

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

This book offers an exciting reinterpretation of Auguste Comte, the founder of French sociology. Following the development of his philosophy of positivism, Comte later focussed on the importance of the emotions in his philosophy, resulting in the creation of a new religious system, the Religion of Humanity. Andrew Wernick provides the first in-depth critique of Comte's concept of religion and its place in his thinking on politics, sociology and philosophy of science. He places Comte's ideas in the context of post-1789 French political and intellectual history, and of modern philosophy, especially post-modernism. Wernick relates Comte to Marx and Nietzsche as seminal figures of modernity and examines key features of modern and postmodern French social theory, tracing the inherent flaws and disintegration of Comte's system. Wernick offers original and fascinating insights in this rich study which will attract a wide audience from sociologists and philosophers to cultural theorists and historians.

ANDREW WERNICK is Professor of Cultural Studies and Sociology at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. He is director of the Center for the Study of Theory, Culture and Politics, and Director of the Graduate Program in Methodologies for the Study of Western History and Culture. His publications include *Promotional Culture* (1991), *Shadow of Spirit: Religion and Postmodernism* (with P. Berry, 1993) and *Images of Ageing* (with M. Featherstone, 1994).

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity

*The Post-Theistic Program of French  
Social Theory*

---

Andrew Wernick



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK [www.cup.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk)  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA [www.cup.org](http://www.cup.org)  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

© Andrew Wernick 2001

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2001

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Plantin 10/12 pt *System* 3b2 [CE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN 0 521 66272 9 hardback

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of  
French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

In memory of my father, Abram Joseph Wernick

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove . . . One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.

Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

---

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> viii
1 Introduction: rethinking Comte	I
2 The system and its logic (1): from positive philosophy to social science	22
3 The system and its logic (2): from sociology to the subjective synthesis	50
4 Religion and the crisis of industrialism	81
5 Love and the social body	116
6 The path to perfection	153
7 Humanity as ‘ <i>le vrai Grand-Être</i> ’	187
8 Socio-theology after Comte	221
<i>References</i>	267
<i>Index</i>	275

Cambridge University Press

0521662729 - Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic Program of French Social Theory

Andrew Wernick

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Acknowledgments

---

My interest in French social theory had its distant origin in a conversation with Jonathan Bordo. Other friends and colleagues at Trent who have helped shape and enrich this interest include John Fekete, John Hillman, Zsuzsa Baross, Constantin Boundas and Peter Kulchyski. Interchanges with Philippa Berry, Phillip Blond, Mike Featherstone, Mike Gane, Gad Horowitz, Arthur Kroker and Heather Jon Maroney have also been of great benefit over the years. I thank Gad Horowitz for his help and encouragement with the manuscript, an earlier version of which was accepted as a doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto. My thanks also to Mike Gane for his valuable comments, the two anonymous reviewers at Cambridge University Press who saved me from many errors, and Jean Gauthier and Heather Jon Maroney for pointing me towards some key references. My intellectual, as well as every other kind of, debt to the latter is incalculable.