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AUGUST COMTE'S PRINCIPAL COMPARATION WITH VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Philosophy is a process of conducting critical studies to acquire the truth and to know the quintessence of some particular things. An assortment of thoughts from various figures and schools emerged related to the efforts to achieve the truth. One of them is August Comte. In Hindu teachings, there are also various schools of philosophy, one of which is Vedanta philosophy. The purpose of writing this article is to attain a comparison of the main points of August Comte with Vedanta philosophy with the intention of obtaining a new perspective of knowledge. By using a qualitative descriptive method, a comparison is achieved. According to August Comte with his positivism school, valid knowledge is knowledge that comes from positive-scientific facts. Whereas according to Vedanta, the highest knowledge is the knowledge about Atman and Brahman. August Comte's positivism emphasizes surrender to society (outside); whereas according to Vedanta, surrender is done to God (Brahman) as the origin of the entire existing universe (inside).

Keywords: Comparison, August Comte, Vedanta

I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of the era and the humans' frame of mind, numerous philosophers have emerged with a variety of philosophical schools that are stretched and the main ideas that are outlined. Starting from philosophy which questions the origin of the world, philosophy which provides views on valid knowledge, to philosophy that addresses language and society (typically carried out by many contemporary philosophers). It does not matter what schools of philosophy emerge, completed with the main points of thought that accompany them, all of them have a relative truth value because the truth that emerges from a philosophical process is basically alternative and speculative.

August Comte is one of the philosophers who came up with his thoughts in the early 1800s. His thoughts on positivism, the law of three stages, altruism, and his "science of creation" namely sociology; making him a philosopher whose name is often mentioned as one of the most influential philosophers in mainland of Europe and the entire world. As a western philosopher, August Comte accepted only scientific-positive facts as a source of knowledge. Beyond that, there is no knowledge and it is considered not significant. Humans must also surrender to society, not only to the society in which we live, but also to society as a whole unit.

Vedanta as one of the Hindu philosophies was born long before August Comte's thought appeared. This philosophy originates from the Vedic scriptures and becomes the last philosophy at the *Sad Darsana* level. *Vedanta* is the pinnacle of Hindu philosophies. *Vedanta* philosophy provides a view to humans that everything in this world is not real (illusion) because humans are overwhelmed by *Maya* which causes *Avidya* (ignorance). The truly real are *Atman* and *Brahman* as the origin and cause of all that exists in this world.

Starting from this, the author tries to explore the

main ideas of August Comte compared to *Vedanta* philosophy with the intention that they become a new source of knowledge for connoisseurs of philosophy and become additional material in philosophy because the nature of every human being is to be a philosopher.

II. METHOD

The method used in the writing of the comparison between August Comte's main ideas and *Vedanta* philosophy is a qualitative method, namely an analytical and descriptive method. The author reviews various literature related to the focus of the problem subsequently organizes it systematically, then analyzed to obtain the final conclusion. Writing is done by emphasizing the depth of the data so that good writing results can be obtained.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 August Comte and Their Points of Mind

3.1.1 Life of August Comte

August Comte was born in Montpellier, France on 19th January 19th 1798. His parents were from middle class and his father afterward became an official in the local tax office. Notwithstanding being a fast student, he never received a college diploma. In each of his classes at the Ecole Polytechnique, Comte and his entire class were expelled because of the political ideas and rebellion they carried out (Ritzer, 2015, p. 18).

After his writings began to be published, he became eminent throughout Europe nevertheless he was never given the occasion to teach at the university. The Comte was poor whilst he lived. His work as an author and private teacher was not adequate to live on. It was only gratitude to the donations from his followers, among others from the English philosopher named John Stuart Mill that he was able to live better. August Comte's most important writings are the *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (Course on positive-scientific philosophy) (six parts) and the *Système*

de Politique Positive (Positive political system) (four parts). He breathed his last breath in 1857 (Hamersma, 1983, p. 54).

3.1.2 Main Thoughts of August Comte

Comte's philosophy is anti-metaphysical. It only accepts facts that are found in a positive-scientific manner and distances itself from all questions that overcome the field of positive sciences. Positivism requires to talk about the symptoms ("phenomins"); everything else has no meaning. There is no point in searching for the "substance" of reality. There was only one thing is crucial, namely "*Savior pour prévoir*" or "Knowing in order to be ready (to act)". Knowing so that humans can expect what will happen (Hamersma, 1983, pp. 54-55).

Positivism comes from the word "positive". The word "positive" here means truthful, that is, what is based on facts. In accordance with positivism, our knowledge should never exceed facts. Empirical science becomes an exceptional example in the field of knowledge thus philosophy must emulate that example. For this *raison d'être*, positivism rejects the metaphysical branch of philosophy. Inquiring into the "essence" of things or the "true causes", including philosophy, only investigates the facts and the relationships that exist between the facts. The particular assignment of philosophy is to synchronize the various kinds of knowledge. It is obvious that the intent of positivism is closely related to what empiricism aspires to. Positivism also prioritizes experience, unlike British empiricism, which accepts inner or subjective experience as a source of knowledge, positivism does not accept a source of knowledge through this inner experience. He only relies on facts (Prajā, 2003, pp. 133-134).

The theory proposed by Comte stated that there were three intellectual levels that the world had to pass through throughout its history. According to Comte, it is not only the world that will go through this process; but also societies, science,

individuals and even contemplation developing through the same three stages. First, the theological stage was characteristic of the world before the 1300 era. In this period, the main idea system emphasized the belief that supernatural powers, religious figures and human example were the basis of everything. The social world and the physical world in particular are seen as creations of God. Second, the metaphysical stage which occurred roughly in 1300-1800. This era was marked by the belief that abstract forces explained everything, not personal gods. Third, in 1800, the world entered a positivistic stage marked by belief in science. Humans are starting to tend to stop researching absolute causes (God or nature) and focus on observing the physical world and the social world in order to find out the laws which govern it. It is clear that in his theory of the world, Comte focused on intellectual factors (Ritzer, 2015, p. 20). In Comte's vision, when humans reach the positivistic stage, there will be no longer any point in trying to achieve knowledge of something absolute, both at the theological and metaphysical levels. In addition, people who have reached the positivistic stage will no longer seek the origin and purpose of everything, or the essence of all things in this world. Humans began to focus on discovering natural laws through observing and maximizing the use of reason. Sociology is the culmination and end for all human endeavors; sociology can only develop after other sciences reach maturity. Consequently, Comte thought that as the "creator" of sociology, he brought science to its positive level. Thus, designing sociology, Comte has a practical intention, that is, on the basis of knowledge of the laws that govern society, they create a more perfect social order (Prajā, 2003, p. 136)

According to Comte, precise science is the basis of all philosophy. In this, he agrees with Descartes and Newton. This is because the exact

sciences have the most general, the simplest and the most abstract postulates. For that reason, it is also the most free science. Psychology had no place in Comte's system. According to him, humans are not able to investigate themselves. Conceivably, people can still investigate their desires because lust is not in the mind (Hadiwijono, 2005, p. 112).

The societal order sought in positivism can only be achieved when all human beings can accept altruism as the principle in their proceedings. Due to this altruism, Comte considered the human race to be a kind of substitute for God. This new divinity of positivism is called *le Grand Etre*, "The Supreme Being". For this the Comte proposed to organize a kind of service for *le Grand Etre* completed with priests, saints, liturgical feasts and so on. It can essentially be said as "a Catholic religion without Christian religion". The only system of belief of this religion is "love as principle, discipline as basis, progress as goal (Praja, 2003, p. 137).

Comte's altruism is a paradox of origin from the laws of his three epochs in that he abandoned religion. The main thing is the facts. There is no point in quest of absolute knowledge either theologically or metaphysically. It is the position of the human being that is the highest with the objective being the orderliness of society.

3.2 VEDANTA

3.2.1 Definition of Vedanta

The term "Vedanta" as the label of a characteristic form of reflective spirituality refers to a philosophic vision of the "transcendent" reality variously described as Being, Consciousness or Spirit (Bhattacharyya, 1995, p. 231). "Vedanta" literally means "the end of the Vedic scriptures". Primarily, this term meant the *Upanishad* holy books, although afterward the meaning was expanded to include all thoughts that developed and originated from the *Upanishad* themselves. The *Upanishad*

scriptures can be considered the end of the Vedas in many ways.

- First. The *Upanishads* are the last literary works of the Vedic era. In this era, three types of literature can be distinguished broadly, namely the oldest one are the *mantras* (*Himna*) which are compiled in various *Samhita* (*Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*), the followings are the *Brahmin* scriptures, namely sacred texts which provide guidance and encouragement in the implementation of Vedic rituals and finally the *Upanishads* which illustrate and eliminate philosophical problems. All three are seen as revealed scriptures (*Sruti*) and occasionally they are all called the *Vedas* in the broader sense of the word.

- Second. In terms of the rules of study, the *Upanishads* are the last. According to the rules that ought to be followed, one must first study the *Samhita* books, subsequently the *Brahmin* scriptures are required to be a guide when one begins to lead a life that must accomplish the rituals – obligatory as head of the household, and last of all is The *Upanishads*, also known among others as *Aranyaka* or forest scriptures, are considered necessary to help him when he begins to leave the world and live alone in the forest and try to comprehend the meaning of this life and contemplate the mysteries of this universe.

- Third. The *Upanishads* can also be seen as the end of the Vedic scriptures in the sense that they are the culmination of the thoughts (assumption) of the Vedic scriptures. In the *Upanishads* themselves, we learn that albeit we have completed the teachings of the Vedic scriptures with other branches of teaching, a person's education is not complete until he receives the instructions contained in the *Upanishads* (Pendit, 2007, pp. 155-156).

3.2.2 Concepts in Vedanta

Vedanta states that humans are divine, where everything we see around us is the result of divine consciousness. Everything that is good,

strong and effective in human nature comes from that divinity. Even if it has the potential in many ways, basically there is no difference between human and other humans, where essentially all creatures are divine. As it is, there is an immeasurable ocean behind it, of which you and I are the many waves which come out of that immeasurable ocean. Each of us is trying our best to push the infinity out. Potentially, each of us has the ceaseless ocean of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss, as our innate, as our true nature and the differences between us are due to overindulgence or inadequacy of power to manifest that Divinity. Hence, *Vedanta* emphasizes that everyone should be treated the same, not because of the appearance, but as a symbol of what human is. Every human being is a form of divinity thus every teacher must be a helper, not just blaming people, but by helping him realize his divinity (Vivekananda, 2006, pp. 18-19).

From the explanation above, it can be understood that God and His creation, namely the universe, are two things that are not different. “*Brahman Satyam Jagan Mithya, Jiwo Brahmaiva Na Aparah*”: In fact only *Brahman* (God) exists, the world is temporary, the personal soul and *Brahman* are qualitatively the same. *Brahman* (God) with the universe (man) is like a jug with clay. This understanding is called Pantheism. Titib, in his book entitled *Theology & Symbols in Hinduism*, explains that Pantheism is the belief that God is everywhere or every aspect of nature is described as controlled by God. According to historians Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, the attitude of the people of India and East Asia is showing that Pantheism is different from Jewish Monotheism. In the view of Pantheism, the matter of divinity is embodied (immanent) in the universe. In the view of Monotheism, matters of divinity are snatched from the universe and left outside human understanding and experience (Trancendent)

(Titib, 2003, p. 31).

Vedanta has also its own concept of the human self. According to *Vedanta*, the self is covered by the five sheaths – the five psychosomatic coatings. The first and the most substantial is called *Anna-maya-kosa*, "the sheath (*kosa*) made up (*maya*) of food (*anna*)", which is obviously the gross body and its gross material world. This relates to the container of awareness described in the *Mandukya Upanisad*. Second, *Prana-maya-kosa*, "a sheath made of vital forces (*prana*)", third, *Mano-maya-kosa*, "a sheath made of mind (and senses) (*manas*)", fourth *Vijnana-maya-kosa*, the "stub made of understanding (*vijnana*)," forms the subtle body, which is associated with the vessel of dream consciousness; Fifthly, *Ananda-maya-kosa*, "the frond made of bliss (*ananda*)", which keeps up a correspondence to the vessel of deep sleep as described in the *Mandukya Upanisad*, is what is known as the causal body. This body becomes a deep, dark covering of ignorance (*avidya*), which is the underbelly of the entire fundamental created world. It is only when this sheath has disappeared that the self can be known—quiet Silence beyond the syllable *AUM*, which from the "non-dualist" *Vedanta* point of view *Sankara* is the single actualization, the only real. “Enwrapped by five sheaths,” *Sankara* writes in *Vivekacudamani*, “self-formed, the Self does not emit light—just like water in a tank covered with reeds (which grow by its own power). Excluding when these weeds are all mowed, the clean waters visible to humans, soothe sudden pangs of thirst and bestow happiness to the highest degree (Zimmer, 2003, pp. 393-394).

The *Upanishads* have shifted the focus from the gods (angels) in the *Vedic* scriptures to the human soul. The *Upanishads* have analyzed the Soul, distinguishing between its shell and the reality within. The body, the senses, the thinking, the intellect (mind) and the pleasures arising from them have all been tested and found to be

ephemeral, as changing modes, not permanent soul-essences. This is only the outer evidence, the outer covering (*kosa*) which hides a permanent inner reality, which cannot be said to be the same as any of them even though all of them are centered on it and become its manifestations. The real soul is pure consciousness and any particular object consciousness is its limited manifestation.

Since it is not limited by any object, this pure consciousness is also limited. This real soul is called *Atman*. As an infinite, conscious reality (*satyam, jnanam, anantam*), the human soul is the same as the souls of all beings (*sarva-bhutatman*) and consequently the same as God, *Brahman*. In the *Katha Upanishad* we find the statement: "The soul is hidden in everything and is therefore invisible there. But it can be known by a person with keen vision with a keen penetrating *Budhi*" (Pendit, 2007, p. 170).

3.3 COMPARISON OF AUGUST COMTE'S KEY THOUGHTS WITH VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

3.3.1 Valid Knowledge

Positivism comes from the word "positive". According to positivism, human knowledge should never exceed facts. Thus, empirical science becomes a special example in the field of knowledge. As a result, philosophy must emulate that example. Hardiman in his book explains that positivism is a sharpening trend of modern western historical thought which has begun to emerge since the collapse of the medieval world order through rationalism and empiricism. Positivism is a particular focus on methodology in its philosophical reflections. In positivism, the position of knowledge is replaced by methodology and the only methodology that has developed compellingly since the Renaissance and its source during the Aufklarung period was the methodology of the natural sciences. For that reason, positivism places natural science

methodology in a space that was formerly the area of epistemological reflection, namely human knowledge about reality (Hardiman, 2003, p. 54).

Based on this, positivism rejects the branch of metaphysical philosophy that discusses the "nature" of things or "true causes". Positivism only investigates facts and the relationships that exist between facts. Positivism does not accept the source of knowledge through inner or subjective experience. It only relies on facts.

According to *Vedanta*, the highest knowledge is awareness of *Atman* and *Brahman*. There is only a relative reality in this universe; it is not real. What is real is *Atman* and *Brahman* which are the source of everything in the universe. Mustika and Harsawibawa in their writings explain that *Advaita Vedanta* is establishing the unity of reality and guiding humans to realize it. All differences in essence between man and reality must be flawed because for one who knows his true self automatically knows reality. The human essence is *Atman* or *paratmatman*. *Atman* is the highest self which is pure, undifferentiated, eternal, spaceless, self-illuminating and unthinkable consciousness. *Atman* underlies every human individual. The *atman* is completely beyond the reach of space, time, causality, distinction of subject and object and intellect. *Atman* is not different from *Brahman*. The two are one unit. The unity of *Atman* and *Brahman* is expressed in the *mahavakya* as *Tat Tvam Asi* (Mustika & Harsawibawa, 2021, p. 80).

The explanation above gives the view that according to positivism, valid knowledge is knowledge that comes from positive-scientific facts, apart from these facts there is no knowledge, whereas according to *Vedanta* the highest knowledge is knowledge of *Atman* and *Brahman*. There are only illusions in this universe caused by *Maya* and *Avidya*.

3.3.2 Surrender

The core of Comte's thought emphasizes surrender to society. Altruism is Comte's teaching which becomes the continuance of his teachings about the three ages. Altruism is defined as surrendering oneself to the whole society. Not even "one of the peoples", but *I'humanite*, "tribes of humanity", in general. Subsequently, altruism is not just the opposite of "egoism". In his writings, Robert explained that Comte emphasized that altruism is a moral prerequisite for the rise of the age of positivism; the age in which man reached the highest level in his rationality. This is at the same time becomes a sign of the strengthening of humanism because of the success in overcoming the burden of the "theological knowledge stage" and "transcendental knowledge stage" from the prior era.

In Comte's thought, altruism was placed as a secular phenomenon, humanism at its peak. Altruism has absolutely nothing to do with Christian morality which is often attached to it by moralists. It is clear that for Comte, altruism was an anthropological requirement of a new society. Altruism is needed as "civic", citizenship identity and a condition for the establishment of society (Robert, 2013, pp. 4-5).

Vedanta is one of the six parts of the Indian philosophical system which recognize the authority of the *Vedic* scriptures (*Astika*). The ultimate goal of this philosophy is the union of *Atman* with *Brahman*. Everything that is done by humans should be dedicated and solely for God (*Brahman*). The surrender that is done is for God (*Brahman*). Sindhu in Widiastuti explains that the purpose of *Advaita Vedanta* is actually to return to *Brahman*, there is much that must be done according to the teachings of *Advaita Vedanta*, namely that humans must first understand life and existence, reincarnation and the four paths to the highest foundation, namely *Catur Marga Yoga* (Widiastuti, 2021, p. 93).

Maheswari also added that individual self is universal self. To comprehend, or realize, this truth deep within oneself is the end of *Vedanta*. One who does so is free from the ills of existence in the world; he has transcended all personal desires and attachments; he has fulfilled all the obligations demanded by his nature and place in society (Maheswari, 2022, p. 65).

The explanation above illustrates that August Comte's positivism places more emphasis on surrender to society (outside), whereas according to *Vedanta*, surrender is made to God (*Brahman*) as the origin of the entire existing universe (inside).

3.3.3 Absolute

The societal order sought in positivism can only be achieved when all people can accept altruism as a principle in their actions. Due to this altruism, Comte considered the human race to be a kind of substitute for God. This new divinity of positivism is called *le Grand Etre*, "The Supreme Being". For this, Comte proposed to organize a kind of service for *le Grand Etre* complete with priests, saints, liturgical feasts and so on. It can actually be said as "a Catholic religion without Christian religion". The only system of belief of this religion is "love as principle, discipline as basis, progress as goal" (Praja, 2003, p. 137).

Basically, *Vedanta* philosophy is God himself nevertheless because he is covered by 5 layers, he forgets his true identity. If positivism considers it is ineffective to search for absolute knowledge (both theological and metaphysical) and no longer searches for the origin and purpose of things and the nature of things, then according to *Vedanta*, this is the highest knowledge. When humans are able to realize that they are sparks from God and know the purpose of all things and the nature of things.

Nirguna Brahman is the real. The real is the content of reality when the division between subject and object is transcended and in which the spiritual experience of the one is attained.

Reality is an experience that cannot be canceled or revoked by other experiences. The proponents of *Advaita Vedanta* have the concept of *badha* which Eliot Deutsch reconstructs into sublation, which is a mental process in which a person disvalues or no longer considers the evaluation of previous objects or contents of consciousness important because they oppose new experiences (Mustika & Harsawibawa, 2021, p. 177).

According to *Advaita*, the highest goal of life is to know and realize that *Atman* is *Brahman*. Whoever knows the true self, then achieving liberation, namely uniting with *Brahman* because the nature of ourselves is holy and pure. We are *Brahman*, Our true Self (*Atman*) is One with *Brahman* (Maheswari, 2022, p. 64).

Based on this, it can be understood that in the view of positivism, August Comte considered the human race to be a kind of substitute for God, whereas in the view of *Vedanta*, humans are God himself. To know and realize that *Atman* is *Brahman* is the highest goal of life.

3.3.4 The Highest Position

According to August Comte's positivism, science holds the highest position in human life. Exact science is the basis of all philosophy. This is obviously in line with his teaching which states that in investigating its target object, positivism philosophy bases it on the ability of reason. Chabibi in his writings explains that positivism believes that society will progress if it adopts a total approach to science and technology. In other words, this school highly upholds the position of science and is very optimistic about the social role; it can play for human welfare. A slogan emerged for positivism "*savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour pouvoir*" which means "from knowledge comes prediction and from prediction comes action" (Chabibi, 2019, p. 16). Comte stated that intellectual confusion led to social disorder. This confusion stems from the previous system of ideas (theology and metaphysics) that continued to exist in the

positive (scientific) era. New social upheaval will end when people's lives are fully controlled by positivism. Positivism will emerge, although not as fast as people expect (Ritzer, 2015, p. 40). Meanwhile, according to *Vedanta*, the highest position is held by *Brahman*. Everything in this world comes from Him. Humans are the tiniest spark of it. Everywhere everything is God or every aspect of nature is described as controlled by God. Mustika and Harsawibawa also explained that in spiritual identity or experience of *Brahman* (*nirvikalpa samadhi*), self-realization and self-knowledge are achieved. The single reality, which is a perfect identity, cannot be replaced by other experiences. Hence, the experience of *Brahman* is the absolute highest experience; that no other experience can subsist on. On the other hand, this spiritual experience can cancel all other types of experience that originate from the world of appearances and concepts (Mustika & Harsawibawa, 2021, p. 79). This is evidently in contrast to the philosophy of positivism which only relies on facts without caring about things that are beyond the grasp of human senses, whereas in *Vedanta* philosophy, what is beyond human senses is also knowledge and the highest knowledge is knowledge of *Brahman* which is the source of all that exists.

IV. CONCLUSION

Positivism and Vedanta philosophy are philosophical knowledge that can provide an additional knowledge and view of what and how real knowledge is from each point of view. There is nothing wrong and nothing is right because everything is an alternative. With these two philosophies that are almost opposite in their views, each has its own truth value. It depends on how the people who study it can acquire good knowledge from these two philosophical systems.

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