

Comtes three stages law research paper examples

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When the sociological theory is mentioned, many people tend to think of the likes of Marx, Weber, Durkheim and others who are famed for having come up with these theories. However, what the people fail to appreciate is that there were other philosophers who equally contributed to the body of knowledge in this area. One of them is Auguste Comte. According to Besant 5), Comte was one of the philosophers who shaped the modern understanding of philosophy. He also has quiet a lot to do with the modern understanding of science, religions and positivism (Wernick 22). However, not much is known about this philosopher, even though he made a major contribution to the modern understanding of various issues. This essay aims at looking at Auguste Conte, focusing on his works and contributions to the modern day body of knowledge in philosophy. The essay will start off by giving a brief biography of Comte. It will then go on to look at his theory of three laws. This will be done by looking at the three stages and what they present. It will then seek to identify the reasons behind which, or circumstances surrounding which he came up with the three stages. Lastly, the essay will conclude by giving a reflection on the Comte's three stages law and its implications in the modern day understanding of science, religion and philosophy. The main objective is to explain who Auguste Comte was and his contribution to the philosophical approach. This will be done with the aid of literature review available on Comte as well as his biographical records.

In a book titled " Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography, Volume 1", Pickering gives a detailed biography of Comte, which is supported by other materials available on his life and works. This account has it that he was

born back on January the 19th, 1798. His name at birth was Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte, in Montpellier, Herault area of the south France.

His life story took such a direction that it was oriented to the understanding of religion and sociology. Pickering (3) observes that from the very beginning, it was highly likely that Comte distrusted the “morally neutral, positivist or scientist thinking that is now associated with his name.” This is an indication that his life took a turn that many might not have expected, given the kind of person he was. It is apparent that there was no one who could have imagined that he would have come to be associated with the philosophical argument known to many as the positivism (Comte and Lenzer 5). However, these characteristics and orientation to the philosophical and positive thinking developed as his life progressed.

In his education life, he attended the Lycee Joffre and then joined the University of Montpellier. It was after his university education that he joined the Ecole Polytechnic. However, it is worth noting that it was during this time that the French had a feudal system where the noble controlled every resource in the country. As such, any institution that seemed not to be in favor of the nobles was scrapped off or simply brought down. This is the fate that befell Ecole which was shut down due to its adherence to the French ideas of progress and republicanism (Pickering 8). After the closure of Ecole, Comte went to the Montpellier institution where he sought to continue with his studies in the medical field. Though the Ecole reopened later, Comte did not apply for readmission into the same institution.

However, his ideologies began to be seen after he returned to Montpellier. It was while at this place when he discovered that his ideologies and way of thinking were very different from the way of thinking of the Catholics and the monarchical families that resided in the area. As such, he made a decision to move to Paris. His aim was to do some jobs, get money and continue with his life. It was while at Paris that he met Comte de Saint Simon who introduced Comte to the community of intellectuals. This is where Comte found his passion and dwelt in the intellectual world, questioning issues and seeking to explain what the people did not understand. His philosophical mind started forming at this stage.

Comet started writing and had various publications. However, his publications were under the name of Simon. This sharpened because Comte did not have the financial resources required to go through with the publication process. However, Picker (24) observes that Comte could not work with Simon for long since they had differences that could not be bridged. For this reason, they parted ways and Comte tried to make the ends meet by himself. By this time, his ideas about the society and its formulations had started forming. In 1822, he published the Plan for Scientific studies necessary for the reorganization of society. This already indicates that he had a passion and a mind for the society. It is no wonder that he fell out with many of the people whose ideologies did not seem to be of any benefit to the society. Comte could not continue much with his academic work since he had no steady source of income. Instead, he heavily depended on the support from friends, sponsors and donors. Of course, this could not help much.

Picker (315) observes that Comte had problems in “ trying to establish himself.” However, things just did not seem to work out well for him. He tried a hand in marriage life where he got into marriage with Caroline Massin. However, their marriage could not last long and it eventually broke in 1842. Before the end of their marriage, Comte got a mental condition which saw him taken for medical assistance but with no avail. During this time, it can be said that his life was slowly falling apart. After the medical attention failed to cure him of his condition, he was taken up by Jean Etienne who was a French alienist. Jean’s plan was to try and get Comte to work on his plan. However, life seemed to be so desperate for Comte at the time that he attempted suicide back in 1827. Once again, he developed a kind of close relationship with Clotilde de Vaux and also had a close friendship with John Stuart Mill. After the death of Clotilde in 1846, Comte continued working with Stuart Mill. During this time, Comte shifted his adoration to the religious matters. It was also at this time that he developed an admiration for Mill who helped him to come up with the Religion of Humanity. Comte’s sunset came on September 5th, 1857 in Paris where he died from stomach cancer.

Though his life had quiet a lot of ups and downs and he was equally put down by the lack of resources, Comte did quiet a great job with his publications. Between 1827 when he attempted suicide and 1842 when he got divorced, Comte wrote six of his publications. His other works included the publication of the four volumes of *Systeme de Politique positive* back in 1851 to 1854. He also wrote *The Subjective Synthesis* which was published in 1856 (Comte xiii). The ideas given in his books and publications have a lot to do with the positivism, just as seen in the four volumes that he wrote. In a

way, it can be argued that the political era in which he lived might have played a major role in shaping his writing as he wrote in criticism of the system back then. His was a message of hope, an indication that one way or another the society would have changed and accepted the fact that there was the need for a better society. More so, this was aimed at the political arena which is where most of the policies tend to be made and is also where the leaders are got. All his life, he tried to keep away from individuals who worked to their own advantage at the expense of the people. This should also explain why he fell out with so many people.

In his book titled " Introduction to Positive Philosophy", Comte (35) looked at the " classification of the positive sciences." This forms the basis of his " Law of Three Stages." These three stages are as follows; there is the religion, metaphysics and science. As Stableford (158) observes, these have a purposely universal scheme of cultural evolution in which magical beliefs- interpreted as practical pseudoscience based in mistaken laws - were replaced by religious systems that progressed from primitive fertility cults to monotheism before giving way to science." In a way, it can be said that Stableford (158) was somehow critical to the laws as suggested by Comte. However, it cannot be denied that Comte's way of thinking was quite impressive given the time in which they were derived. As Gane (65) observes, Comte captured almost all aspects of human life in his law. The first step in the laws is the religion or what is termed as the theological stage (Wernick 22). According to Comte, this is the stage at which an individual seeks the explanations of the presence of deities. People at this stage tend to believe in the existence of divine and supernatural beings. This

supernatural is responsible for different phenomena as well as the happenings in the world. These happenings are thought to come about due to the power of the deity. In this case, Wernick (32) describes that Comte had three subdivisions of the theological stage. The first one is that fetishism. According to Comte, this was a period during which people were at the primary stage of thinking and were quite primitive in their thinking. They believed that inanimate objects had a spirit, and, therefore, they worshipped these inanimate things. At the fetishism stage, people would worship things such as the stones, trees, pieces of wood and such kind things. Then they proceeded to the next level which was polytheism. In this stage, the people believed in the idea that many different happenings were controlled by different divine powers. As such, there were many deities who controlled these happenings. The last stage is the monotheism where the people came to appreciate that there is only one God who controls everything. He has all the divine powers and the authority to control all. Thus, the three stages of theological stage are complete.

Comte then went on to the second stage of his three stage law which is the metaphysical stage. At this stage, he argued that the people tried to get more information and greater understanding of factors that were not as open to them. They started questioning the nature and existence of God, where the argument arose that His existence was abstract, and, therefore, even his power which they believed in was equally abstract. As such, the metaphysical stage drove the people to doubt the existence of God or his ability to control nature. They were more inquisitive and sought to understand what exactly determine the natural happenings; what controlled

nature. At this stage, Comte observes that the nature of inquiry of the people was quite on a rational and legal platform. It was at this point that some religions such as the Hindu came up with the idea of reincarnation. Such ideas came up simply because the people were more inquisitive and they wanted to understand the nature of God in a deeper way. They were not just going to believe in the existence of what they did not see. For them to believe in the existence there had to be the evidence and in the absence of evidence, then an inquiry was needed so as to explain the phenomena in a deeper, more cohesive way. This is the idea behind metaphysics.

The last stage of the three stage theory is the positivity stage (Werwick 102). At this point, the inquisitive nature of the people had grown to such a level that they sought physical evidence to the existence of what they believed in. this is why this last stage is also called the scientific stage since it is the level at which the people started experimenting so as to explain some of the phenomena they could not understand. This stage is based on the argument that people believe in something after it has gone through the process of observation, experimentation and comparison studies. It was at this time that man started looking at the causal-effect relationship. In other words, the people had reached a level where they took up the intellectual approach to affairs. They would only make conclusions after they had made observations, got data and facts, classified them and then interpreted them. The results from such a manipulation count as proof and the findings supported by such can be accepted. The fact is that there is evidence, and therefore the people can have the confidence in taking it up and adopting it.

In a nutshell, the three stages are arranged in a progressive manner from

the primitive to the enlightened way. Through this argument, Comte (23) sought to assert his positivism ideas; the people had already come too far and achieved quite a lot in terms of making their lives better. Definitely, if given the right resources and the proper environmental conditions, they could do even much more to make their lives even better.

On reflection, it can be seen that Comte had a very well organized manner of thought. He had ideas about how the development of the human understanding came to be and this led him to writing such a cohesive argument that is easy to follow and understand as well. This is quite a commendable and appreciable feat, given the time during which this was done. There are also some lessons learnt from his works.

First of all, there is a greater understanding of the human nature. Following Comte's argument reveals that the people had a constant hunger for information. They could not just get satisfied with the little understanding that they had and so they sought to expand their body of knowledge. This is what led to the progression of the laws from the first to the third. It is clear that the transition is from a primitive stage to a more informed stage. This can be taken as a compliment to the evolution theory which claims that man moved from a primitive creature to the current informed stage.

Going through the work also informs in that an individual can understand why there are so many researches going on around the world. In almost every area, people are doing research and coming up with new ideas, inventions and way of doing things. Understanding Comte's argument reveals that the people do this simply due to their curiosity and quest for information. People want to understand more and more of their world, and

for this reason, they continue being involved in more and more studies. It also explains why the people, after conducting research activities, always give recommendations for future study. This happens because it is assumed that life is a discovery journey and there are quite a lot of discoveries that are still pending. As such, one study is just another step in the body of knowledge, and this acts as a stepping stone to a higher level. This also explains why there will be more studies to be done in the future; the more the people know, the more they need to know and the more they will keep looking for more information. It is all about building the body of knowledge. Another great lesson that can be learnt from Comte is the organization of ideas. It can be seen that Comte was building a case as he argued. He managed to go through it in such a manner that anyone can follow it quite clearly. It has a beginning, a mid-section and the end. As such, a lesson can be picked from this on how to plan a study or some findings that need to be presented. The lesson is how to build a case from scratch and make a convincing, academic argument.

Generally, it can be argued that Comte's ideas were well thought, planned and expressed. It is for this reason that they have stood the test of time and are referred to even today. They touch on crucial matters of the human life, which make Comte one of the people to be quoted in the social and religious matters. For this reason, he qualifies as one of the greatest thinkers to have lived, one who looked at a pertinent issue in the society and trailed a path that has been followed by many in understanding the development of the human intellect.

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