Law Of Three Stages
by Auguste Comte

B.A. Part -1 (Honours)

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“Augusta Comte” philosophy is based on the concept of positivism.

By, “Positivism he meant that, obtaining knowledge by means of, scientific method.

According to Comte; the knowledge, which is obtained using, experimental methods and observation is the only authentic and valid knowledge.
The notion, “law of three stages” was discussed in his book “Positive philosophy”, which imply that, society, individual mind, world history and each science had passed through the following progressive law of three stages, which are as follow:

1. Theological stage,
2. Metaphysical stage
3. Positive stage.

As the stages progresses, role of religion diminishes, whereas, positive or scientific role take over in explaining social phenomenon and events.
The Law of Three Stages

OR

Theory of Human Progress

- Theological OR Fictitious Stage (dominated by priests and ruled by military men)
- Metaphysical OR Abstract stage (under the sway of churchmen and lawyers)
- Positive OR Scientific stage (governed by industrial administrative and scientific moral guides)

- Fetishism (Belief in some living spirits in the non-living objects)
- Polytheism (Belief in several Gods as well as natural and Human forces)
- Monotheism (Belief in one God Who is Supreme)
Theological or Fictitious Stage

- This is very old and most primitive stage, of interpreting science and any social phenomenon. In primitive societies individuals believed that, each social phenomenon and events are considered to be the will of God.

- Human beings are infused with emotions, sentiments and feeling which lead them to believe that, behind occurrence of every event there is supernatural power.

- Moreover, theological stage is further divided into three stages
  - fetishism
  - polytheism
  - monotheism
• **Fetishism;** the primary stage of theology is fetishism. In this stage people believed that, spirits are embodied by nature like, trees, stones and wood, which is known as animism. People used to preach them and explain and interpret everything according to their religious belief.

• **Polytheism;** in this stage primitive people believe in multiple God. They believed that, natural forces are controlled by multiple Gods. For example, God of rain, God of fire, God of air etc.

• **Monotheism;** in this stage people believe in one God and believed to be the creator of world and supreme power. Nothing can happen in this world without the will of God.

Individuals in theological stage believe that, all the natural and social events are the work of supreme and supernatural power.
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<th>Intellectual phase</th>
<th>Material phase</th>
<th>Type of social unit</th>
<th>Type of order</th>
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Metaphysical or Abstract Stage

- People in metaphysical stage believe in God, however, they do not explain, everything which happens in the society is due to the will of God.
- However, most of the problems take place due to the inadequacy of humans. To make sense of the world; religious and scientific view co-exists in metaphysical stage.
- This stage is also called, “transitional stage” because it progresses from absolute imagination to rationality.
- For example if someone is sick they may associate sickness with germs which is rational however, they might use the spiritual ritual to cure the disease.
- Social phenomena in metaphysical stage is explain through amalgamation of religious belief and rationality.
Positive or Scientific Stage

- Each social phenomenon in this stage is explained by the scientific findings and empirical research.
- For example, if someone is sick it is not interpreted and explained as the will of God or caused due to some supernatural power or the result of wrong doing of an individual which makes the God angry and unleashes his wrath upon him in the form of sickness.
- It is explained by people rationally and scientifically that the illness is caused by germs.
- According to Comte, positivism is absolutely intellectual way to determine social phenomenon, there is no place for supernatural power in it.
- In this stage religion became less predominant and scientific methods become more predominant in obtaining knowledge.
Criticism

Comte’s law of three stages have been criticized by different philosophers and sociologists.

- According to Bogardus, Comte failed to postulate a fourth mode of thinking, i.e. socialized thinking, a system of thought which would emphasize the purpose of building the constructive, just and harmonious societies. Bogardus also says, Comte however, should be credited with opening the way for rise of socialized thinking.

- According to Prof. N.S. Timasheff, Comte’s law of three stages could not stand the test of facts. He opines, “Neither the later approaches (metaphysical and scientific) wholly supersedes the religious approach; rather there has been accumulation and often admixture of the three”.

C.E. Vaughan has said, “But its foundation is purely negative and destructive. It is powerless to construct and when credited with the ability to do so, it brings forth nothing but anarchy and bloodshed.”
Recommended books:

1. The Structure of Sociology – J. H. Turner
4. Utkrist Samajshastriya Paramparayain – R. N. Mukherjee
THANK YOU