”: Civilization vs. Barbarity in the Great War

Le Bon’s ideas represented an entire stream of thought at the beginning of the twentieth century. Numerous intellectuals and artists, from the left and the right, in France and throughout Europe, rejected their bourgeois culture’s scientism, individualism, and capitalism, in favor of irrationalism and intuitive thought.⁵³⁶ They saw the old society, based on community and unity, as fading, and a new, inhuman social order as replacing it.⁵³⁷ The solution was war. When the July Crisis came, commentators saw it as a way to break the corrupt order and create a new one.⁵³⁸ Their anti-rationalist thought both rejected and continued nineteenth century ideas. It rejected scientism in favor of subjective thought,⁵³⁹ but it continued positivism’s ideal of reconciling change and tradition. This new generation wanted to maintain modern, individualist society, while recreating forms of solidarity. The answer, Roland Stromberg argues, was the idea of the nation.⁵⁴⁰

The beginning of the war seemed to support their vision of unity. The left and right came together in the Sacred Union, temporarily healing the rifts of the late nineteenth century.⁵⁴¹ Intellectuals on the left and the right, despite their differing views on education and secularism,

⁵³⁶ For their rejection of rationalism, see Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), 1-10. For their adoption of irrationalism, see *ibid.*, 61-83.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61-73.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1-7.

found common ground in denouncing German culture as innately imperialist and aggressive.⁵⁴² As Martha Hanna argues, Le Bon agreed that the Germans were responsible, but argued that it was irrational psychological forces, rather than philosophy, which influenced German actions.⁵⁴³ Indeed, Le Bon saw much in the war to support his old theories. It discredited the illusion of civilization, showing the primitive nature of the Western nations.⁵⁴⁴ “The modern world believes itself free from the influence of mystical forces, but humanity has never been more subject to them.”⁵⁴⁵ This irrationality could be positive. Le Bon argued that it created a people’s strength, guiding their armies. “Against mystical forces, cannons are powerless.”⁵⁴⁶ Yet it was also costly. He viewed racial hatred as driving the German people into a pointless war.⁵⁴⁷ I argue that these two ideas, of solidarity and destruction, represented two visions of the modern world. He identified the first with Germany, and the second with France.

Le Bon viewed the Germans as an amoral nation. He argued that they lacked all sense of civility and liberty and instead followed ideals of power, conquest, and superiority.⁵⁴⁸ They represented the primitive side of human nature. Le Bon argued that in the war the Germans had reverted to an irrational state,⁵⁴⁹ following innate racial aggression.⁵⁵⁰ They also represented a

⁵⁴² Ibid., 78-105. For the debates on education, see *ibid.*, 26-49.

⁵⁴³ Hanna, “Introduction to the Transaction Edition: Waging a Two-Front War,” in Le Bon, *The Psychology of the Great War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), vii-xix.

⁵⁴⁴ Le Bon, *Premières conséquences de la guerre: transformation mentale des peuples* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1917), 1-2.

⁵⁴⁵ Le Bon, *Enseignements psychologiques de la guerre européenne* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1915), 21.

⁵⁴⁶ Le Bon, *Hier et demain: Pensées brèves* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1918), 16.

⁵⁴⁷ He argued that they had no chance of success in the war. Le Bon, *Premières conséquences*, 26-8.

⁵⁴⁸ Le Bon, *Enseignements*, 29-53.

⁵⁴⁹ Le Bon, *Hier et demain*, 10-11.

⁵⁵⁰ Le Bon, *Premières conséquences*, 156-62. For his statement about their racial psychology, see Le Bon, *Hier et demain*, 10-11.

modern form of dehumanization, in which the all-powerful state suppresses individualism.⁵⁵¹ In this way, Le Bon identified German mentality with the crisis of modern society, in which humanity was both savage and civilized at once. He argued that the Germans had created industrial progress and achieved economic power, but retained their primitive mentality.⁵⁵² That was because, for Le Bon, progress was unequal; a people could advance while remaining uncivilized.⁵⁵³ “However intelligent a barbarian becomes, he still retains his barbaric mentality.”⁵⁵⁴ In this way, Le Bon preserved a form of French greatness at a time of crisis. The Germans may have had material power, but the French had moral power. The latter was more important, because “war is above all a battle of wills.”⁵⁵⁵ The German mentality was weak, becoming unstable during the war, while other peoples maintained more fixity.⁵⁵⁶ The French attained a greater level of solidarity and strength.⁵⁵⁷ The difference was that he viewed the Germans as an unnatural people, based on an aggregate of races.⁵⁵⁸ In contrast, he viewed the French as French as a true unity, a “historical race” with a long past.⁵⁵⁹

Le Bon viewed the war as ending the Belle Époque decadence.⁵⁶⁰ It formed a new unity, integrating the French man into a national whole while instilling values of courage and morality.⁵⁶¹ It thus recreated the French man into a social being, fulfilling the dream of both the

⁵⁵¹ Le Bon, *Enseignement*, 40-6.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 50-3.

⁵⁵³ “The material development of a civilization is without parallel to its moral evolution.” Le Bon, *Hier et demain*, 8.

⁵⁵⁴ Le Bon, *Premières conséquences*, 2.

⁵⁵⁵ Le Bon, *Hier et demain*, 42.

⁵⁵⁶ Le Bon, *Enseignements*, 22-5.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵⁵⁸ Le Bon viewed the German state as forcing other peoples into a false unity. *Ibid.*, 29-30.

⁵⁵⁹ For an earlier discussion of this kind of race and the formation of the French people, see Le Bon, *Lois psychologiques*, 14-20. For the quote, see *ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁶⁰ Le Bon, *Premières conséquences*, 48-9.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 63-76.

Enlightenment and positivism. The war also reconciled equality with stability. Le Bon argued that the war had formed true equality between people and had discredited the old hierarchies of class and education.⁵⁶² It had discredited gender hierarchy. Women had taken over most of society, thus earning them a new status. After the war, “it will become difficult to keep them under supervision.”⁵⁶³ Le Bon, once a staunch defender of hierarchy, thus used his Social Darwinist rhetoric to support equality; conflict, rather than creating hierarchy, formed an egalitarian unity. Was this a contradiction? On the contrary, Le Bon’s rejected revolutionary ideology because it sought to change nature, creating a new society based on abstract thought. He nevertheless believed in the possibility of a true, intellectual revolution, and he viewed the Great War as achieving this ideal.⁵⁶⁴

Like Comte, Durkheim viewed 1789 as a false revolution, precursor to the true event which would reshape the nation and the individual. Le Bon's rhetoric echoed the utopianism of the past. He heralded the arrival of “new beings which France threatens to create, beings created by a revitalization of the ancestral souls which sometimes sleep but never die.” The newly revived French population was “forging a new France.”⁵⁶⁵ Yet Le Bon viewed these progressive forces as problematic. He viewed the war as creating solidarity, but at the expense of the individual.⁵⁶⁶ He argued that the challenge for the new era was to reconcile militarism and the need for defense with morality and law.⁵⁶⁷ Nevertheless, he viewed the war's impact as positive.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 63-112.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 117-18.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 110-12.

⁵⁶⁵ Le Bon, *Enseignments*, 8.

⁵⁶⁶ Le Bon, *Premières conséquences*, 320-1.

⁵⁶⁷ Le Bon, *Hier et demain*, 212-15; Le Bon, *Premières conséquences*, 8-10.

As late as 1917, he maintained the dream that the growing destructive power of modern weapons, as well as the interdependence of modern nations, would lead people to reject war.⁵⁶⁸

Durkheim was similarly optimistic, but his views were more within the mainstream of French intellectual reactions. In 1915, he wrote the essay *Qui a voulu la guerre?*, in which he argued that the Germans bore sole responsibility for the war and that the other nations were innocent.⁵⁶⁹ The following year, he wrote *L'Allemagne au-dessus-de tout*, a criticism of the German mentality. He argued that their entire culture was corrupt, based on ideas of domination, superiority, and authority.⁵⁷⁰ They rejected morality and viewed the nation and its power as absolute ideals.⁵⁷¹ Durkheim remained optimistic. He wrote that the Central Powers would fail. They would weaken, while the Allies would maintain their strength.⁵⁷² Indeed, he argued war gave him a new confidence in the French population. He argued that where the French had once appeared weak and demoralized, the war revealed an underlying moral strength and unity. They came together as a nation and cooperated in the war effort.⁵⁷³ This seemed to fulfill Durkheim's prewar hopes for the development of a new, secular belief that would unify and revive the French people. He predicted in 1916 that “one of the results of this war, without parallel in history, will be to revive the sense of community (aviver le sens social), to render it more active and make the

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 302-8, 321-3. He also argued that German atrocities may create moral progress, causing greater condemnation of violence. Le Bon, *Hier et demain*, 203-5.

⁵⁶⁹ Durkheim, *Qui a voulu la guerre? Les Origines de la guerre d'après les documents diplomatiques* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1915), 54-63.

⁵⁷⁰ Durkheim, “*Allemagne au-dessus de tout*”: *La Mentalité Allemagne et la guerre* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1916), 7-30.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 18-40.

⁵⁷² Durkheim, “Introduction,” in *Lettres a tous les français: “Patience, effort et confiance”* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1916), 15-18.

⁵⁷³ Durkheim, “The School of Tomorrow,” in *French Educational Ideas of Today*, ed. Ferdinand Buisson (Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY: World Book Company, 1919), 188-9.

citizens more accustomed to combine their efforts and subordinate their interests to those of society.”⁵⁷⁴ Durkheim thus echoed the wartime fervor, which viewed the war as a means to create a new, more vital society. Like the Idealists, he viewed the war as positive, but he continued his positivist belief in the power of secular education. Unlike Le Bon, Durkheim argued that France's education system had created its current moral strength. To maintain that progress, he argued for instituting greater “discipline” and respect for authority.⁵⁷⁵

The Problem of Human Nature: Le Bon after the War

Durkheim did not live to see the end of the war. His son André died in combat in 1916 and Durkheim subsequently fell into a depression. He died the following year.⁵⁷⁶ The form of optimism which he represented ended. For many intellectuals and commentators, the war discredited the nineteenth century idea of progress. It demonstrated that science and technology, rather than creating peace or civilization, led to greater destruction. The war separated the idea of moral progress. Where earlier thought had viewed advances in knowledge as perfecting human nature, they came to have the opposite effect: destroying civilization altogether.⁵⁷⁷ This was an innovation in postwar thought; war came to represent the idea of total destruction,

⁵⁷⁴ Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 554.

⁵⁷⁵ Durkheim, “The School of Tomorrow,” 189-92.

⁵⁷⁶ Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 554-9.

⁵⁷⁷ Adas, *Machines*, 365-81.

capable of wiping out the human race.⁵⁷⁸ Le Bon was at the forefront of this pessimism. In the early 1920s, his brief support for ideas of progress ended and he once again viewed French society as being in a state of dissolution. He argued that the Western societies were losing their unifying ideals and that a “revolutionary spirit” prevailed.⁵⁷⁹ People rejected authority and sought power.⁵⁸⁰ This was part of a longer progression. Over time, people had passed through several ideals: religion, monarchy, Enlightenment, and finally socialism. This final belief was untenable; it contradicted the true development of civilization, which was toward greater inequality.⁵⁸¹ It threatened to block the rebuilding effort.⁵⁸² Furthermore, it was growing more radical; even the socialist leaders were losing control of the movement.⁵⁸³

For Le Bon, there was one solution: strong authority. He viewed the military as capable of creating greater discipline.⁵⁸⁴ He lauded the fascists in Italy for halting the advance of socialism.⁵⁸⁵ Yet militarism remained problematic. Le Bon argued that progress should lead the nations of the world to cooperate, but their irrational hatred drove them to combat.⁵⁸⁶ The war did not end in 1918. He argued that the military war was just the first phase in the current conflict, which would be followed by an “economic” war, and finally a “racial struggle.”⁵⁸⁷ He argued that in the final stage, the races of the East, from China, India, and Japan, would overrun

⁵⁷⁸ Clarke, *Prophesying War*, 162-6.

⁵⁷⁹ For the destruction of intellectual unity, see Le Bon, *Les Incertitudes de l'heure présente*, in *Lois psychologiques*, 281-2. For the “revolutionary spirit,” see Le Bon, *The World Unbalanced* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), 72.

⁵⁸⁰ Le Bon, *Psychologie des temps nouveaux* (Paris: E. Flamarrion, 1920), 10-11.

⁵⁸¹ Le Bon, *World Unbalanced*, 15-18.

⁵⁸² Le Bon, *Temps nouveaux*, 184-5.

⁵⁸³ Le Bon, *World Unbalanced*, 69-73.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 218-24.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 178-84.

⁵⁸⁶ Le Bon, *Incertaines*, 1-11.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

the world, resulting in a conflict between East and West which “could only be compared to those formidable struggles for existence which, during geological ages, brought about the destruction and transformation of species.”⁵⁸⁸ This idiosyncratic vision of the war reflects Le Bon's idea of the conflict between rationality and irrationality. He viewed human nature itself, with its tendency toward destruction, as the problem of the modern age. Could moral progress ever match material progress? For the philosophers of the eighteenth century, and even for Comte, the answer was yes. Le Bon agreed that for war to end, “science must first of all find a means to completely transform the nature of man.”⁵⁸⁹ In the postwar context, such a dream appeared absurd.

Did Le Bon retain a belief in the Enlightenment idea of scientific utopia? In the 1930s, the possibility seemed unlikely. Writers increasingly predicted a new, more destructive war which threatened to wipe out humanity.⁵⁹⁰ Le Bon shared this thought in his final work, 1931's *Bases scientifiques d'une philosophie de l'histoire*. He argued that peace was unlikely and that war would become worse. If the nations of Germany, Italy and Russia formed a union, the ensuing conflict would spell “the end of Western civilization.”⁵⁹¹ There was hope; he argued that someone needed to build a weapon so destructive that it would make war unthinkable.⁵⁹² More optimistically, he hoped that humanity would overcome its current failings. He argued that, although society was divided between scientific rationality and the irrationality of the human

⁵⁸⁸ Le Bon, *World Unbalanced*, 237-43.

⁵⁸⁹ Le Bon, *Incertitudes*, 305.

⁵⁹⁰ Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 169-77.

⁵⁹¹ Le Bon, *Bases scientifiques d'une philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1931), 248-50.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 283-5.

mind, the latter would become rationalized in the future.⁵⁹³ Humanity could become totally moralized, becoming “as different from current humanity as the latter differs from the rudimentary beings of prehistory.”⁵⁹⁴ By this time, advances in physics had discredited the positivist idea of universal scientific laws.⁵⁹⁵ Le Bon himself had rejected positivism's central ideas. Yet at the end of his life, he retained the nineteenth century belief in the moralizing role of science.

The Legacy of the Nineteenth Century

This thesis has discussed the development of an idea of modernity, based on science, rationality, and progress, through the philosophy of positivism. From one perspective, visions of the modern world appear to have become more pessimistic over time, corresponding to a series of political crises. Eighteenth-century intellectuals viewed progress as unproblematic. Rationalization could create a superior society. Later, after the Revolution, Comte viewed progress as creating unity, but also threatening to unravel that same solidarity. This idea of self-destructive modernity became prominent in the fin-de-siècle. Finally, the First World War separated the ideas of science and morality altogether. Science, rather than forming a superior society, threatened to destroy it. This narrative is correct in broad terms, but it ignored the

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 38-46.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 285-8.

⁵⁹⁵ Michael Biddiss discusses these changes in thought. Michael D. Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses: Ideas and Society in Europe since 1870* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 62-75.

underlying tensions that existed throughout. The eighteenth century created not just Enlightenment, but Romanticism. Throughout the nineteenth century, positivism struggled with reconciling the two sets of ideals, science and tradition, rationality and morality. The World War indeed created a new era, but one which took on its meaning because of the positivist ideas of the previous era. The Belle Èpoque rejection of positivism and rationality shaped the post-war idea of modernity. I argue that positivists and their opponents must be viewed as part of the same history. This study has demonstrated that they were sometimes the same individuals.

The debates of the nineteenth century continued to echo well beyond the end of the war. After Le Bon's death in the nineteenth century, the new extreme right adopted a similar idea of the nation as an organic, racialized unity; they rejected foreign elements, immigrants, and Jews, and sought to recreate the French man and halt the decadence of the Third Republic era.⁵⁹⁶ They received their chance after the fall of the government in 1940. In several ways, the Vichy Regime represented the pinnacle of Le Bon's vision of France; it rejected liberalism and universalism and adopted ideals of community and nation.⁵⁹⁷ It supported a traditional rural vision of France⁵⁹⁸ and sought to free the nation of undesirable elements.⁵⁹⁹ The reality was more complex; Vichy

⁵⁹⁶ J.G. Shields discusses Le Bon's influence on the interwar idea of the nation. J.G. Shields: *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2007), 24-5. For concerns over foreign influence and cultural pathology, see Surkis, "Enemies Within: Venereal Disease and the defense of French masculinity between the Wars," In *French Masculinities*, 144-7; Sandrine Sanos, *The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 15-42. Debbie Lackerstein discusses ideals of regenerating the French man. Debbie Lackerstein, *National Regeneration in Vichy France: Ideas and Policies, 1930-1944* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), 163-5.

⁵⁹⁷ Shields, *Extreme Right*, 16-18.

⁵⁹⁸ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. (Repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 200-9.

⁵⁹⁹ For Vichy's naturalization policies, see Patrick Weil, *How to be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 87-124.

incorporated numerous ideologies, including both traditionalists and modernizers, including statist concepts which ran counter to Le Bon's form of individualism.⁶⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Vichy continued the ideals of regeneration the society and the nation. These ideas were, once again, gendered; Vichy sought to recreate a traditional woman, representing maternity and domesticity. As Miranda Pollard and Francine Muel-Dreyfus have demonstrated, Vichy saw gender order as the basis for social order. By returning the sexes to their rightful places, it would recreate an idealized vision of hierarchy.⁶⁰¹ Most relevant was Vichy's rejection of intellectualism. Marshall Pétain rejected the Third Republic's "purely bookish pseudo-culture"⁶⁰² and wanted a Catholic, moral education which would build character.⁶⁰³ He argued that "there was a profound illusion at the basis of [the Third Republic's] educational system: it was to believe that it suffices to instruct minds in order to form hearts and to temper characters."⁶⁰⁴ The debate on enlightenment continued. Pétain's views were anti-intellectual, but they echoed the earlier concerns over the relationship between morality and progress.

After the end of the war, gender continued to represent ideas of both tradition and modernity. Mary Louise Roberts discusses how the figure of the French prostitute in liberated

⁶⁰⁰ Robert Paxton discusses the diversity of Vichy's thought. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 136-45. Philip Nord discusses statism in Vichy. Philip Nord, *France's New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 90-115.

⁶⁰¹ Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 33-6; Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender*, trans. Kathleen A. Johnson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 1-11.

⁶⁰² Quoted in Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 210.

⁶⁰³ For the role of Catholicism, see Paxton, *Vichy France*, 146-65. For the general vision of moral education, see Lackerstein, *National Regeneration*, 177-85.

⁶⁰⁴ Quoted in Muel-Dreyfus, *Eternal Feminine*, 220.

France stood for the failure of the nation and its decline from Great Power status.⁶⁰⁵ In the subsequent decades, experts created a new, modern ideal of the home, as a way to recover from the war.⁶⁰⁶ They still viewed women as irrational,⁶⁰⁷ but saw women's role as consumers as vital to economic development.⁶⁰⁸ At the same time, women and domesticity continued to signify tradition in the midst of change; they were timeless and apolitical.⁶⁰⁹ Kristin Ross discusses how 1960s culture used women to symbolize anxieties about the state of the nation.⁶¹⁰ "If the woman is clean, the family is clean, the nation is clean. If the French woman is dirty, then France is dirty and backward."⁶¹¹ This domestic ideal declined in subsequent years, in the face of social, cultural, and intellectual change.⁶¹² Yet gender never lost its ability to signify. Camille Robcis discusses how during the debates over a civil union law in the 1990s, opponents argued for sexual difference as the basis of socialization. It founded society and created the individual as a social actor.⁶¹³ This demonstrates how one key idea, gender difference as the basis of society, has continued in a familiar form.

⁶⁰⁵ Roberts, *What Soldiers do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 13-32.

⁶⁰⁶ For the rationalization and modernization of domesticity, see Ross, *Fast Cars*, 89-105; Claire Duchén, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France, 1944-1968* (London: Routledge, 1994), 67-73. For plans to modernize the economy, see Rebecca J. Pulju, *Women and Mass Consumer Society in Postwar France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-26.

⁶⁰⁷ For this concerns, see Nicole Rudolph, "Who Should be the Architect of a Dwelling?: Architects Versus Housewives in 1950s France," *Gender and History* 21, no. 3 (2009), 545-554; Pulju, *Women and Mass Consumer Society*, 1-3.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-15.

⁶⁰⁹ Duchén, *Women's Rights*, 64-6.

⁶¹⁰ Ross, *Fast Cars*, 71-7.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

⁶¹² Camille Robcis discusses the decline of familial ideology in the 1960s and 1970s. Robcis, *The Law of Kinship*, 143-65. Claire Duchén discusses the decline of the mother's idealized image. Duchén, *Women's Rights*, 92-5.

⁶¹³ Robcis, *The Law of Kinship*, 1-8.

Another set of ideas, the universalist and particularistic concepts of cultural identity, remained in conflict. In the 1970s, the new right under Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front Nationale rejected the old form of biological racism in favor of a cultural idea of cultural difference. This group echoed Le Bon in arguing that all people were equal, but that they had a fixed cultural identity and had to remain separate.⁶¹⁴ In contrast, the left adopted an extreme universalism which ignored difference altogether. Numerous scholars have noted the problems with this latter idea. By ignoring difference, universalism has failed to recognize real social problems excluded women, immigrant groups, and those who do not conform to the supposedly abstract identity.⁶¹⁵ Finally, the nineteenth century idea of universal progress remained active. In 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy blamed African underdevelopment on the Africans' ahistorical mentality. He argued that “the African man has not sufficiently entered history.” Because the African failed to follow European progress, he remained in an anachronistic state.⁶¹⁶ This conclusion argues that understanding the debates on positivism from the nineteenth century help to illuminate how these ideas, of universalism, progress, cultural identity, and gender difference, may have influenced recent history.

⁶¹⁴ For their ideas, see Pierre-André Taguieff, “L'Identité nationale saisie par les logiques de racisation. Aspects, figures et problèmes du racisme différentialiste,” *Mots* 12, no. 12 (1986), 91-128.

⁶¹⁵ Scott, *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11-32. For other critics of universalism, see Naomi Schor, “The Crisis of French Universalism,” *Yale French Studies* 100 (2001); Peter J. Bloom, Didier Gondola, and Peter J. Bloom, eds., *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992), 95-123.

⁶¹⁶ Gary Wilder, “Eurafrrique as the Future of “Black France”: Sarkozy's temporal Confusion and Senghor's Postwar Vision,” in Trica Danielle Keaton, Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Stovall, eds., *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 58-61.

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