

Introduction: *Why For Durkheim?*

The present state of sociology may be characterized as a flourishing decentered discipline in different parts of the world, including those in Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia which a quarter of a century ago were for the most part suppressed by political regimes. The internet has opened up new areas of research and new data bases, there has been a significant proliferation of specialty areas in various sections of the American Sociological Association, and new sophisticated statistical techniques have sprung up to demonstrate, hopefully with rigor, new concepts.

Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, it has been a “cool period” for new theorizing. Perhaps the main problem for sociological theory today is how to energize mainstream graduate training to give theory its due in the curriculum and steer the young graduate student Argonauts between the lures of “post-colonial theory,” “queer theory,” “post-modernism”, and “deconstructionism” to make sense analytically and theoretically of “the Global Age” with its development processes of globalization and anti-globalization, of new state formation and state deformation, of new multiple identities both “traditional” and transnational, and of transregional civilizational crossings with new diasporas bringing the East to the West, the South to the North, and all these being part of the modernity of the 21st Century. Still early in this century, we await to renew and go beyond the systemic theorizing of the late 20th Century in major figures like Parsons, Habermas, Wallerstein, Castells, Eisenstadt, and Albrow. To do justice to the emergent global reality of our situation and its interrelationships at various levels, economic, political, cultural and technological, calls for sociology to reinvent itself or at least to put the dynamics of the global societal system as the hub, and regions and nation-states as the spokes. Yet, far from throwing aside the legacies of the past, there is need to know these legacies well enough to recombine them, following the example of genomics and the mapping of the human genome.

In a “new” world of “global complexities”,¹ with its many “butterfly effects” that can have manifold political, economic, and social repercussions from one corner on earth to another, sociologists might well give emphasis to a cooperative mapping of the social genome. It is with such a tacit project that sociologists can recognize with freshness the ongoing importance of major classical figures: Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, Simmel and Durkheim, who formulated basic inquiries of modernity that continue to prod the sociological imagination. They were not

1 John Urry, *Global Complexity*, Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity/Blackwell, 2003.

the only ones “at the beginning”, as the history of sociology continues to unravel, particularly with documentation of the contributions of minorities and marginalized figures coming to light, to say nothing of bringing into the fold of sociological theory figures from non-Western regions who constitute part of the story of modernity. That said as necessary for the “reinvention” of sociology in the twenty first century, it is also important to retain the figures just mentioned as essential cornerstones, as both reminders of where sociological thought is anchored and as stimulants for seeking major patterns and tendencies in the new century.

My chapters in this volume bring together a lifelong interest in one sociological cornerstone. The title *For Durkheim* is indirectly a response posed by two earlier remarkable volumes waiving the banners of two other giants of sociological analysis: *For Marx* by Louis Althusser and *For Weber* by Bryan Turner.² Althusser in the 1960s, amidst competing perspectives on Marxism, sought to reclaim the hard core of Marx’s structural approach; Turner, some years later, was responding to Marxist critiques of Weber’s idealism and subjectivism carried in his “methodological individualism”.

At least symbolically, the “trilogy” (some might view it as a triptych) of the major figures of sociological theory merits completion with a volume marking the sustained *engagement* by its author for the figure in focus. My engagement – and enthusiasm – for Emile Durkheim is extensive and intensive, going back to my graduate training in theory with Talcott Parsons at Harvard University, who in an initial discussion, after finding that I could read French with ease, suggested that I read Durkheim in the original. Parsons himself, as I was much later to understand,³ was thoroughly familiar with Durkheim (whom he reread with great interest in his later years), albeit identified as a Weberian scholar. Reading Durkheim – his entire corpus – has been for me immensely satisfying, intellectually and even aesthetically exciting as one can follow the reasoning of a great mind to establish sociological truths and uncover patterns under the façade of quotidian reality.

My engagement with Durkheim has other layers. It took me to become aware that Durkheim did not do sociology as an isolated individual, but rather as team leader, a team that he began forming while he was a young faculty at Bordeaux, providing them with a division of labor that was an empirical manifestation of the justification for his own doctoral dissertation, *The Division of Labor in Society*. It was only near my mid-career that I thought of making contact with the team, a remarkable set of first-rate scholars who, like Robert Hertz and Marcel Granet, established their academic credentials with major studies in the sociology of religion, yet could write with idealistic but rigorous fervor about causes of social

2 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (1965), Ben Brewster, trans. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969; Bryan S. Turner, *For Weber. Essays on the Sociology of Fate* (1981). London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996.

3 “Parsons’s Emergent Durkheims,” *Sociological Theory*, 18 (March 2000): 60-83.

democracy; the same can be said for François Simiand and Maurice Halbwachs as major contributors to economic sociology.⁴

During a sabbatical leave in 1971, besides doing archival research in Épinal (Durkheim's birth place, where I discovered one of his earliest unpublished pieces), and in Bordeaux (where he spent half of his career), I went around Paris looking to meet, if not Durkheimians, then their relatives. Georges Davy, well in his nineties, was the only one still alive, but I did meet widows and children of several, along with students of Marcel Mauss, like Georges Dumézil. The composite picture reinforced my appreciation and respect for Durkheim and his team of collaborators: there really was an *organic solidarity* that drew them together in their dedication to establish sociology. In one sense, if they did not present Durkheim with a *Festschrift*, their work during and after his unfortunately short lifetime, could well have been entitled *Pour Durkheim (For Durkheim)*.

There is still another layer to my engagement. I spent my childhood years in France, attending primary school, until the war clouds in the summer of 1939 led to my impromptu return to America (I left France literally on the eve of WWII). I lived in France, accordingly, during the last decade of the Third Republic. What led to its downfall like putty at the hands of the German army, repeating what had happened seventy years previously, became something more than a comparative historical question. It became an existential question regarding the broader temporal frame of childhood.

As a mature social scientist, this prompt led me to progressively become fascinated with the entire period of the Third Republic, and thereby to seek an understanding of the total *milieu* in which Durkheim flourished, which was over three decades the cultural, educational and political flourish of the Third Republic, as it surmounted internal crises. Why republican democracy was viable and thrived in a new century, with unequaled bursts of creativity in the arts, sciences, and technology, but why this faltered in the 1930s (as did Weimar Germany) with bitter internal divisions that I have vague childhood memories of have provided me with continuing terrain to explore. And perhaps the engagement with the Third Republic is also tacitly an engagement with the American republic, which in recent years seems as bitterly divided as France was in my youth and with the same need for sociological intervention as the Durkheimians sought to provide in their teaching and research. So perhaps *For Durkheim* is also an invoking of a sociological presence for new cadres of sociologists, in the classroom or in their career, to take to heart Durkheim's mission of making sociology central in reframing the twin problem of integration and solidarity in advanced modernity.

What then will the reader find in this volume? It is not a systemic, chronological work in the nature of an intellectual biography. For that, one is better served with

4 Robert Hertz, *Socialisme et Dépopulation*, Les Cahiers du Socialiste, no. 10. Paris, 1910; Marcel Granet, *Contre l'Alcoolisme. Un Programme Socialiste*, Les Cahiers du Socialiste, no. 11, Paris 1911; Maurice Halbwachs, *La Politique Foncière des Municipalités*, Les Cahiers du Socialiste, no. 3, Paris 1908.

two large-scale studies, the first which has served well for many years, Steven Lukes's excellent intellectual biography *Émile Durkheim*, and the recent immense labor of Marcel Fournier, *Émile Durkheim*.⁵

What *For Durkheim* brings together is a set of chapters that span thirty years, including two original ones recently prepared for this volume. There are three foci which I have used to frame the 17 chapters selected among my writings on Durkheim.

In Part 1, I seek to engage the reader to (re)discovering Durkheim, his major projects and his major concerns. While most sociologists, students and practitioners, have some general knowledge of Durkheim, mainly on an ad hoc basis of reading scattered texts, there are trails leading to and from him which have tended to be less well surveyed. Conversely, some already surveyed ones deserve a second look in terms of their actuality, including whether they need upgrading in light of our modernity, a century after his.

As a general methodological note, I take it as a directive that to *understand* more fully the import of a text (taken singly or as the total oeuvre of a major figure like Durkheim), one should look at both the manifold contexts of his or her productions and also how they apply to a deeper understanding of the situation of the contemporary, here and now reader. A classic theoretical text can gain appreciation (i.e., vitality) lifting it out of the bins of the catacombs of dusty shelves by seeing how it relates to broad currents and influences, some commonly known, some to be discovered by new historical data or new interpretations. To make it theoretically relevant for today's practitioners, the text further needs to be related to today's epistemological and ontological concerns, to the problematic of contemporary sociology. The first dimension is the domain of the history of sociology; the second, of contemporary sociology. The two intertwine in what might be thought of as the "double helix" of a theoretical text.

Accordingly, I begin Part 1 with three chapters to help in the discovery and recovery of Durkheim, beginning with a lengthy study of the basic projects of Durkheim in laying out, tacitly a broad scientific research program for sociology. The historical and philosophical contexts in which he and his dedicated team carried this out are, in my judgment, essential parts of the Durkheimian matrix. Two other brief chapters follow, one a review chapter of a three-volume publication (in French) of his works and their major themes, a publication which also made available a correspondence of Durkheim that showed him not as a detached intellectual but as a caring human being. The other brief chapter is intended to dispel an earlier (and fallacious) view that Durkheim's theorizing about social structure and social organization did not address the question of social change.

Two other figures that are germane in contextualizing Durkheim are treated in subsequent chapters. The first is Edmund Husserl founder of modern

5 Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim; his life and work, a critical study*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972; Marcel Fournier, *Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)*. Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2007.

phenomenology, born shortly after Durkheim, and like him, attended the same world-famous research laboratory of Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig. Given Durkheim's training and keen appreciation of philosophy, it seemed appropriate to compare Durkheim and Husserl whose respective methodologies appear as polar opposites. The second figure was an historian at the Sorbonne, where at the turn of the century sociology and history seemed to be at loggerheads methodologically. What I have found as an exciting bridge is how the early writing on religion by Durkheim stimulated the young historian of the French Revolution Albert Mathiez to look for a new dimension of the French Revolution in religious cults, and that in turn provided Durkheim with an important comparative dimension for his own seminal study of religion.

The last two chapters in this first part deal with well-known substantive themes of Durkheim, but I seek in these not only to discuss the social and intellectual context in which they were written, but also their actuality a century later.

Part 2 draws together various chapters which have as a central focus the question of the dynamics of cultural change, not only the place of culture in the sociological analysis of change but also the cultural context of sociological analysis, the latter often overlooked. The first two chapters are complementary though written nearly thirty years apart. In the first, I had been intrigued in looking at the composition and works of the Durkheimian school at the importance of *symbolism* in the later Durkheim and in the works of major associates who worked with him in the sociology of religion. A stimulus from Robert Nisbet's *Sociology as Art Form* led me to consider the context of avant-garde art in the Bordeaux period of the Durkheimian school, and it struck me that the symbolists in art and the sociological search for symbols in the Durkheimians had a not insignificant affinity. The second chapter was undertaken in the present decade, initially on the occasion of an invited presentation at the British Centre for Durkheim Studies in Oxford. Although there is some overlap in the focus on avant-garde art, new aspects of the cultural context unfolded, and not only because what was avant-garde art in Durkheim's Bordeaux period changed rapidly, just about when he left his university position there to become a professor at the Sorbonne. Almost the same year as he received his professorship at the Sorbonne, Picasso and Braque shook the cultural scene, going beyond the Fauves to cubism. In the second chapter, then, I relate the radical innovations in representational and performance arts to the radical innovation of Durkheim, both, I propose, part of a broad cultural context of *primitivism*.

Durkheim is well noted for his critique of utilitarianism, and its offshoot today in rational choice theory, for his critique of Spencer's individualism, a critique which in so many words points to the cultural embeddedness of markets (in laws, regulations, mores, etc.). Cultural sociology has taken a new lease on life by going beyond the critique of Spencer found in *The Division of Labor in Society* to finding new stimuli for theorizing and application as derivative of the later *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. The cultural scene has greatly become illuminated in sociology with one window (that is particularly associated with Foucault and

Bourdieu, but also Gramsci) opening to the place of culture in the (re)production of domination and hegemony in a social order. As Jeffrey Alexander has keenly seen in framing cultural sociology,⁶ Durkheim's window on culture is wider, in the full panorama of his seminal *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, which has well deservedly become seen as his *magnum opus* and a foundational work for the sociology of culture. At one level, the analysis on rituals and symbols as key elements of the structuration of the social order is in keeping with this opening.

But in keeping with the complementary aspects of culture as "order-maintaining" and "order-transforming", to follow Eisentadt,⁷ there is an unstated dialectic in *The Forms*: the lifeblood of society are endogenous forces of social mobilization, of creative moments of regeneration and enthusiasm, with a rebirth of the sphere of the sacred, even if that may itself become subject in time for the *extraordinary* to become *ordinary*, quotidian. The destructuring and restructuring of the social order in societal movements and collective effervescence is thus given in a complementary view of the cultural scene. For comparative purpose, how this may be applied to revolutionary change that appeared pretty much at the same time in several countries ("From Durkheim to Managua") provides us with material for the actuality of Durkheim in the contemporary world.

I also include a chapter that examines a cultural potential for destructuring the social order as much as any political revolution, namely what may be termed "sexual anomie". On the surface, it might appear that Durkheim's views on marriage and monogamy are a straight reflection of Victorian patriarchal biases. This is partly true, but putting together various parts of his dealing with sexuality, one can see the potential for far-reaching changes in social organization that Durkheim intuitively sensed, and which have increasingly become actualized in our modern period.

The cultural sphere has other dimensions that bring the sacred into play. Durkheim grasped at the potential explosive force if the separation of the sacred and the profane, a cardinal aspect of social organization, were violated or broken. The eruption of Muslim outrage over a set of cartoons appearing in a Danish newspaper, as well as the reaction of the Western world to the outrage, caught my attention as providing materials for the relevance and actuality of Durkheim's sacred/profane dichotomy. The Danish Cartoons affair has marked this decade as a *cause célèbre*, a cultural maelstrom involving new and old identities, new and old values, as complex a totality as the *cause célèbre* that shook Durkheim's France, the Dreyfus affair.

6 "Introduction: Durkheimian sociology and cultural studies today," pp. 7-21 in J.C. Alexander, ed., *Durkheimian Sociology: cultural studies*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

7 S.N.Eisenstadt, "The Order-maintaining and Order-Transforming Dimensions of Culture," pp. 64-87 in Richard Münch and Neil J. Smelser, eds, *Theory of Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Part 3 contains a set of chapters which explore the complex relationship, intellectually and otherwise, of Durkheim and his great contemporary, Max Weber, the two being central nodes of French and German sociology before World War I. Going to Germany as a young promising student was decisive for Durkheim's career, and Weber made several visits to Strasburg and Paris, so their crisscrossing the Rhine has provided me with another set of comparative and historical materials. In the first two chapters, I have put the stress on differences between them, in the initial chapter on their seeming unawareness if not benign neglect of the other, and in the second chapter, the advantage over Durkheim (and Marx) of utilizing Weber as ingress to making sense of American society. In this vein, it is not too far-fetched to view Durkheim and Weber as collective representations of France and German social science competing to open up fields of sociology the way Pasteur and Koch competed to bring glory to France and Germany in the field of microbiology.

However, the last three chapters in this part tacitly opt for inviting readers to viewing Durkheim and Weber as complementary rather than antipodal theorists, engaged in a heuristic dialogue in the analysis and understanding of our modern situation, in particular the directions of large-scale societal change, the definitive challenge for the sociological enterprise. Ultimately, that is the rationale *For Durkheim*.