

Sociological thoughts: chapter- 2 (course content- August Comte-Social statics and Dynamics, Law of Three Stages and positivism) paper- 2 Sociology (lecture-1)

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Biographical Sketch (August Comte (1798-1857)):

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a French sociologist, was born at Montpellier France of Catholic royalist parents. In 1814 he was admitted to one of the most prestigious educational institutions of France at that time called the Ecole- Polytechnique. Here most of the professors were scholars in mathematics and physics. They had little interest in the study of society. But young Auguste Comte, being sensitive to the kind of social disorder that France was undergoing due to the Revolution, was keenly interested in human affairs and the study of society. Comte was involved in a student protest at the Ecole Polytechnique because of which he was expelled. At the Ecole Polytechnique, he came under the influence of such traditionalist social philosophers as L.G. Bonald and Joseph de Maistre. It was from them that he borrowed the notion of an order governing the evolution of human society. From Condorcet, another major philosopher of France, who was beheaded later, Comte got the idea that this evolution occurs along with progress in human societies. In 1824, he became a secretary to Saint-Simon, an aristocrat by birth but an utopian socialist in ideas. He became a close friend and disciple of Saint-Simon, who stimulated his interest in economics. It was at this period that Auguste Comte worked out the general conception of a science of society, which he named sociology. Auguste Comte's ambition was the political reorganisation of human society. According to him, such reorganisation will have to depend upon the spiritual and moral unification of society. Thus, with Saint-Simon, he developed several major ideas. However, their partnership was short-lived and they ended up quarrelling with each other. Later Auguste Comte published some of

his lecture notes in, *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (6 Vols. Paris 1830-42, 5th ed.). In this work he wrote about the law of three stages and developed his conception of a science of society. While working on this book, he discovered the principle of cerebral hygiene. This meant that in order to keep his mind uncontaminated he stopped reading other people's works. Between 1851-1854, he wrote a treatise entitled, *System of Positive Politics*, (4 Vols.). In this book he applied the findings of theoretical sociology towards solving the social problems of his society. It was during this period that he met Clotilde de Vaux who became a close friend. Her death in 1846, a year after they met, affected Auguste Comte to such a great degree that his ideas turned towards mysticism and religion. His ideas, which he put down in *Systems of Positive Politics*, shifted partly from positivism to construct a religion of humanity. Due to this change in ideas he lost many of his disciples and intellectual friends such as, J.S. Mill of England. He took his role as the prophet of social regeneration so seriously that he even sent a plan to the Russian King suggesting ideas to reorganise society. However, till his end Auguste Comte's works were not recognised in France. Only after his death, in 1857 (a very important year in Indian history) he became popular first in England and then in France and Germany. The direct imprint of his thinking can be seen in the French scientific movement of the last half of the nineteenth century, represented by such thinkers as, Taine, Renan, Berthelot and such outstanding English figures as J.S. Mill.