

STEVEN LUKES

Émile Durkheim

His Life and Work

A HISTORICAL
AND CRITICAL STUDY



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Chapter 16

The Reception of Durkheim's Ideas

DURKHEIM's aggressive claims for sociology and their implied, and usually explicit, criticisms of existing disciplines and scholars were not calculated to endear him to the wider academic establishment. Davy has written of 'the militant period of the early days when [Durkheim] was the target of so many arrows and his imperious doctrine was passionately denounced by many'.¹ It is worth examining the hostilities and polemics of the Bordeaux period in some detail, because they formed part of the intellectual context within which Durkheim's thought developed, and because they were themselves a contributing factor to that development.

'THE DIVISION OF LABOUR'

The reception of his doctoral theses by the Sorbonne philosophers at his oral defence gave some indication of future hostilities. According to Bouglé, Boutroux accepted Durkheim's dedication of *The Division of Labour* to himself with a grimace and Paul Janet at one point smote the table and invoked the name of God.²

One observer of the defence described Durkheim's appearance and manner thus:

M. Durckheim [*sic*], tall, thin and fair, is already bald . . . His voice at the start was feeble and subdued, but gradually, under the pressure of the ideas he was expressing, it rose and grew animated and warm, until it seemed capable of filling a vast vessel.³

He was questioned first about his Latin thesis on Montesquieu, the examiners paying tribute to its 'probing study of the

1. Davy, 1967, p. 8.

2. Bouglé, 1930b, p. 281.

3. Report to the Recteur from a M. Perreux dated 11 March 1893 in Durkheim's dossier, Archives Nationales.

texts, the excellence of its method and the clarity of its exposition' but questioning his own 'personal, ingenious and bold views'.⁴ The Doyen's report records that 'the candidate defended himself with much vigour and the jury was unanimous in admiring the precision of his ideas, the sureness of his speech, and the sincerity and the convinced ardour which he manifested throughout'.⁵

On being asked to give an account of *The Division of Labour*,⁶ Durkheim emphasized that he had not departed from an absolute 'mechanicism', or determinism, and that he had discovered a constant index of the division of labour in the legal system: his was a 'purely scientific thesis'. Marion remarked that Durkheim should have ignored morality altogether, saying, 'Your thesis is not acute enough to reach morality. It is a thesis on the *physique des mœurs*.' To this Durkheim replied by justifying his moral starting-point by a 'historical argument' (he had begun from the insufficiency of existing moral codes) and by a 'polemical argument' (moralists attacked sociology and it was necessary to put them right). Paul Janet took up Marion's objection, arguing that Durkheim had substituted *function* for *duty*. Durkheim replied that for the modern and informed *conscience*, to specialize was a duty: 'to be more of a man today is to consent to be an organ'. Waddington then said, 'You bring us nothing that is new: we are in the lower realm of morality . . . You ignore liberty and you do not believe in Duty in general.' To this Durkheim replied, 'That was not my subject. Why ask me questions with which my thesis is not concerned?'

Hitherto the discussion had borne entirely on the relation of Durkheim's work to systems of formal ethics and not at all on its scientific claims; but this, as the writer of the account we are following observed, was in part Durkheim's own fault, 'considering the moral importance which he himself attributes to his researches'. Boutroux, however, then turned to this

4. Doyen's report, 8 March 1893, in *ibid*.

5. *ibid*.

6. The main account I have used here is to be found in the *Revue universitaire*, 2^e année, t.1 (1893), pp. 440-43. (It is, very partially, summarized in Alpert, 1939a, pp. 45-6.)

aspect and asked Durkheim whether his use of indices ('the signs of realities') did not detract from the value of his work, making its results less certain. Durkheim replied as follows: '1. The signs are brought ever closer to living reality: there is a continuous approximation; 2. consequently, concerning the division of labour, we have every day new and more veridical signs; 3. and, as each sign encompasses less and less, we see through them more and more'. Boutroux then observed, concerning the law that the increase in the division of labour is a direct result of the increasing density and volume of population, that the increasing division of labour was not the only possible solution to the problem. 'I did not wish', replied Durkheim, 'to show that my law was the only possible consequence, but rather that it was a necessary consequence. There are others, but they are secondary and weak.' Brochard then returned to the earlier theme and remarked, 'Your main argument against the systems of formal ethics is that none of them can explain charity. How do you yourself explain it? You explain solidarity, not charity.' To this Durkheim replied, 'I do not see the distinction. I define charity as the attachment of a man to something other than himself. Solidarity and charity are related as motion is to force. I am a scientist: I study motion.' Then after a factual objection concerning the law of the division of labour, to which Durkheim briefly replied, Séailles ended by expanding on 'interior morality' and on the latent idealism of Reason.

Durkheim, according to this account, showed throughout, though somewhat impatiently, 'a simple and sincere eloquence'. This was a thesis-defence in which 'the upper hand was almost constantly taken by the candidate'. And according to another observer of the proceedings,

Unprecedented applause broke out more than once. The oratorical powers of our candidate were not a sham. His responses – and this is indeed rare – were often very successful, never ending in evasions or in a cowardly or prudent capitulation. One can certainly say that in this joust he was the equal of his examiners and indeed often had the advantage over them.⁷

In his official report, the Doyen referred to the 'rare distinction' with which Durkheim had defended the propositions in his thesis, and concluded:

M. Durkheim had reflected on them for too long not to have foreseen all the objections to which they could and should give rise. He replied to these with a sureness of thought, a breadth of knowledge and a firmness of speech that were as striking to the public as to the members of the Faculty. A certain nervousness and quivering in his voice – which in no way detracted from the precision of his replies and never became declamatory – added further to the sincerity of his tone and consequently to the authority of his thought. We were agreed in considering M. Durkheim one of the best successful doctoral candidates we have announced for a long time. Needless to add, we were unanimous.⁸

The defence was widely reported and acclaimed: it was taken to indicate a victory for the new science of sociology over the traditionalists at the Sorbonne, who had been compelled, despite their views, to grant a doctorate with unanimity because of the quality of the candidate. *La Petite Gironde* in Bordeaux carried the following report of Durkheim's 'brilliant success':

... we are happy to state that, thanks to M. Durkheim, sociology has finally won the right to be mentioned at the Sorbonne. It was received with great favour by the eminent professors charged with judging M. Durkheim's work and, it may be said, with enthusiasm by the many members of the public who had the good fortune to hear the explanations exchanged in the course of the defence. It was indeed an event of great importance. It could not fail to concern both those interested in the progress of social science and those who are concerned for the good name of our University of Bordeaux, of which M. Durkheim is one of the most hard-working and distinguished members.⁹

The Division of Labour was widely discussed by the students.¹⁰ The early 1890s were a time of widespread unease in France: young men actively sought ideals, whether these were religious,

8. Doyen's report, *ibid.*

9. From Durkheim's dossier, Bordeaux.

10. Bouglé, *Les Pages libres*, 5 October 1897, quoted in Lasserre, 1913, pp. 186–7.

secular-religious or political. Durkheim, like T. H. Green at Oxford, offered them an ideal that claimed to be both spiritually appealing and socially relevant, though many found it deeply objectionable. It was not surprising that 'appearing in this context of moral uneasiness, the initial impact of *The Division of Labour* was one of shock'.¹¹ Its message was striking; as Bouglé put it:

'The origin of your malaise', the author seemed to say, 'is elsewhere than at the bottom of your hearts. To restore equilibrium you must establish new social relations. Encourage the normal effects of specialization. Equalize the conditions of competition between individuals. We must rebuild anew professional groups. Salvation lies without and this is how it may be achieved.'¹²

Both Durkheim's method and his solution struck many as disconcerting. Bouglé writes of one student, who was something of an aesthetic individualist, 'walking off his indignation in the corridors of the Sorbonne, denouncing such formulae of Durkheim's as "Man must be taught to play his role as an organ"'.¹³ But others were strongly attracted - Bouglé himself, Simiand, Fauconnet and the others who were to form the select band of disciples grouped around the *Année sociologique*. Of them Bouglé writes that 'obsessed . . . by the problem of national reconstruction, of secular emancipation, of economic and social organization, and seeking, on the other hand, a path equidistant from over-abstract speculation and over-minute erudition, [they] chose to take their stand with him, and work under his direction to advance the scientific understanding of societies.'¹⁴

The opposition of the Sorbonne moral philosophers was largely due to Durkheim's own hostility to the purely *a priori* discussion of moral questions. From an early date, as has been seen, he opposed the methods of 'the large majority of contemporary French moralists and economists': they began 'from the abstract, autonomous individual, depending only on

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.*

13. *ibid.* (The student was Henri Vaugeois.)

14. Bouglé, 1938, p. 35.

himself, without historical antecedents or social context' and thence deduced 'how he is able to conduct himself, whether in his economic relations or in his moral life'.¹⁵ And indeed, Mauss states that it was the opposition of moralists and economists that kept him away from Paris for so long.¹⁶

The Division of Labour caused 'a great noise in the philosophical world',¹⁷ but it was with the publication of *The Rules* in 1894 that the polemics really began. The boldness and intransigence of Durkheim's style, evident in both works, led many of his first readers to react strongly against what they saw as his hypostasization of the group and his emphasis on what seemed to be mechanical and *sui generis* social forces that could only be known externally by their effects, of which individuals were unaware and before which they were powerless. As he wrote in the preface to the second edition of *The Rules* in 1901:

When this book appeared for the first time, it aroused lively controversy. Current ideas, disconcerted, at first resisted so fiercely that for a time it was impossible to make ourselves understood. On the very points on which we had expressed ourselves most explicitly, views were freely attributed to us which had nothing in common with our own, and we were held to be refuted when they were refuted. Although we had repeatedly asserted that the *conscience*, both individual and social, was for us in no way substantial, but only a more or less systematized collection of phenomena *sui generis*, we were charged with realism and ontologism. Although we had expressly stated and abundantly repeated that social life is constituted wholly of *représentations*, we have been accused of eliminating the mental element from sociology.¹⁸

15. 1890a, p. 451. Cf. 1902b, p. 380; tr. 1933b, p. 386.

16. He resented his exile from Paris. After being passed over for an appointment at the Collège de France, he wrote to Léon of his great regret at 'seeing myself separated *sine die* from Paris, where I would find resources and means of action that I do not have at Bordeaux' (letter dated 19 August 1897). (The appointment was a chair in Social Philosophy and the successful candidate Jean Izoulet: see *Journal officiel*, 4 August 1897.)

17. Sorel, 1895, p. 1. It also commanded much admiration. Lucien Herr, for example, wrote that it denoted 'an understanding that is as yet rare of the social realities of our time' (Herr, 1893).

18. 1901c, p. ix; tr. 1938b, p. li (S.L.).

Such interpretations of his thought were evidently offensive, especially to moralists and philosophers in the neo-Kantian philosophical atmosphere of the time. He was quite widely regarded as an obscurantist and an anti-individualist.

THE DEBATE WITH TARDE

The most notable and persistent of these attacks came from Gabriel Tarde, a magistrate, criminologist, statistician and sociologist, who was from 1894 director of the criminal statistics office of the Ministry of Justice (and in that capacity the provider of some of the statistical data for *Suicide*). Tarde had for twenty years been engaged in a one-man campaign against the various forms of biologism in sociology – Darwinism, organicism, transformism – that he found in the work of such writers as Spencer, Espinas, Worms (whom he actually converted), de Greef, Gumpłowicz, Novicow, Lombroso, Lilienfeld and Roberty. At the same time he had been developing his own system of sociology, founded entirely on psychology, or, as he was later to call it, 'Interpsychology', and, in particular, on the notion of imitation. Within this elastic concept Tarde proposed to encompass the whole of social behaviour, analysed at a microscopic level. For Tarde, it has rightly been said that 'Everything in the social world is explained in terms of beliefs and desires that are imitated, spread and susceptible of increasing and diminishing, and these rises and falls are measured by statistics'.¹⁹ All is reduced to the 'elementary social fact' of imitation, supplemented by spontaneous, and unexplained, 'inventions', random products of

19. Essertier, 1930, p. 204. On Tarde, see Clark, T. N. (ed.), *Gabriel Tarde: On Communication and Social Influence* (Chicago and London, 1969); the sections on him in Essertier, op. cit., and Barnes and Becker, 1938; Davis, M. M., *Gabriel Tarde* (New York, 1906); Parodi, 1919, pp. 117-19; Bouglé, C., 'Un Sociologue individualiste: Gabriel Tarde', *Revue de Paris*, 15 May 1905; Worms, R., 'La Philosophie sociale de Gabriel Tarde', *RP*, 1906; Hughes, E. C., 'Tarde's "Psychologie économique": An Unknown Classic by a Forgotten Sociologist', *AJS*, 1961; and Milet, J., *Gabriel Tarde et la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris, 1970). On Tarde *versus* Durkheim, see Essertier, 1930, Barnes and Becker, 1938, Benoit-Smullyan, 1937, pp. 488-510, Blondel, 1928, and Milet, op. cit., pp. 247-57.

genius (the 'supreme accident') to supply the *deus ex machina* of social change. Despite the poverty and superficiality of his explanatory framework, and despite the fact that he did not attempt a psychology of imitation but rather took it as his starting point, Tarde's work is full of striking and suggestive observations and had (it is worth adding) a notable influence in America.²⁰ Tarde's sociological system reached its maturest expression²¹ at precisely the time that Durkheim's first original writings were appearing, and it is not surprising that, given Durkheim's methodological views, Tarde should have reacted strongly against them, as he had previously reacted against biologism, and that he should have waged a protracted and highly polemical battle against them. Tarde wrote as a methodological individualist: everything in society could be reduced to and explained in terms of individuals. As Bouglé wrote of Tarde, 'In his eyes, everything stemmed from the individual, and everything came back to him: the individual is the first and last piece of the edifice; he is the alpha and omega of the system.'²²

Durkheim defended his views against Tarde with considerable vigour and indeed his formulation of them was to some extent determined by the terms of the debate laid down by Tarde. He did not, however, enjoy these polemics. Characteristically, but not entirely unjustifiably, he held that Tarde misconstrued his thought.²³ Thus he wrote to Léon in 1898, asking him to publish his article 'Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives'²⁴ as quickly as possible because 'Tarde has announced to me his intention of attacking me again, but I have definitely decided not to reply any more,

20. In particular on E. A. Ross, J. M. Baldwin, C. H. Cooley and F. H. Giddings; and also on the sociologists of the Chicago school, as well as on many American anthropologists, especially Franz Boas.

21. See, for instance, *Les Lois de l'imitation* (Paris, 1890), Tarde, 1895a, *L'Opposition universelle* (Paris, 1897), Tarde, 1898a, and Tarde, 1898b.

22. art. cit., p. 313. Cf. Lukes, 1968c.

23. According to Davy, '... he viewed with ... genuine suffering certain criticisms relying on a distortion of his thought' (Davy, 1960a, pp. 17-18).

24. 1898b.

judging that this debate has lasted long enough. I would therefore have preferred that the little work I am sending you should not appear after the attack, so that it would not look like a reply.²⁵ Moreover, certain personal factors no doubt aggravated the controversy. Tarde was something of a dilettante, who dabbled in literary activities and frequented Parisian *salons*; he was also hostile to socialism and in favour of an intellectual aristocracy. Greatly influenced by Renan, he followed the latter's belief that 'truth lies in the nuance'; his purportedly scientific writing was often fanciful and epigrammatic and his intellectual activity was far from single-minded and systematic. Indeed, when Tarde was appointed to the chair in modern philosophy at the Collège de France, Durkheim wrote to Léon in the following acid tones: 'I deeply regret, for the sake of both sociology and philosophy, both of which have an equal interest in remaining distinct, a confusion which shows that many good minds still fail to understand what each should be.'²⁶

The first shot was fired by Tarde in a generous and respectful review of *The Division of Labour*²⁷ (a 'remarkable and profound study'), which he criticized on three counts. First, its account of social evolution left out 'wars, massacres and brutal annexations',²⁸ considering only intra-national and not international relations. Changes in social structure were rather the result of annexations and conquests, which were caused by 'ambition, cupidity, love of glory, proselytizing fanaticism'.²⁹ Second, the division of labour was 'the daughter of genius', resulting, not from the increasing volume and density of societies, but from the presence of inventiveness, creating new branches of activity. Thus Durkheim 'took too little account' of 'the accidental, the irrational, . . . the accident of genius'.³⁰ Third, and most interestingly, he questioned Durkheim's opposition of mechanical and organic solidarity, arguing that the division

25. Letter undated.

26. Letter dated 7 February 1900.

27. Tarde, 1893, reprinted in Tarde, 1895d.

28. *ibid.*, p. 187.

29. *ibid.*, p. 190.

30. *ibid.*, p. 187.

of labour as such could neither socialize nor moralize men, and that in fact it merely 'has the constant effect of developing and strengthening, under new forms, [the] intellectual and moral community [of beliefs and sentiments] by multiplying the objects of this common fund and notably facilitating their diffusion'.³¹ Differentiation presupposed community.

There followed an attack on Tarde by Durkheim in the first chapter of *The Rules*, where, after defining a social fact in terms of its power of external coercion and observing that if it is general, that is, common to members of a society, it is only so 'because it is collective (that is, more or less obligatory)', he remarked in a footnote how remote his definition was from that which was at 'the basis of M. Tarde's ingenious system'. His researches, he wrote, did not support Tarde's view of the preponderant influence of imitation in the genesis of collective facts, and, in any case, the diffusion of social facts, which the notion of imitation purported to explain, was itself the consequence of their obligatory character. ('No doubt, every social fact is imitated . . . but that is because it is social, i.e. obligatory'). He added that 'one may wonder whether the word 'imitation' is indeed fitted to refer to a propagation due to a coercive influence. Under this single term one is confusing very different phenomena which need to be distinguished'.³²

Tarde reacted strongly to Durkheim's definition of social facts, with a number of arguments³³: the externality of the social fact does not apply to all individuals taken together; he could not make sense of Durkheim's notion of the social fact as being 'external to its individual manifestations'; social phenomena *are* transmitted from individual to individual (Durkheim admitted it); and the defining notion of constraint is based on a narrow analogy that led Durkheim to recognize as social bonds 'only the relations of master to subject, professor to student, parents to children, without having any regard to free relations among equals' and imitation arising from

31. *ibid.*, p. 193.

32. 1901c, pp. 14-16: tr. 1938b, pp. 9-11 (S.L.). Cf. Durkheim's critique of Tarde's use of 'imitation' in *Suicide*, ch. 4.

33. In Tarde, 1894; repr. in Tarde, 1898a, pp. 63-94; also Tarde 1895a, pp. vi-vii, and Tarde, 1895c, *passim*.

spontaneous interaction.³⁴ He accused Durkheim of reifying the social group ('Are we going to return to the realism of the Middle Ages?')³⁵ and argued that the social whole was an illusion and that Durkheim's 'social realism' was counterfactual, mystical, metaphysical and incompatible with positivism. Social phenomena were immanent in the consciousnesses and memories of the associated individuals and were no more exterior to them than was the wave to the drops of water which composed it.³⁶ The source of Durkheim's illusion, wrote Tarde, was his assumption (derived, as we have seen, from Boutroux) that there were distinct levels of reality. Ultimately, Tarde consistently believed, everything would be explained in terms of '... cells ... molecules ... atoms'; Durkheim's 'postulate that the simple relation of several beings could itself become a new being superior to others' was 'a chimerical conception'.³⁷ To Durkheim's slogan: 'every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure the explanation is false',³⁸ Tarde replied, 'in social matters, every clear explanation must necessarily be erroneous'.³⁹ To Durkheim's principle that psychological explanations left out the specifically social element, Tarde replied: 'yes, if one wants to account for collective phenomena by the psychology and logic of individuals alone, and only of existing individuals; but not if one has regard also for the psychology and logic of masses and of the dead' (*sic*).⁴⁰ To Durkheim's objection that psychology could not explain the evolution of societies, Tarde replied that this could be reduced to the imitation of ideas of genius.⁴¹

34. Tarde, 1893a, p. vi; cf. Tarde 1898a, pp. 71-2. This objection resembles that of Piaget, 1932.

35. *ibid.*, cf.: 'M. Durkheim confronts us like a scholastic. Sociology does not mean ontology' (*ibid.*). According to Albert Thibaudet, this charge against Durkheim of scholasticism was to become a commonplace at the Sorbonne in the early 1900s (*La République des professeurs*, Paris, 1927, p. 223).

36. Tarde, 1898a, p. 73.

37. *ibid.*, p. 76.

38. 1901c, p. 128; tr. 1938b, p. 104.

39. *ibid.*, p. 77.

40. *ibid.*

41. *ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

Against Durkheim's view that social phenomena could be isolated and methodically observed, he wrote that 'in sociology we have, through a rare privilege, intimate knowledge both of that element which is our individual *conscience* and of that compound which is the sum of individual *consciences*'; and to Durkheim's maxim: 'remove individuals and society remains'⁴² he countered: 'remove the individual and nothing remains of the social'.⁴³ To these latter two statements of Tarde, Durkheim responded in *Suicide*. To the first he replied that mental phenomena are not directly knowable and must be reached 'little by little by devious and complex procedures like those used by the sciences of the external world'; to the second, which he called 'arbitrary', he replied that 'proofs supporting this statement are lacking and discussion is therefore impossible', but that it would be only too easy to oppose to it the feeling of many that society is not a 'form spontaneously assumed by individual nature as it expands outwards, but . . . an antagonistic force restricting individual natures and resisted by them'. Moreover, if Tarde were right, if 'we had really only to open our eyes and take a good look to perceive at once the laws of the social world, sociology would be useless or at least very simple'.⁴⁴ But the evidence here was against Tarde; distinctively social causes could not just be directly observed, but they could be discovered by the use of scientific procedures. As we have seen, Durkheim saw no point in continuing this dispute with Tarde; but the 1898 article and the second preface to *The Rules* (1901) are to be seen as comprehensive replies to Tarde and Durkheim's other critics, discussed below.

He crossed swords with Tarde in a much more acrimonious fashion in connection with his own views about the normality of crime ('a factor in public health, an integral part of all healthy societies'⁴⁵), views which were regarded by many

42. 1895a: tr. in 1938b, p. 102 (S.L.).

43. Quoted in 1897a, pp. 350-51: tr. 1951a, p. 311 (S.L.), from Tarde 1895c, repr. in Tarde, 1898a, p. 75. Cf. Tarde, 1895a, p. vi. 'Remove the professors and I do not see what remains of the university.'

44. *ibid.* (S.L.).

45. 1901c, p. 83: tr. 1938b, p. 67. Cf. 'Crime . . . must no longer be conceived as an evil that cannot be too much suppressed' *ibid.*, p. 89: tr. p. 72).

contemporaries as both startling and offensive. As George Sorel put it, Durkheim's principle that 'it is normal that there should be criminality, so long as this attains and does not exceed a certain level' scandalized 'moral persons'⁴⁶ and Durkheim himself observed that 'this affirmation has . . . disconcerted certain persons and may have seemed, on superficial examination, to shake the foundations of morality'.⁴⁷ Tarde disputed⁴⁸ that it might be justifiable to seek to suppress what does good, and that the normal may be defined in terms of the general (the morbid is most often the general, while the normal is the highest state a given being can attain, which for society is 'the ideal . . . peace in justice and light, . . . the complete extermination of crime, vice, ignorance, poverty, corruption'⁴⁹), and he also disputed that human ideals can be determined by means of science which was, in the hands of Durkheim ('*mon subtil contradicteur*'), the 'cold product of abstract reason, alien, by hypothesis, to every inspiration of the conscience and the heart'.⁵⁰ More specifically, Tarde disputed the following propositions which he attributed to Durkheim: (1) that the contemporary increase in crime was normal; (2) that crime was useful because it prevented the moral conscience from being too severe on insignificant acts; (3) that if certain crimes became rarer, the corresponding punishments would increase; (4) that crime and genius were two aspects of the same mental state; and (5) that one should be exclusively concerned with 'low and rampant crime, that is hated and condemned'.

Durkheim's reply, 'Crime and Social Health',⁵¹ was sharp and bitter. First, he denied that he had asserted any of these

46. Sorel, 1895, p. 176. Compare the view of Menachem Horovitz, the sociologist who heads Israel's probation service, according to whom, 'the normalization of the Jewish people in their own State has brought a normal crime rate. Crime is a normal phenomenon' (reprinted in the *Sunday Times*, 9 May 1971).

47. 1897a, p. 413; tr. 1951a, p. 361 (S.L.).

48. Tarde, 1895b.

49. Tarde, 1895b, p. 160. 'What,' said Tarde, 'about the old distinction between good and evil?' (ibid.).

50. ibid., p. 161.

51. 1895c.

five propositions and agreed with Tarde (*'mon éminent critique'*) in judging them false. He then restated his views on crime, arguing that crime was normal because it was 'linked to the fundamental conditions of all social life', for in all societies some individuals must diverge from the collective type, among which divergences some must be criminal; and that the existence of crime was generally useful, either indirectly or directly: indirectly (as in most cases) because it 'could only cease to exist if the *conscience collective* dominated individual *consciences* with such an ineluctable authority that all moral change would be rendered impossible'⁵²; and directly (and rarely) when the criminal was an innovator, the precursor of a new morality. Tarde was too preoccupied with contemporary morality; in a wider view the normality of crime seemed less paradoxical and was a condition of changes in morality. Moreover, Durkheim argued, morality was a social function and, for the sake of social equilibrium, must be limited in influence (for instance, *too much* respect for individual dignity rendered military discipline impossible). Finally, Durkheim disposed of two minor arguments of Tarde (*'mon ingénieux contradicteur'*) against his definition of normality: to the objection that illness is general, he replied that illnesses vary, and it is a limited resistance to illness that is general; and to the objection that an inferior society composed of inferior people could not survive but would have to be called healthy, he replied that such a society would itself be abnormal, that 'it is socially normal that in every society there should be psychologically abnormal individuals' and that the normality of crime is only a particular instance of this general truth. The conditions of individual and social health were very different, even contrary to one another. This, he observed, followed from his own position that there was 'a deep dividing line between the social and the psychological',⁵³ but it could also be seen in the simple fact that the succession of generations implied the death of individuals.

In conclusion, Durkheim turned to the origin of the dispute between Tarde and himself. It sprang, he wrote, 'above all

52. *ibid.*, p. 321.

53. *ibid.*, p. 323.

from the fact that I believe in science and M. Tarde does not'.⁵⁴ Tarde wished to 'reduce it to being nothing more than an intellectual amusement, at best capable of showing us what is possible and impossible, but incapable of use for the positive regulation of conduct. If it has no other practical utility [than this], it is not worth the trouble it costs.' Tarde gave too many hostages to the enemies of science and thus allowed there to be placed above reason 'sensation, instinct, passion, all the base and obscure parts of ourselves'. To condone this was mysticism - 'the rule of anarchy in the practical order, because it is the reign of fantasy in the intellectual order'.⁵⁵

Tarde replied to this,⁵⁶ insisting that Durkheim ('*le savant professeur*') had no objective basis for deciding what was a *normal* crime-rate and arguing that Durkheim's identification of crime and deviance was an *a priori* dogma. He reacted to Durkheim's bitter charge that he did not believe in science, by insisting on the distinction between science and the intellect, on the one hand, and moral character and the heart, on the other. Scientific knowledge, he wrote, 'enlightens both the good and the wicked and serves all ends, good and bad' and 'if mysticism consists in not giving science and reason their due - and I am certainly not guilty of this - the anti-mysticism, calling itself positivist but scorned by Auguste Comte under the name of "pedantocracy", anti-mysticism which consists in not giving their due to the heart, to love, to national loyalties, and also to imagination, the source of hypotheses and theories as well as of poetry and art, that is more disastrous still. And indeed, what can my eminent adversary have in mind but this personified abstraction of Science, pure Science?'⁵⁷ He was himself, Tarde added, too well disposed towards science and reason to adore them.

The hostilities continued, with particularly strong attacks by Durkheim on Tarde in the course of *Suicide* and in the second of the 1900 articles on the history of French sociology, in which he repeated the charge that Tarde's work was unscientific,

54. *ibid.*

55. *ibid.*

56. Tarde, 1898a, pp. 158-61.

57. *ibid.*, p. 160.

putting chance and contingency at the centre of social life, and being rather 'a very particular form of speculation in which imagination plays the preponderant role and thought does not regard itself as constrained by the regular obligations of proof or the control of facts . . . caprice . . . is permitted to thought'.⁵⁸ In 1901, Tarde published an article on 'Social Reality',⁵⁹ arguing that there was indeed a social reality, but it was composed of psychological states and that sociology should concern itself with 'belief, desire and imitation'.⁶⁰ He rejected the charges of 'caprice and the negation of science', arguing that sociology 'must show the emptiness of sham formulas, of sham historical laws which would place insurmountable obstacles in the way of individual wills'⁶¹ and he once more rejected Durkheim's account of the external and constraining character of social phenomena (such as a religion, language or custom), insisting that they were rather to be seen in terms of 'the similarity and simultaneity of multiple central imprints produced by an accumulation and a consolidation of individual actions'.⁶² Tarde added, in a sly footnote, that he was glad to see that 'the learned professor of sociology' had, since the foundation of the *Année*, come much nearer to the psychological conception of social facts.⁶³

This drew a reply from Durkheim, in the form of a letter to the editor of the *Revue philosophique*.⁶⁴ If Tarde meant by this

58. 1900b, p. 650. Cf. also 1906a (1), where Durkheim offers a brief and incisive critique of Tarde's system, arguing that Tarde's notion of 'interpsychology' was 'arbitrary and confused', that the study of individual interactions must lead to a search for some means of observing them objectively and discovering the conditions of their variation, and that Tarde's thought moved within a vicious circle: 'imitation, the source of social life, itself depends on social factors; it presupposes what it produces'. Thus: 'One imitates superiors, but superiority is already a social institution, so that "imitation" is empty and non-explanatory. One must know why men imitate; and the causes which lead men to imitate and obey are already social' (pp. 134-5).

59. Tarde, 1901.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 468.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 464.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

64. 1901d.

last suggestion that he shared the view that social phenomena could be immediately explained by individual mental states, not a line of his supported it: 'I always see the same dividing-line between *individual* psychology and sociology, and the numerous facts we have had to catalogue every year in the *Année sociologique* only confirm me in this view.' If, however, Tarde meant that social life was 'a system of *représentation* of mental states, providing it is understood that these *représentations* are *sui generis*, different in nature from those which constitute the mental life of the individual, and subject to their own laws which individual psychology could not predict', then this was indeed his view, and always had been. Sociology was 'a special psychology, with its own object and a distinctive method'.⁶⁵

The final confrontation between Tarde and Durkheim came in 1903-4 at the École des Hautes Études Sociales, when Durkheim and Tarde each gave a lecture on 'Sociology and the Social Sciences' and, at a third meeting, debated with each other, maintaining, according to the published report, 'with much heat their respective theses'.⁶⁶ Durkheim's lecture argued that sociology was the daughter of philosophy ('born in the womb of the Comtist philosophy, of which it is the logical completion'⁶⁷) but must now specialize in studies of complex, concrete phenomena, rather than seeking abstract, general laws. Special disciplines must become truly sociological sciences, becoming infused with the ideas evolved by social philosophy. Tarde's lecture argued that the study of social phenomena had to refer to 'elementary acts' studied by 'intermental psychology', or 'elementary sociology', which was presupposed by, and an indispensable guide for, the special social sciences. Elementary sociology, thus understood, was both general and central: the special social sciences would become objective as they were 'psychologized'.⁶⁸

65. This, as we have seen, was the view set out in the article on 'Individual and Collective *Représentations*' (1898b) and had, in fact, been fully developed only *after* the first edition of *The Rules*.

66. 1904b, p. 86.

67. *ibid.*, p. 83.

68. *ibid.*, pp. 85-6.

In their joint discussion, Tarde began by admitting the value of deriving general laws by means of the comparative method, but insisted on the importance of the microscopic study of intermental psychology. Durkheim replied that general sociology could only be the synthesis of the results of particular sciences and as yet one could not prejudge these results, nor whether they would be obtained by intermental psychology. He went on,

M. Tarde claims that sociology will arrive at such and such results; but we are not able to say what the elementary social fact is, in the present state of our knowledge. We know too little, and the construction of the elementary social fact in these conditions can only be arbitrary. Whatever the value of this intermental psychology, it is unacceptable that it should exert a sort of directing influence over the special disciplines of which it must be the product.

Tarde replied that laws could be formulated without sciences being definitively constituted. The social sciences did not owe their progress to certain rules of objective method, but to the extent to which they had moved in the direction of psychology. Tarde then proceeded to repeat that there was nothing in social life except acts between individuals. Did M. Durkheim think otherwise?

If you do think so [Tarde continued], I understand your method: it is pure ontology. The debate between us is that of nominalism and scholastic realism. I am a nominalist. There can only be individual actions and interactions. The rest is nothing but a metaphysical entity, and mysticism.

Durkheim retorted that M. Tarde was confusing two different questions and refused to say anything about a problem which he had not touched on and which, moreover, had nothing to do with the discussion.⁶⁹

OTHER CRITICISMS

We have covered the Durkheim-Tarde debate⁷⁰ in some detail, not only for its intrinsic interest and importance, but

69. 1904b, p. 86-7. Tarde died in 1904. Eleven years later, Durkheim could be more generous: see 1915a: tr. in 1960c.

70. This has nowhere been fully reconstructed hitherto (though Benoit-Smullyan, 1937 and 1938, and Milet, *op. cit.*, offer partial summaries).

also because Tarde's reactions to Durkheim's ideas were identical to those of many of the first readers of *The Rules*. Thus, for example, among early reactions, the socialist historian of German thought, Charles Andler, objected to Durkheim's social realism (calling it 'mysticism'), observing that it was just a sociological version of the mistaken economic '*chosisme*' of Marx,⁷¹ and declaring himself quite unconvinced by Durkheim's claims for sociology; Marcel Bernès also disputed Durkheim's account of social reality, and in particular his emphasis on externality and constraint, arguing that he should have considered the beliefs and desires of individuals⁷²; James Tufts and Gustavo Tosti, in the United States, argued similarly,⁷³ the former quoting John Stuart Mill against Durkheim ('Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance'⁷⁴); Alfred Fouillée observed that 'the concept of society as existing outside individuals is pure metaphysics'⁷⁵; while Sorel criticized Durkheim's 'mysterious alchemy'.⁷⁶ Even Durkheim's fellow editor of the *Année*, François Simiand, offered a mild criticism of his 'sociological metaphysics'.⁷⁷ Another critic wrote that 'this pursuit of pure ontology, despite its avoidance of hypostasizing

71. Andler, 1896a, especially p. 258. But see Durkheim, 1896a, where 'without wishing to prolong the discussion', he 'rejects absolutely the ideas which M. Andler attributes to me'. See also Bouglé's defence of Durkheim (Bouglé, 1896b and c), for which Durkheim thanked Bouglé, stressing the need to separate oneself from the charlatans who had exploited the vogue of sociology and were discrediting it (letter dated 27 March 1897).

72. Bernès, 1895, especially p. 239.

73. Tufts, 1896, and Tosti, 1898a and 1898b. Cf. Durkheim's reply (1898d) to Tosti's charge that he had not realized that 'a compound is explained both by the character of its elements and the law of their combination': 'I do not at all deny that individual natures are the components of the social fact. It is only a question of knowing if, in combining . . . they are not transformed by the very fact of the combination.'

74. *A System of Logic* (9th edn London, 1875), vol. II, p. 469.

75. *Le Mouvement positiviste et la conception sociologique du monde* (Paris, 1896), p. 248.

76. Sorel, 1895, p. 19.

77. Simiand, 1898. Cf. Gaston Richard (at this time still a Durkheimian), in the first volume of the *Année*: 'Let us beware of sociological metaphors' (p. 405).

the social, personifies it none the less ...⁷⁸ In Germany, Ferdinand Tönnies observed that Tarde, while he was mistaken in failing to recognize that social phenomena must have features independent of individual *consciences*, was right in criticizing Durkheim for constructing sociological concepts without psychological foundations.⁷⁹

Lucien Herr, the eminent and immensely influential socialist librarian of the École Normale (who in 1886 had brought an article by Sir James Frazer on Totemism to Durkheim's notice⁸⁰), summed up the substance of all these criticisms in a magisterial review of *The Rules* in the *Revue universitaire*. He began by insisting on his profound admiration for Durkheim's sincerity, character and mind and on the extent to which he agreed with Durkheim's critique of contemporary sociology, with his scientific aims for sociology and his view of methodology, but he then continued:

when he goes on to define the elementary social fact, when he discerns in it a reality exterior and superior to individuals because exterior and anterior to *one* individual, when he attributes to rules, that is to generalized abstractions, to signs or symbols, that is to conventions between individuals, an imperative and coercive power, when he affirms that an emotion common to a collectivity of individuals has for its substratum not the sum of these individuals taken one by one, but the collectivity of those individuals, when he poses as a principle of this new science ways of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, that is to say to all individuals, and when he provides sociology with the subject-matter of social facts thus defined, then not only do I no longer give my support, but I no longer understand, and I refuse to recognize as scientific anything that will be built on this basis, with these materials. I am certain that M. Durkheim will himself be horrified by the phantom of the old realist metaphysics, the day he clearly perceives it behind his formulas and images.⁸¹

These sorts of criticism were frequently to be advanced,

78. Mazel, 1899, p. 677.

79. Tönnies, 1898 (1929), p. 275.

80. Mauss, 'Notice biographique: Lucien Herr', *AS*, n.s., 2 (1927), p. 9.

81. Herr 1894, p. 487.

throughout Durkheim's career and subsequently.⁸² Moreover, Durkheim brought the best out of his critics. As one writer has justly observed, 'It is from the individualists that the most acute and cogent criticisms of the Durkheim school have come. In fact, the best statements of the individualistic position are to be found in the large literature of Durkheim criticism in France.'⁸³

As we have seen, Durkheim saw his *Suicide* as triumphantly vindicating his claims for sociology, his methodology, and, in particular, his social realism. His attitude to the hostility he knew it was bound to bring forth is interestingly revealed in a letter to Bouglé written in 1897. Bouglé had suggested that the extreme way in which Durkheim presented his thesis might antagonize some of his readers. Durkheim replied:

There is much truth in your remarks. It would perhaps have been more politic not to present things in this form. But what can I do? It is in my nature to present ideas by the point rather than by the hilt (*par la pointe plutôt que par la poignée*). What is more, it seems to me impossible that, if you pursue your ideas to their conclusion, you will not arrive at a formula more or less like mine. If society is something other than the individual, it has a different basis (*substrat*) from the individual, though it could not exist without individuals. That seems to me a truism. It is not in any one individual that society is to be found, but in all the individuals associated in a determinate manner. It is not, therefore, by analysing the individual *conscience* that one can do sociology. Now, in the first place, isn't it necessary to pursue one's ideas to their conclusion? Besides being necessary, it also turns out to be desirable, for method thereby rests on a more solid foundation. It is not only as part of a necessary technique (*artifice*) and in order to avoid the danger of substituting one's own opinions for realities that one should consider social phenomena from the outside; but because they really extend beyond the individual. Is it not then of some interest to show that morality is in part external to individuals? In this way many phenomena are explained. But as you say, however basically simple the proposition may be, it is natural that it should be resisted to begin with.

82. See Essertier, 1927b, and Lukes, 1968c, for references. There is a broad anti-social-realist tradition stretching from Tarde to Popper and Homans.

83. Benoît-Smullyan, 1938 p. 51.

Since Hobbes, at least, the idea is latent in all attempts at sociology; but what a delay and what difficulties have attended its emergence, while it is evident that thinkers were conscious of its necessity!⁸⁴

In addition, Durkheim's views on crime met, as we have seen, with strong opposition.⁸⁵ His general scientific aims also came under attack from a number of quarters; some objected to the implied determinism, others to the extent of his scientific ambitions. Still others, such as Gustave Belot,⁸⁶ objected to the narrowness of his characterization of morality. *Suicide* and the first volumes of the *Année* provoked many such criticisms, though they also induced widespread admiration in France (and much incomprehension abroad).⁸⁷

In the pages of the *Revue socialiste*, Charles Péguy advanced a characteristic and distinctively socialist critique of *Suicide*, which is of both historical and intrinsic interest. After criticizing Durkheim for writing of theft without considering 'the unceasing theft of surplus labour committed by the majority of employers', Péguy referred to Durkheim's assertion that egoistic suicide, seen as a social sickness, had been greatly aggravated in 'our western civilization' since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Durkheim's remedy was to reconstitute society, and, wrote Péguy,

doubtless he regards it as sufficient to reconstitute corporate groups into true communities. M. Durkheim forgets that it is not in vain that men have acquired the taste for universal harmony and lost the taste for more particular harmonies. In order that the baker of today should desire to form a close association with his neighbouring bakers, it is necessary that he sense, above his single

84. Letter dated 6 July 1897.

85. In addition to Tarde's critique, see that of the Italian criminologist, Enrico Ferri, in *Sociologia criminale* (Turin, 1900; 5th edn 1929), vol. 1, pp. 157-8 and 193-202; and *L'omicida* (Turin, 1895; 5th edn 1925), pp. 445-7.

86. Belot, 1894, pp. 414-15.

87. See especially Small, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1902a, 1902b, etc., Hinkle, 1960, and the reactions to Durkheim's views from scholars from many countries to be found in *Sociological Papers* (The Sociological Society: Macmillan, London, 1905), pp. 204-56 (in response to Durkheim, 1905c). (For list of these scholars see p. 578, fn.). Cf. Chapter 25, below.

corporation, the single and harmonious City of which his corporation will merely be an organic part. The time is past when one could hope to build out of particular justices and harmonies what is, in the end, a total injustice.⁸⁸

Finally, another socialist critic of Durkheim is worth special mention: Péguy's friend, Georges Sorel, who published a long study of *The Rules* in 1895 in his socialist journal *Le Devenir social*. Sorel was at this time a self-proclaimed though unorthodox marxist and his criticisms of Durkheim from this perspective have much interest.

Socialism, wrote Sorel, had in M. Durkheim an adversary of the first order: the forces of conservative democracy had found a 'theoretician who is, at the same time, a metaphysician of a rare subtlety and a scholar fully armed for the struggle'.⁸⁹ Sorel first criticized Durkheim's view of science as being too ambitious in aiming at determinate solutions: all sociology could hope to establish was the patterns of the principal social changes and one should be sceptical of deriving generalizations from statistical regularities. Secondly, Durkheim's account of social facts was not sufficiently mechanistic, for the notion of constraint was itself in part psychological. Thirdly, Sorel approved of Durkheim's account of the development of the division of labour in terms of a struggle for existence, but he pointed out that Durkheim left classes out of the picture - if he had included them his account would have been more historically concrete, instead of being purely logical and schematic. Next, Durkheim's use of the notion of the social milieu came under attack as being non-explanatory: it should be 'defined in a materialist manner and viewed as a field of forces'.⁹⁰ Fifthly, Durkheim's principles of classification were attacked as insufficiently materialist, and as deriving ultimately from an idealist theory of progress. Sixthly, Durkheim's morphological explanations, in particular the notions of volume and density, were criticized as being unduly *simpliciste*, and as leaving differential class relations out of account (groups, their

88. Péguy, 1897, p. 636.

89. Sorel, 1895, p. 2.

90. *ibid.*, p. 181.

tendencies, the general character of their movements'⁹¹), so that there was an undue emphasis on the growth of modern states and a failure to 'penetrate the principle of the political state'.⁹² Seventhly, Durkheim's account of normality in terms of 'the general conditions of collective existence', misdescribed the latter by 'stop[ping] before the marxist philosophy'.⁹³ Lastly, Sorel argued that if one was to seek to satisfy Durkheim's aim of aiding the statesman by indicating to him where he should yield to the pressure of circumstances, it was necessary to abandon the theories of classical sociology and turn to socialism for its theory of the class struggle; the statesman would then yield to revolutionary forces. Sorel concluded by observing that Durkheim had pushed his investigations as far as he could without entering into socialism, and by asking whether he would advance further and pass through 'the frontier which separates him from us'. If he did that, Sorel proclaimed that he himself would be 'the first to acclaim him as my master', for 'No thinker is as well prepared as he to introduce the theories of Karl Marx into higher education'.⁹⁴ But in this connection, as in most others, Sorel's hopes were to remain unfulfilled.

91. *ibid.*, p. 168.

92. *ibid.*, p. 171.

93. *ibid.*, p. 177.

94. *ibid.*, pp. 179-80. Sorel's opinion of Durkheim was to grow much more hostile.