



Hope in the Sociological Thoughts of some Founding Fathers

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Abstract

Not all hope is equal. For the Christian religion, hope is a theological virtue, and refers to the expectation of future life, beyond death. With the transformation of European society in a secular sense and the rise of individualism between the 17th and 18th centuries, hope becomes a program of political and social transformation, aimed at this world. In my contribution I trace the emergence of the concept of hope in social thought and, then, in sociology. My analysis begins with the *Philosophie sociale* (Paris, 1793) by Moses Dobruska (1753–1794), a pioneering and largely overlooked text that founds a new vision of social science. After Dobruska, I then devote my attention to the great thinkers of the early nineteenth century, Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) and Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and then I move on to the work of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). It is a historical perspective that has been neglected until now, and that allows us to appreciate the construction of an idea of hope that frees itself from religious determinants and is oriented toward society and the individuals who live in it, and that anticipates the utopias and failures of the social ideologies of the 20th century.

Keywords Hope · Emancipation · Moses Dobruska · Henri de Saint-Simon · Auguste Comte · Emile Durkheim

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Introduction

To the best of my knowledge, the concept of hope has so far not been studied from a historical perspective within social thought between the late 18th and early 20th centuries. Yet it is a very important topic, to understand the transformations in mentality and method between the Age of Enlightenment, and positivism. As is well known, Christianity considers hope one of the three theological virtues, along with faith and charity. Owing to the progressive secularization of culture, social thought has found itself having to define hope on new, individual, and collective grounds. In an era marked by such profound political and social changes, hope for a different future has naturally played a key role.

This article aims to fill this historiographical gap by examining four founding fathers of sociology, all linked to the French world.

My investigation begins with Moses Dobruska (1753–1794), a largely forgotten figure to whom, however, as I believe I have shown in my recent books and essays, a role as an anticipator of sociology is due (Greco, 2017, 2021, 2022a, Greco 2022b).

Following Dobruska, I deal with the concept of hope in Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), acknowledged protagonists of 19th and early 20th century social thought.

The reasons for selecting these four thinkers lie in the fact that a subtle but solid common thread binds them together, distinguishing them from some of the major founding fathers of English or German sociology. The elements on which this common thread runs are basically four.

First, all four developed their social thought in the French cultural context, albeit in different historical periods: from the period of the Revolution (Dobruska and Saint-Simon) to the post-revolutionary period and the restoration of the monarchy (Saint-Simon and Comte) up to the empire of Napoleon III and the Third Republic (Durkheim). It is true that Dobruska came from Bohemian Judaism and had had Jewish and German acculturation, but his *Philosophie sociale* was written in France, and is addressed first and foremost to a French audience.

Second, uniting them, albeit with significant differences, is an approach that we might call positivist. Dobruska, Saint-Simon, and Comte can indeed be considered, each with their own characteristics, inspirers, and founders of positivism itself. All embrace secular faith and hope in the continuing economic, social, and technological progress of the nascent capitalist society. They harbor a deep hope for imminent political change, which will finally see the establishment of a democratic state and end monarchical abuse. As positivists, they believe in the development of mankind, that is, the evolution of citizens' intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities. Under the right conditions, mankind is, in their view, capable of improving its living conditions so that each member of society can be responsible, self-directed and achieve the highest levels of happiness and freedom. This trust is theorized in the law of the three stages—from the theological stage to the metaphysical stage to the positive stage. This law is first elaborated by Moses Dobruska in his *Philosophie sociale* (1793) and later taken up by Comte. As Sydney Eisen sharply points out:

The Positivists also believed that for humanity there was movement toward permanent balance, in which man would be brought into harmony with the universe

and with his fellow human beings, in a well-ordered state and a centrally directed world. In order to understand man, it was essential to understand the historical laws of coexistence and development; and for understanding these historical laws, the law of evolution and dissolution as defined by Spencer was of little value (Eisen 1967, pp. 65–66).

It is clear how, within this philosophical perspective, reflection on hope becomes crucial. Positivist philosophy breaks away from materialism and Herbert Spencer's (1820–1903) law of evolution and dissolution, which we know was strongly influenced by Auguste Comte (see Eisen 1967). The Spencerian system of thought insists “on force, materiality, and movement in the explanation of all phenomena” (Eisen 1967, p. 66), and for this reason the theme of hope is, in Spencer, less present than in the French positivist sociologists. Positivist philosophy also distances itself from the historical and dialectical materialism of Karl Marx (1818–1883). Unlike the positivists, Marx, along with Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), does not believe at all that in a capitalist society, democratic rule can lead to the happiness of human beings. Nineteenth-century English capitalist society, which Marx analyzes in *Capital* (1867), is marked by strong antagonisms and contradictions between different social classes - between those who own the means of production, the capitalists, and those who lack them, the proletarians - struggling with each other. According to Marx, capitalism reifies everything, alienates workers from their product, and exploits the proletariat economically. Moreover, exhausting working conditions in factories seriously harm the health of proletarians (Marx, 1867). Only the process of becoming aware of the exploitation of the working class can trigger the revolution. For Marx, the historical period is coming when communism can replace capitalism. Hope is a very present and central theme in Marx's thought, but it is not identified with the perfectibility of the democratic system. Rather, it consists in the advent of communist society, which, by overcoming class distinction, will abolish private property and bring the proletarian class to power.

The third element, which unites the four authors I have chosen for my study, is the empirical scientific methodology of the hard sciences (physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc.), applied to the newly born “art social”, as Dobruska calls it (Frey/Dobruska 1793, p. viij), or “social physics” and later “sociology,” in the definition of Saint-Simon and Comte. Only through the scientific method will it be possible to discover and enucleate the laws that unravel human behavior, and thus make it possible to hope for the construction of a better society. This methodology is still very rudimentary in the first three authors examined, while it appears decidedly more sophisticated in Durkheim. Unlike in German circles - from Simmel to von Wiese - this new social discipline is not placed side by side with other human and social sciences such as economics, jurisprudence, or political science, but is seen as competing with them. It often wants to hold primacy over the others (Marjolin 1937, p. 695).

The fourth component of the common thread linking our authors is the secular view of society. Their theoretical reflections are based on the division between society and state, on the one hand, and church and religion, on the other. Proof of this distinction is, among other things, the law of the three stages, both in Dobruska's first formulation and in the more articulate one proposed by Comte.

In the name of such a secular view, hope never acquires a transcendental, other-worldly dimension. This happens, it is true, in Saint-Simon's conservative followers, who restore hope to its Christian connotations as a theological virtue, but this is a development that tends to misrepresent the master's teaching:

We will tell you to hope, because hope is a virtue that must be developed in us with all our strength; because despair is a weakness unworthy of us, which would tend to deprive us of the ability to act on the masses that we have to move. Here you stop me again: our mission, you say, is purely philosophical; Saint-Simon founded only a school; it is reserved for others to preach the new word and to build the temple: the times of the apostolate are still very far away (Rodrigues, 1831, pp. 16–17).

Durkheim also falls fully within this secular strand. For him, “the main preoccupation was to construct a morality which would be absolutely independent of all theological or metaphysical conceptions” (Marjolin 1937, p. 696). It is worth mentioning how Durkheim's theories were strongly criticized by some Catholic sociologists (e.g., Jean Izoulet (1854–1929), both for aspiring to an objective sociology and for treating religious phenomena only in social and moral terms (Marjolin 1937, p. 702).

Despite their biographical and conceptual differences, Dobruska, Saint-Simon, Comte and Durkheim share a belief in the perfectibility of society in a democratic sense, the adoption of a methodology inferred from the hard sciences, and a convinced secularism. A comparative analysis of the concept of hope that each of them developed allows, I believe, to identify continuities and changes within French social thought from the late 18th to the early decades of the 20th century.

The result is an unprecedented glimpse into the tensions, disappointments, and expectations that shake thinking about society at a time of whirlwind transformation and great intellectual creativity.

Moses Dobruska (1753–1794): Hope as Greatest Happiness

Moses Dobruska (1753–1794) was born into a Jewish family in Brünn, Moravia, then part of the Habsburg Empire. In 1775 he converted to Catholicism in Prague together with his wife Elke Joß and his first daughter Maria, to achieve better integration and social ascendancy (Greco 2022, p. 21). Ennobled by Empress Maria Theresa, Dobruska, who took the name Franz Thomas von Schönfeld after his conversion, made his way into Viennese court circles and achieved enviable economic prosperity (Greco, 2021, p. 40). In an abrupt decision, and probably dictated by idealistic reasons, he left Vienna in 1792 to join the French Revolution, alongside the Jacobins.

Arriving in Paris, he took to writing feverishly his great work entitled *Philosophie sociale, dédiée au peuple français par un citoyen de la section de la République française*¹, published in the French capital in 1793. The *Philosophie sociale*, to which I have devoted a monographic study, contains such an innovative proposal for the analysis of society that Dobruska, as I believe I have shown, can rightly be considered an *ante litteram* sociologist and indeed the forgotten father of sociological stud-

¹ Henceforth *Philosophie sociale*. It should be noted that during the revolutionary period in France, first in Strasbourg and then in Paris, he changed his name to Junius Frey.

ies. Justifying at least in part the oblivion into which Dobruska fell is his untimely death on the guillotine in 1794, at the height of the Terror. Indeed, Saint-Simon and Comte, who read and used Dobruska's work extensively, did not feel they should mention their debt to an outsider, who, moreover, died under less than honorable circumstances.

The theme of hope runs through Dobruska's work, and indeed lies at its origin. What motivates the decision to side with the Jacobins and theoretically support their action is undoubtedly the hope of building a democratic society in France, in which citizens can be happy both individually and collectively (social reorganization) (Greco, 2022a, p. 32). A prerequisite for such a transformation is the overthrow of the unjust social system of the *Ancien Régime*.

To realize this utopian vision, according to Dobruska it is necessary for two successive stages, social disorganization, and reorganization, to take place.

Dobruska is credited with being the first in the history of European thought to theorize the concept of social *disorganization*. Through a refined analysis of the mechanisms that regulate society, Dobruska can clearly identify the *mélanges monstrueux* (sic.)² of the absolutist monarchy of the *Ancien Régime*. These are what we would call today, with Axel Honneth (Honneth, 1994), *social pathologies*. Among them, Dobruska identifies the tyranny and abuses of an *élite* composed of the monarchy, aristocracy, and clergy, the lack of concern for the common good, the division of men into social classes, and the non-recognition of all people as citizens. These are the reasons why the social system of the *Ancien Régime* must be torn down. Dobruska states in this regard:

For you, O wise! May your first care be to overthrow (disorganize) the artificial regime, and to bring us back to the simple regime of nature, developed by a healthy culture. Let us first go back to it, examine it; and let us draw from its processes a new art, a new culture³. Wise! lead us once more out of the maze of consequences and back to the primitive source of principles. Let us draw deeply from the bosom of this fertile mother (Frey/Dobruska 1793, p. 47).

Only once the old social system has been *disorganized* can a new one, based on different principles, be reorganized. And this is the task of the second stage of *social reorganization*. Such reorganization presupposes, according to Dobruska, sociological thinking grounded on a new, scientifically based methodology. To be effective and to be able to sustain a new society, social thinking will have to follow the model of the mathematical and natural sciences. Only then will social thinking be able to enucleate *principles* of cause and effect that explain human motivations and behavior. Dobruska enucleates 70 such principles, which will be the basis for the universal constitution of the new democratic society.

It is evident how hope, understood as the capacity for social transformation and, at the same time, as the generative principle of new structures of coexistence, underlies the entire utopian project of the *Philosophie sociale*. More specifically, Dobruska,

² I have also reported the occasional errors in syntax and vocabulary made by Moses Dobruska, so as not to retrospectively homologate a work that reflects the breadth and limits of its author's multilingualism. In correct French "monstrous" is spelled *monstrueux* and not *monstreux*.

³ English translation from the French by Silvana Greco. See (Greco, 2022a, p. 166).

reflects theoretically on the concept of *espérance*. *Esperance* appears in the *Philosophie sociale* with three different connotations.

First, for Dobruska there is a strong relationship between hope and individual and collective happiness. He states in his *Philosophie sociale* (Dobruska/Frey 1793, p. 208, see Greco 2022a, p. 141):

What would then be man's greatest happiness? Hope. It is hope which shows man a more distant purpose, to sweeten the pains of the past, the anxieties of the present, through the enjoyment of a future that he has not yet tasted.

The greatest happiness for human beings is hope. Primarily, because hope shows us a more distant, higher, more meaningful purpose to achieve in our lives beyond mere survival. This goal, however, is different from person to person. For Dobruska, each man is different from the other not only in physical form and strength but also in moral resources (Dobruska/Frey 1793, p. 209), abilities and goals he wishes to achieve. There are people who are more materialistic, desiring in every way to increase their material possessions; there are, on the other hand, people who are more spiritual, requiring more time to develop their spirituality; there are people who are more skilled and capable than others; there are people who are more ambitious materially and intellectually than others; there are people who are capable of running a country while others are not; there are people who are more educated than others who are ignorant. Each man is driven by a different force, has different abilities and he can develop them because of living in society. Likewise, each will tend to achieve distinct goals individually or collectively. Hope, however, spurs him/her on, challenges him, *sets him/her in motion*, and *makes him/her active* in achieving such more distant ends, whatever they may be.

In short, for Dobruska hope motivates us to become active. And activity should be understood here in Robert Stebbins' sense: "an activity is a type of pursuit, wherein participants mentally or physically (often both) think or do something, motivated by the *hope of achieving a desired end*" (Stebbins, 2020, p. 14).

The second characteristic of hope is "to soften the pains of the past and the anxiety of the present through the enjoyment of a future that [one has] not yet experienced." Precisely because hope shows us a more distant goal and makes us active (physically or mentally), it moves us away from the pain of the past, which becomes less acute, and makes us less anxious in the present.

Dobruska understands anxiety⁵ as a feeling of individual worry and apprehension. Such concern may relate to everyday life in the present, or it may be directed toward the future, toward a goal one would like to achieve. Anxiety should also be understood in a collective sense, as related to the crisis and instability of the political order. In this meaning, the term is also used by some authors of the time, such as the lawyer and revolutionary François-Antoine de Boissy D'Anglas (Boissy D'Anglas 1791, p. 185). Indeed, the years in which Dobruska writes and later publishes his *Philosophie sociale* are the revolutionary years, when insecurity and anxiety about the future is very high for many intellectuals and revolutionaries. The fate of Moses Dobruska and

⁴ The cursive is mine.

⁵ According to documents of the time and particularly Duverger's study of the French language compared with English syntax, anxiety was translated into French as *inquiétude* (Duverger, 1796 p. 389).

his brother Emmanuel, who were guillotined on April 5, 1794, along with Danton, shows, moreover, that such anxieties were well founded (Greco, 2022a, p. 29).

In short, hope is, in *Philosophie Sociale*, a wise guide, spurring us toward action, mitigating our negative bodily and emotional states, such as pain and anxiety, and making us relish future enjoyments⁶.

Although Dobruska goes through a very complicated and tumultuous revolutionary period, he fully adheres to an Enlightenment culture, based on rationality but also on feelings. In his conception, the latter represent, along with reason, one of the two moral faculties possessed by human beings (Frey/Dobruska 1793, p. 15). It is evident that Dobruska is sustained by a teleological hope, and believes in a never-ending progress, in a constant improvement of society and humanity.

What, for Dobruska, are the political, social, and economic conditions that allow humans to be happy and have hope about the future?

The first requirement is certainly political: human beings must be recognized as citizens and live in a democratic state, based on the universal constitution outlined in the *Philosophie sociale*. In such a state, citizens will enjoy various rights, *first and foremost*, freedom, conceived in all its meanings (freedom of speech, press, religious, etc.).

Although Dobruska professes social liberalism, he does not believe that the fair distribution of economic resources is the most suitable condition in promoting happiness. If there is a equal distribution of resources, it would even be necessary to redistribute them unfairly, in order to introduce abundance, mediocrity and poverty again.

He states in his *Philosophie sociale* (Dobruska/Frey, 1793, p. 211):

equal goods should be collected and distributed unequally, to reintroduce abundance, mediocrity and even poverty, to awaken the sleeping talents of all individuals in their own interest, and to satisfy their appetite, which is the principle, to make everyone happy through hope, desire, and activity.

Such an unequal distribution of resources enables the realization of various moral actions, as people need one another (reciprocity, etc.) (Dobruska/Frey, 1793, p. 208). Moreover, it awakens the dormant talents of individuals, they will be spurred by their interests and the satisfaction of their appetites (both material and intellectual). In short, it is understood how hope is the great engine that makes men active and enables them to achieve happiness in this way.

It centers on the activities in their social milieu that people can do and want to do to make their lives worth living.

In conclusion, Dobruska's sociological thought is all about delineating the social conditions as well as the actions that make humans happy and reserves a precipitous role for hope. Dobruska appears to us as a forerunner of what is now called *positive sociology*. This is the sociology that "centers on the activities in their social milieu that people can do and want to do to make their lives worth living" (Stebbins, 2020).

Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825): Collective Hope for a Brighter Future and Public Celebrations of Hope.

⁶ For a more-in depth analysis of the founding father and mother of sociology concerning the role of emotions in their theories see (Cerulo & Scribano, 2021).

Let us now delve into the thought of Count Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), a foremost exponent of French socialism born in Paris into an impoverished aristocratic family (König, 2022, p. 227) and see how his concept of hope bears some similarities to those of his contemporary Moses Dobruska but also relevant differences.

Like Dobruska, Henri de Saint-Simon experienced firsthand the revolutionary period in Paris. He also got to know Dobruska personally and certainly read his work *Philosophie sociale* from which he drew some theories⁷. In fact, Saint-Simon was arrested on November 19, 1793, and imprisoned in the same Parisian prison of Sainte-Pélagie where Moses Dobruska and his brother Emmanuel were detained. Unlike Dobruska, however, Saint-Simon did not end up on the guillotine but got out of prison after a rather long period of detention.

In Henri de Saint-Simon's extensive work, the concept of hope runs along three different meanings.

Hope is primarily related, as in Moses Dobruska, to the cognitive, emotional, and participatory vision of the future construction of a better society for France and the whole of Europe after the previous social system has been disorganized (Saint-Simon, 1814).

In this regard, Saint-Simon tacitly takes up, without citing the source, the theory of disorganization and reorganization elaborated by Dobruska, and which I briefly expounded above (Frey/Dobruska 1793; Greco 2022a, p. 45).

In the opening of his essay *L'Organisateur* (1820) (Saint Simon, 1869), Saint-Simon evaluates the damage that the loss of two different categories of citizens would do to French society. He imagines that the first group consists of the best doctors, chemists, physiologists, mathematicians, artists, and intellectuals (poets, painters, sculptors, men of letters), mechanics, engineers, artillerymen, architects, physicians, surgeons, pharmacists, watchmakers, bankers, shopkeepers, manufacturers, etc. artisans. The second category includes thirty thousand members who hold political, administrative, and religious offices in the country, including family members of royalty, members of the aristocracy, and state councilors.

The ironic, and seemingly counterintuitive, conclusion is that in the first case, the disappearance of all components would represent irreparable damage to the country. In the second case the loss would emotionally afflict the nation but would not affect the economic, social, and moral development of society in any negative sense.

The example serves to introduce the theme of social hope, which, for Saint-Simon as already for Dobruska, is to achieve a society in which human beings can be happy. To those who wonder what general tools enable the achievement of such happiness, Saint-Simon offers an unambiguous answer:

science, fine arts and arts and crafts; For men can only be happy through the satisfaction of their physical and moral needs, which is the sole aim and more or less direct object of the sciences, the fine arts and the arts-and-trades. It is to these three directions, and to them alone, that all work truly useful to society is related (Saint-Simon, 1869, p. 191)⁸.

⁷ For more on the influence of Moses Dobruska's thought on Henri Saint-Simon's work, see Greco (2022a, § 7.2.1).

⁸ The translation from French is mine.

The sciences, fine arts and trades are the indispensable elements of the future society, capable of satisfying both the physical and moral needs of human beings. Beyond the scientists, artists, and producers (the farmers, artisans, merchants, and industrialists) “lie only parasites and rulers” (Saint-Simon, 1869, p. 192). Unfortunately, still in the present period, Saint-Simon writes, these three classes are dominated by parasites. The priority objective, not only useful but indispensable for social reorganization, is to get rid of such domination (Saint-Simon, 1869, p. 192). Secondly, knowledge derived from the sciences, fine arts and trades should be applied, developed, and perfected to the highest level for the satisfaction of the various needs of human beings. Saint-Simon therefore invites:

to spread this knowledge, to perfect it and to increase it as much as possible: in a word, to combine as usefully as possible all the particular works in the sciences, in the fine arts and in the arts and crafts (Saint-Simon, 1869, p. 193–194)⁹.

After the cognitive and emotional character of hope, Saint-Simon discusses its collective dimension. The strengthening of the sciences, fine arts, and crafts and, consequently, the entrusting of the administration of public affairs to scientists (*savants*), artists and artisans, brings into play the resources and skills of those in society who have less interest in obtaining material wealth. All of them, in fact, do not aspire to high economic well-being since their needs are modest nor can money grant them the recognition they aspire to (Saint-Simon-Simon, 1869, pp. 207–208).

However, hope for a better future, in its collective dimension, lies above all in being able to draw in and enthuse the population to support this new social order. According to Saint-Simon, this is to be done through public festivals and through the festivals of hope designed, organized, and presented by the Chamber of Invention (*Chambre d'invention*).

The Chamber of Invention, the imaginative faculty of the new social body, consisted of 300 members and was divided into three sections: the first section consisted of 200 civil engineers, the second, 50 poets or other literati, and the third, 25 painters, 15 sculptors or architects, and 10 musicians (Saint-Simon, 1869, p. 51).

The purpose of this Chamber is to present and devise public projects, which contribute to the wealth of France and the quality of life of its inhabitants (e.g., through the improvement of public transportation by opening canals, etc.). It must also promote public festivals, which are the festivals of hope and those of memory. In the feast of hope, “speakers expose to the people the work projects that have been stopped by Parliament, and stimulate the citizens to work ardently by making them feel how much their lot would improve if these were to be realized”.

The true animators of the festivals are the artists, *les hommes à imagination*, “through the festivals they are the true guides of society along the path that the present state of enlightenment requires” (Gentile, 2012, p. 230).

These festivals recall the revolutionary festivals Saint-Simon witnessed during the period of the Revolution. They will be celebrated not only in the French capital but in the capitals of the departments and cantons and have three purposes. A first purpose is pedagogical, intending to make most of the population understand the reasons behind public decisions. In this way, “the citizen will be able to recognize the motives of

⁹ The translation from French is mine.

social life beyond any particular relationship” and will have confirmation of his or her rights and duties (Gentile, 2012, p. 227, p. 240).

A second purpose is aesthetic, because celebration and play involve all citizens, arouse their passion, excite their spirits and make them open to adventure (Gentile, 2012, p. 228). This passion for future benefits and the common good strengthens fellowship, fun, and solidarity among citizens.

A third purpose of the festival of hope is political participation. Indeed, enthusiasm causes cognitive and emotional involvement. Perceiving hopefulness as a benefit they will have in the future, citizens become increasingly interested, actively, in political life. And this increases trust, one of the pillars of social capital as Coleman (Coleman, 1988) puts it, which in turn supports and strengthens the country’s economic and social development. A virtuous circle is set in motion between political participation, trust, and improvement of the country’s wealth.

This is followed, in Saint-Simon’s vision, by festivals dedicated to remembrance (*aux souvenirs*), where speakers “will try to make the people understand how much better their position is than that in which their ancestors were” (Saint-Simon, ([1820] 1869, p. 54).

Looking backward to one’s ancestors enables citizens to become aware of the strenuous journey humanity has already made to improve their living conditions. At the same time, social comparison as defined by Leon Festinger (Festinger, 1954) brings out a sense of gratitude toward the rulers who helped produce the public benefits (cf. by Henri de Saint-Simon) and, as a result, strengthens hope for an even better future.

At the end of his life, Saint-Simon gives the concept of hope a further development, a real turning point. In the essay *Nouveau Christianisme* (1825), the emphasis is no longer on what to hope for in the future and how to achieve it (through the feasts of hope) but rather shifts to what are the moral conditions for one to hope. In fact, according to the late Saint-Simon, it is not enough for sciences such as mathematics, physics, astronomy, and sociology to progress to create a better society. It is necessary to arrive at the development of a further science that forms the basis on which society can be founded. And that is morality.

when society lost sight of this principle [of morality], when it ceased to take it as the general guide to its conduct, it promptly fell back under the yoke of Caesar: that is to say, under the empire of physical force, which this principle has subordinated to intellectual force (Saint-Simon, 1869 [1825], pp. 187–188) .

And here he appeals to another category of human beings: philanthropists to which all the social groups identified above (industrialists, artists, scientists, artisans, etc.) can belong.

Philanthropists are those who “link the hope of improving their lot with the desire to suppress abuses” and are clearly differentiated from *egoists*. The latter pursue particularistic goals and in their social relationships manage to turn abuse into personal gain. Philanthropists, on the other hand, are those who have managed to go beyond their interests and see human beings in their wholeness, in their moral dimension (Gentile, 2012, p. 240). Thus, a morally developed society is intimately capable of generating hope among its best citizens, the philanthropists, and to direct their conduct toward the common good.

Only combating the abuses and excesses of society can enable individuals to improve their lot.

In his book *Religion Saint-Simonienne*, published a few years after the master's death, Abel Transon interprets hope as a virtue of the individual, which must be developed with commitment. It will then be possible to act collectively on the mass of the population with the goal of achieving a new, happier, and more egalitarian society. Lack of hope, on the other hand, is a weakness of spirit unworthy of a philanthropic human being. In his second letter on *Philanthropy and Religious Sentiment - Mission des disciples de Saint-Simon*, Transon states:

and in his name we will tell you to hope, because hope is a virtue that must be developed in us with all our strength; for despair is a weakness unworthy of us, which would tend to deprive us of the power to act on the masses we have to move (Transon, 1831, p. 176).

In this way, hope is confirmed as an individual virtue in the service of the community.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857): Public Hope as Spiritual Transformation and Emancipation

Brilliant 21-year-old Auguste Comte, originally from Montpellier and fresh from studying at prestigious *Ecole Polytechnique* in Paris, was introduced in 1819 to the almost 60-year-old Henri de Saint-Simon, editor at the time of the periodical *Industrie*. Thus began a fruitful collaboration, not without both intellectual and financial conflicts (Coser, 1977, pp. 14–15).

Unlike Moses Dobruska and Henri de Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte does not theoretically define hope (*espérance*) in his writings. He does, however, develop his own sociological and social philosophical thought, strongly influenced by Dobruska's *Philosophie sociale* and Saint-Simon's works, in which hope is a central element of reflection on the dynamic development of society, in constant balance between past, present, and future.

In his extensive work, Comte makes a static analysis of society, highlighting the conditions and preconditions of the social order. At the same time, he also conducts an analysis of social dynamics, linking them to the progress and development of humanity (Coser, 1977, p. 12).

Nouveau christianisme. Dialogue, published in April 1825 (Saint-Simon, 1977), shortly before his death, represents Saint-Simon's spiritual and political testament. Auguste Comte takes the work as the starting point for an important analysis, which would accompany him throughout his life and which he, would further elaborate in later writings, on the need for a spiritual organization for both France and the whole of Europe¹⁰.

The first stage of this reflection is the *Considerations of the Spiritual Power*, published, in March 1826, in the journal *Le Producteur* and then included in the general appendix in the fourth tome of the *Système de politique positive*, which contains

¹⁰ For a more in-depth look at Henri de Saint-Simon's vision of a United Europe, see Swedberg (1994).

Comte's youthful essays on social philosophy. In the *Considerations* Comte emphatically states, on several occasions, what his hopes (*ses espérances*) are for the future of modern peoples:

Thus as a final result of all the foregoing considerations we can verify in detail the fundamental proposition established above in general terms. Whether from an active or a passive point of view, and for both general and special reasons, the social state towards which modern peoples are moving requires - just as much as that of the Middle Ages did - a spiritual (that is, intellectual and moral) organization which is at once European and national. (...) Such are at least my hopes. (Comte, 1998, pp. 226–227).

His hopes (*ésperances*) are to achieve a spiritual organization, both intellectual and moral, that is both national and European. Such an organization departs from the temporal power of industrial and military forces but also from the religious power of the Catholic type. How, then, should we interpret these hopes? How are they characterized and how are they articulated?

If we build on the foundational *Considerations* of 1826, and up to the great mature work the *System of Positive Polity* (1851–1854), we understand that such hopes are not the mere desire for vague future events but rather cognitive activities, marked by affective and moral involvement, that is “setting concrete goals, finding pathways to achieve goals, and tapping one's willpower or agency to move along pathways to the specified goals,” according to the formulation proposed by Victoria McGeer (McGeer, 2004, p. 103).

These actions, as we will see, have the goal also to empower individuals, social classes, and nations.

Three different modes can be enucleated in which hope in a spiritual power, expectations, and desires for the future of modern peoples are articulated in Comte's thought.

Hope is understood by Comte first and foremost as a cognitive and affective activity that directs and guides individual and collective action at both the national and European levels. Comte envisions the establishment of a spiritual power, clearly distinguished from the Catholic Church, and a related spiritual authority, an “intellectual class”. Initially, this class is identified with the *savants*, in accordance with the work of Dobruska (Dobruska/Frey, 1793, p. 50, Comte 1854). In the *System of Positive Polity* Comte will give such intellectual guides the name “priests of humanity”. The hope is that a government of *opinion* (*government of opinion*) will take place and the principles governing different social relations will be defined, so that individuals or different classes will achieve their goals:

“Neither individuals nor the human race are destined to waste their lives in sterile argumentative activity, continually discoursing upon the course of conduct they should follow. It is essentially to action that the totality of humanity is called, except for a minute fraction, which is principally devoted by nature to contemplation” (Comte, 1998, p. 215).

In most cases the attitude of human beings is one of action, and it is therefore necessary to be able to count on a group of individuals, intellectually finer-minded, who no longer allow themselves to be attracted by the very seductive hopes (*aux ésperances si séduisantes*) of theology or metaphysics (Comte, 1854, p. 146) but rather to be led by the “real and precise knowledge of science from astronomy to sociology”.

At the end of his intellectual journey, Comte recognizes and gives space to the emotional dimension. His hope, therefore, is that it is not only rationality that will guide men but also the founding principle of a society, love, will be considered. In his *System of Positive Polity*, he states that the principle that will have to guide humanity is love and that:

one must judge as entirely chimerical the hope raised by a vicious rationality, aspiring to convergence under the sole impulse of the mind, without any participation of the heart (Comte, 1854, p. 370)¹¹.

In his concluding table of the fourth volume on the *Religion of Humanity* Comte affixes the following maxim, almost a flag of positivism: “Love as a principle. The order as a foundation and progress as a goal” (Comte, 1854, p. 159).

But Auguste Comte’s hopes do not consist only of a desire for certain outcomes to occur. In the words of Peter Drahos, Comtian hope, is also “a way of fighting an unintended fate, should that outcome not occur” (Drahos, 2004).

Should it be impossible to establish spiritual power, the unintended fate that awaits humanity is intellectual anarchy (*mental anarchy*) (Comte, 1998, p. 196), the inability to act without a good compass, and finally moral disorganization.

Second, Comte’s hopes involve a transformative and “empowering power of individuals and nations.” In Comte’s view, spiritual power must fulfill a second important function, which is general and specific direction of education, both at the national and European levels. Education conveys the ideas and habits necessary to prepare individuals to live in the new social order. Comte reminds us:

Its main attribution is therefore the supreme direction of education, whether general or special; but above all the first, taking this word in its widest sense, meaning-as it should-the whole system of ideas and habits necessary to prepare individuals for the social order in which they are to live, and to adapt each of them, as far as possible, for the station he is to fill there (Comte, 1998, p. 205).

In our time, the public education of individuals, Comte argues, is even more necessary because “the classification of individuals in the system is much looser” than in the past. Everyone will occupy different social positions, which are less and less ascribed and inherited. And as a result, it will be necessary for individuals to develop specific aptitudes to fit into the socioeconomic system. The simple home education of the past is no longer sufficient (Comte, 1998, p. 226).

Finally, hope has, for Comte, a third meaning, related to morality. To speak of morality, however, is not to understand hope in the Christian sense of the term as a theological virtue, that tenacious virtue, directed toward a future goal that is difficult to attain but not impossible to reach namely, an encounter with Christ and transcendence and, ultimately, divine salvation.

Moral hope, for Comte, concerns the ethical *reorganization of society* (*moral reorganisation of society*). The secular spiritual power will have to impose on individuals and classes a moral doctrine defining the moral duties necessary to settle the inevitable internal conflicts and to limit the spread of individual or class interests (Comte, 1998, pp. 220–221).

¹¹ The translation from French is mine.

According to Comte, industrialized society is marked by the hostility of social classes to each other, such as that between entrepreneurs and workers, between manufactures and peasants, between bankers and merchants, and so on. The solution to such conflict is the imposition of mutual duties in accordance with mutual relations:

The solution of this serious difficulty necessarily demands the continued influence of a moral doctrine imposing reciprocal duties on employers and workers, in conformity with their reciprocal relations (...) It is clear that in these different respects interests that are left entirely to their own guidance, without any other discipline than that resulting from their own antagonism, always end in direct opposition. Whence results, therefore, the fundamental necessity of a moral rule, and consequently of a spiritual authority, which are essential if the interests are to be contained within limits so that, instead of coming into conflict, they converge; limits which they are constantly tending to transcend. It would, moreover, be easy to establish that this moral influence, considered from these two angles, must besides play a major and essential role in the establishment of temporal institutions intended to complete this regularization of social relations. (Comte, 1998, p. 220).

With the process of civilization, human beings become more sensitive to moral issues and more willing to reconcile opposing interests (Comte, 1998, p. 213). And thus, temporal power becomes less important than spiritual power.

Not only do moral doctrines serve to settle conflicts but also to meet the ethical needs of individuals who in an industrialized societies are increasingly mobile, less bound to roles.

As the process of industrialization has advanced, collective activities and relations between peoples belonging to different nations have also increased in Europe, requiring regulation (Comte, 1998, p. 224). These relations must in turn be placed under the jurisdiction of moral power, to prevent one country from thinking solely of its own advantage and interests at the expense or detriment of other countries. Comte also believes that more developed countries must impose themselves on less developed ones so that all of humanity can progress.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917): Hope as a Collectively Constructed Sentiment

We now come to Durkheim, the last founding father of sociology among those considered here, to analyze his reflection on the theme of hope.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was born into a family of rabbis of Alsatian origin. Already in his doctoral thesis, in the chapter on the *Division of Social Labor* (1893), Durkheim devotes a few important pages to the concept of hope, relating it to the concept of happiness however with different meanings than in Dobruska's *Philosophie sociale*.

It is no longer a burning desire to change the society, but rather a collectively constructed feeling that can make us love life (Durkheim, 1960 [1893])¹².

¹² Durkheim, although he argues that the social division of labor in modern societies has improved men's well-being and happiness, also believes that further specialization and socio-economic development will

Compared to the Enlightenment optimism of Moses Dobruska and Saint-Simon, Emile Durkheim no longer shows himself convinced that a new society in which citizens are happy can be achieved within a close time frame. The social and cultural context has changed radically from the era immediately following the Revolution. The process of democratizing society has been very long, arduous, and difficult. At the end of the nineteenth century, democracy in France was still shaky, anti-Semitism was again “une question sociale” (think of the Dreyfuss affair of 1894), and conditions for workers in factories were often deplorable.

The starting consideration (Neves, 2003, p. 170), is that life is generally good, since most people prefer it over death. For human beings, who “individually aspire to well-being and happiness” (Durkheim, 1960. [1893], p. 262) to prefer life and not death, two conditions are necessary. The first is that moments of happiness prevail over moments of unhappiness:

The only experimental fact proving that life is generally good is that the great mass of men prefer it to death. To be so, in the average life, happiness must prevail over unhappiness. If the relations were reversed, neither the attachment of men to life, nor its continuance jostled by the facts at each moment, could be understood (Durkheim, 1960. [1893], p. 245).

The second condition is that in times of unhappiness, through hope, one can perceive and feel that the future can change for the better. However, this condition does not apply to everyone.

The presence or absence of this feeling varies greatly depending on the category of people to which one belongs. In fact, Durkheim no longer distinguishes different social classes but limits himself to two types of human beings: pessimists and optimists.

Pessimists do not believe in hope. To them it represents only an illusion. If people continue to hope for future improvement when things go wrong, it is because they mistakenly believe in hope:

Pessimists, it is true, explain the persistence of this phenomenon by the illusion of hope. According to them, if, despite deceptions of experience, we hold on to life, it is because we are wrongly hoping that the future will make up for the past (Durkheim, 1960. [1893], p. 245).

Pessimists think it is foolish to believe in hope, but they are and remain attached to life, unlike the suicidal person. Pessimism, as pointed out by Carlos Neves, “requires a life lived without *illusions*, a life lived without hope, and as such, limits the power of expectation to the cold and sober remembrance of disappointment” (Neves, 2003, p. 173).

Optimists nurture this constructive feeling, which explains their great love of life and their ability to endure life’s most difficult moments (Durkheim, 1960. [1893], p. 245). Durkheim then delves deeper into this feeling and asks how it arises, how it is formed and, most importantly, why it does not disappear in the light of the misfortunes to which men may fall victim. He states that hope:

not make men happier on average (Durkheim, 1960 [1893], p. 270). Durkheim’s view therefore toward an Enlightenment-style linear and unlimited progress in which Dobruska, Saint-Simon and Comte all still believed is rather skeptical.

It has not miraculously descended from heaven into hearts, but it has had to be formed, like all sentiments, within the action of the facts. If, then, men have learned to hope, if, under a blow of misfortune, they have acquired the habit of turning their eyes toward the future, and of awaiting compensations for their present sufferings, it is because they see that these compensations are frequent, that the human organism is at once supple and too resistant to be easily beaten into despondency, that the moments won by misfortune were exceptional, and that, generally, the balance ended by returning to its former state. Consequently, whatever may be the part of hope in the genesis of the instinct of conservation, the latter is a piercing witness of the relative bounty of life (Durkheim, 1960 [1893], pp. 245–246).

Hope, Durkheim tells us, is not something that comes from nowhere or that “rains down from the sky” but is a feeling that is built up slowly, as indeed are all feelings, which we learn over time, during the course of our lives, “within the scope of the action of social facts.”¹³

Individuals learn to hope, to acquire that habit of turning their gaze toward the future that enables them to expect compensation for their current suffering. And this is possible “because these compensations are frequent,” as individuals experience on themselves. They learn that in most cases—certainly not always—when they have misfortune, then this misfortune at sometime soon will be rewarded by *luck*.

Therefore, they continue to trust and look confidently toward the future. Thus, hope is a collectively constructed and learned sentiment over time, which “should be cultivated and not annihilated” (Neves, 2003, p. 178), capable of making individuals turn their gaze from the past or present of suffering toward the future, which will enable them to regain their stability and make them relish their lost balance. It is a primal feeling because it plays a significant role in the instinct of preservation, belief in change and love of life. At the same time, such feeling is formed by a cognitive and rational process that arises from comparing less happy moments with happier ones, from comparing suffering on the one hand and future compensation for that suffering on the other.

This instinct for self-preservation fails the moment hope no longer exists, when it is erased, when it is no longer taken into consideration. Then exactly the opposite takes over, the despair (*désespoir*) that can lead to suicide. Durkheim defines suicide as “l’acte de désespoir d’un homme qui ne tient plus à vivre” (Durkheim, 1951 [1897], p. 5) i.e., “suicide is preeminently the act of despair of one who does not care to live”.¹⁴ The French *désespoir* is derived from the Latin word *desperare* and means first and foremost the loss of hope (*la perte d’espérance or d’espoir*). It should be translated as *loss of hope*, or *act of despair*, and not as “desperate act”¹⁵, a locution

¹³ Facts as we know for Émile Durkheim are always social and are conceived by the author as behaviors and ways of thinking that are not only external “but they are endowed with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes or not, they impose themselves upon him” (Durkheim, 1982 [1895], p. 51).

¹⁴ The translation is mine.

¹⁵ The best known somewhat debatable English translation of this early definition of suicide in the work *Suicide. A Study in Sociology* by Émile Durkheim is that of John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, published in 1951 by Free Press, which is as follows: “suicide is pre-eminently the desperate act of one who does not care to live” (Durkheim, 1951 [1897], p. 44). Later in the text Durkheim gives a more precise

that rather refers to despair understood as a violent psychological state of the soul, caused by a great affliction that one tries to overcome in vain.

Concluding Remarks

If we summarize the theoretical reflection on hope in the four founding fathers of sociology we have examined, we can detect several similarities and some differences.

First, we came across the concept of *collective hope*, understood as an ambitious *utopian thought* of transformation and *emancipation* of society (cfr. Cook, 2018), with a view to the construction of a new social organization, which would overcome the “social pathologies” of absolutist monarchy and could make human beings happy. This meaning of hope certainly unites Dobruska, Saint-Simon and Comte, albeit with different nuances, as exponents of that Enlightenment culture, which strongly believes in a *never ending progress* through scientific, technological, social and economic development and which “connected happiness to social order” (Haller & Hadler, 2006, p. 170).

As mentioned above, Dobruska hoped for the construction of a society of free citizens in a democratic political regime, based on the universal constitution he devised in his *Philosophie sociale* (1793); Saint-Simon yearned to build a society, both in France and in Europe, led not only by the *useful and productive* social classes - the scientists, artists, and manufacturers -but finally also by philanthropists, distinguished by deep moral principles; finally, Comte emphasized the importance of a society governed initially by scientific knowledge and scientists and finally by what he called *spiritual power* (intellectual and moral).

Such a concept of hope no longer emerges in Emile Durkheim, the first of the four sociologists who achieved an academic institutionalization of his intellectual journey and who broke away from the social philosophical thinking that united the first three authors.

As Max Haller and Markus Hadler sharply pointed out, “with the breakdown of a binding common value system, with secularization, rationalization and individualization processes, happiness more and more comes to be seen as an idiosyncratic goal to be attained in specific ways by each individual” (Haller & Hadler, 2006, p. 170) and not anymore connected to the social order.

Consequently, Durkheim has a much more disenchanted and, shall we say, pessimistic view of social reality than the positivist one.

Second, we found a more specific reflection concerning *individual* hope, as the ability to spur and activate people toward future goals. Such reflection is conducted

definition. He defines it as the “death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result” (Durkheim, 1951 [1897], p. 44). Once he has defined his object of study Durkheim identifies three types of suicide and their social causes, which can cause this act of extreme loss of hope. Egoistic suicide is provoked by a lack of social integration; altruistic suicide, on the other hand, arises from an excess of social integration and identification; and, finally, anomic suicide is provoked by the temporary disintegration of a social order and the failure of external constraints following, for example, an economic crisis, resulting in the loss of value reference points (Durkheim, 1951 [1897], p.44).

by Moses Dobruska and Emile Durkheim while Henri de Saint-Simon and Comte focus rather on collective hope. In Moses Dobruska, individual hope plays a *guiding* role, a beacon that drives human beings to challenge themselves to achieve higher goals than those of their daily lives. Such hope drives them to go beyond the known and into the unknown. Hope thus becomes the highest form of happiness, understood not so much as a temporary realization of one's desires and goals but rather as a dynamic path, pushing one to tap into one's potential and overcome the obstacles of the past and present. In Durkheim, hope turns one's eyes toward the future.

Third, all four authors, albeit in different accents, stress the importance of the *emotional* dimension related to hope. Hope cannot be separated from the sphere of emotions. In Dobruska, hope softens negative emotions, such as the pain of the past and the anxiety of the present, in anticipation of future enjoyment that has not yet been savored. Saint-Simon theorizes festivals of hope as an aesthetic tool that allows for political socialization and passionate involvement of the majority of the population. In this way, the people can adhere to the utopian vision of society and future planning.

In the fourth volume of the *System of Positive Polity*, Comte attributes to hope the task of founding a new religion of humanity, which will have *love* as its own principle. In Durkheim, hope is interpreted as an individual or collective feeling, which is also connected to a cognitive dimension (having the gaze unfold), and which we must learn with constant effort throughout our lives.

Fourth, all the authors highlighted how hope, whether individual or collective, represents a constant tension between the existing condition of the individual or society and the potential that could be realized in the future.

Constant comparison occurs between past and present, on the one hand, and a potential future, on the other. That future is perceived as distant but not unattainable, and the tension that results from the comparison induces *awareness* and *critical reflexivity* about our living in society.

Finally, and this is the fifth point of the analysis, our authors asked about the *political and socioeconomic conditions of a society*, which can either sustain hope or shatter it.

For Dobruska, only free citizens, living in a constitutional democratic society where resources are distributed unequally, can rely on hope, be guided by those higher goals that set them in motion. For Saint-Simon, only a new political class, made up of scientists, artists, and producers, and the establishment of public festivities can give hope for new social organization at the national and European levels. For Comte it is the spiritual power.

For Durkheim, hope, which makes us overcome the misfortunes of the moment and leads us to turn our eyes toward a happier future, must be learned with perseverance and tenacity, based on awareness and comparison of social interactions and institutions. According to Durkheim's masterful analysis in his work on the *Suicide* (1897), the social causes that make hope vacillate are the same as those that lead to suicide: lack of integration, excess of social inclusion and identification, and, finally, anomie.

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