Durkheim and Representations

Edited by

W. S. F. Pickering

DURKHEIM AND REPRESENTATIONS

Durkheim's sociological thought is based on the premise that the world cannot be known as a thing in itself, but only through representations, rough approximations of the world created either individually or collectively. *Durkheim and Representations* is a set of papers by leading Durkheimians from Britain, America and continental Europe. It is the first concentrated attempt to understand what he meant by representations, how his understanding of the term was influenced by Kant and by neo-Kantians like Charles Renouvier, and how his use of the concept in his work developed over time.

By arguing that his use of representations is at the core of Durkheim's sociological thought, this book makes a unique contribution to Durkheimian studies which have recently been dominated by positivist and functionalist interpretations, and reveals a thinker very much in tune with contemporary developments in philosophy, linguistics and sociology.

The editor, **W.S.F.Pickering,** is a founder member and the General Secretary of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies in Oxford. He has edited and assisted in translations of Durkheim's work with publications such as *Durkheim and Religion, Durkheim on Morals and Education, Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories* and *Debating Durkheim,* all published by Routledge.

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PREFACE

When the editor wrote *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories,* which came out in 1984, it was agreed with the publishers that major references to Durkheim's sociology of knowledge would be omitted and that a future volume would cover the subject. It is common knowledge among scholars that Durkheim's sociology of religion was closely linked with his sociology of knowledge.

The editor's attempt to fulfil his obligation was hampered by undertaking other projects, not least in helping to found and then serving as General Secretary of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies in Oxford. Apart from personal issues, it became evident that, although when the book was first mooted very few scholars were interested in the subject, the position had changed radically in the years that followed, especially in the United States and on the Continent, particularly among professional philosophers. Rather than write the book in accordance with the original plan, it appeared a more worthwhile task to gather together a series of essays by scholars working in the area, including philosophers. To this project the publishers agreed.

But a change in emphasis also occurred. Rather than consider the subject of the sociology of knowledge in general, on which an admirable book by Warren Schmaus, *Durkheim's Philosophy of Science and the Sociology of Knowledge,* was published in 1994, it was thought best to focus on a specific area of the sociology of knowledge, namely representations. This term, which is essential to Durkheim's sociological thought, is a fundamental concept in philosophy, and was much used when Durkheim was writing, as this book demonstrates.

I should like to thank warmly all those who have contributed to this volume, without whose work it would not exist; and also those who have helped in other ways in typing, editing or offering advice: David Bloor, Sue Stedman Jones, Warren Schmaus and my wife, Carol.

The words representation and collective conscience

It has always been the practice of the editor, most of the people connected with the British Centre of Durkheimian Studies, and others, to retain the French word *représentation,* when referring to Durkheim's usage. This is because it is virtually impossible to find an English equivalent which can be used on every occasion to translate Durkheim's use of *représentation.* Its meaning in the French can either be an exact copy of some given object or an idea about something (see chapter 1). The English word representation is inadequate to translate *représentation.*

In translating works by Durkheim where *représentation* appears, or in referring to his use of the word, it has been the tradition to leave the word untranslated. In this book such a procedure has led to difficulties. The reason is that the word representation has been used by several thinkers who have not written in French, and who have not been referring just to Durkheim. One could hardly change what they have written and use the French word. It has therefore been decided to use the English word representation throughout in order to try to offer some degree of consistency. None the less the ambiguity of the English word representation remains when relating it to the French *représentation.* The context must determine the precise meaning, and that the reader has to determine.

The words collective conscience are derived from Durkheim's concept of *la conscience collective,* which appears first in his thesis *De la Division du travail social* (1893b). It is hardly necessary to labour the point that the French *conscience* has two main meanings—consciousness and conscience. Only the context can determine which of these English words should be employed. So that the translator, unlike the commentator, may be excused from deciding the correct word, it is the usual custom to leave the term *conscience,* and therefore *conscience collective,* untranslated. That custom is followed here.

Presentation

It is necessary to forewarn readers of some technical points found in the format of this book.

Lukes' dating-enumeration has been followed throughout (see Lukes 1973/1992 and References). If the dating-enumeration of the reference is of the kind (1895a/1901c:17–19), it means that the reference is to be located by finding Durkheim 1895a in the References, but the page numbers refer to the later 1901 edition. Sometimes the items have been reprinted and will appear as, for example, in Durkheim 1975b. The prefix t. refers to a translation of that date and details are to be found under the date of the French publication. For further details on any item, consult Lukes 1973/1992.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

> Basically Durkheim was interested in the many aspects of a single problem:
> to set epistemology on a scientific basis. All his researches go to illuminate
> the problem, and all his writings—including those on education—touch
> upon it, even when they have practical aims.

So wrote the American anthropologist Paul Bohannan (1960:80). While this
statement contains some truth, it overstates the single-mindedness of
Durkheim's academic quest. Durkheim as a sociologist admired the achievements
of science and was devoted to the scientific method. Trained in philosophy and
an admirer of Charles Renouvier, his interest in philosophy stayed with him
until his relatively premature death in 1917 at the age of 59. He had many
academic interests and goals and it is impossible to say which was uppermost.
Most scholars would agree that the establishment of sociology as a generally
recognized university discipline was his prime concern. And more particularly,
within philosophy itself, it was ethics that was his great love, which some might
see as a consequence of his rejection of Judaism as a religion. He seems always
to have been convinced of the social virtue of religion and specially so after
1895 (see Pickering 1984:ch.4). When he died, his plan to write a large book
on morality as a complement to the one he had published on religion remained
unfulfilled (1912a). Only the introduction eventually saw light of day (see 1920a).
None the less, we may say, though in weaker terms than those of Bohannan,
that he had a deep and abiding concern for epistemology. One part of that
concern is the subject of this book.

   That he wished to make a lasting contribution to epistemology needs little
further support than evidence to be found in his last book, just referred to, *Les
Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912a), especially in the opening and final
sections, where he challenges two conventional theories of epistemology—
empiricism and apriorism. Hardly surprisingly, he substitutes his own social
approach as a superior theory. The theory itself stands outside the scope of
the pages ahead. However, their focus will be on what is arguably the most
fundamental part of the theory.

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Many philosophers have said that behind all knowledge lies representation. Durkheim, standing in this tradition and accepting the primacy of representation, uses collective representations as a key not only to knowledge in general but specifically to the domain of sociology, that is, to a scientific analysis of social phenomena.

Davy and Parsons, along with others, have tried to show that Durkheim's approach to the subject matter of sociology indicated a radical shift in his thought. Whereas in his early work, as in *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895a), he made social facts the basis of sociology, the change to representations had mental constructs as its basis. To such thinkers the new direction was blatantly apparent in *Les Formes élémentaires,* which they argued implied the embracing of idealism and rejection of realism. We do not intend to pursue this much debated hypothesis other than to say that the assertion that Durkheim underwent some radical shift in his use of the concept of collective representations is rejected by most of the authors who have contributed to this book. He used the concept at the very beginning of his work, and if there is any change at all it is that, in his later writings, he finds the term more fruitful and uses it much more extensively. There is no sudden change from A to B: it is a matter of greater utility.

It will be shown here that the concept of representation finds its path back to Kant. It was later developed by the French philosopher Charles Renouvier, and becomes important for continental philosophers from the nineteenth century onwards. Although it never seems to have been significantly popular amongst British and American philosophers of that period, it is now becoming more fashionable.

To be sure the historical setting is important. However, this book is not to be classified as being concerned only with the history of ideas. Primarily, it is exegetical and analytical. It is not only a first step in exploring the place of representations in the thought of Durkheim but also an attempt to appraise his work, both positively and negatively. We would emphasize that his work on representations reaches the heart of the development of the social sciences and is pivotal to his work, not least in the way he evaluated science in general and with it an incipient philosophy of science. By bringing to light issues which have heretofore remained somewhat hidden and correcting what we consider to have been false ones, we hope these essays will not only contribute to Durkheimian scholarship but be of value in a wider understanding of the notion of representation and the philosophy of science.

To turn briefly to the contents of the book. The opening chapter shows the centrality of representations in Durkheim's thought. He never defined what he meant by the term, perhaps because it was so commonly used and accepted by philosophers of his day. One therefore has to propose a meaning which is derived from the way he used the word. Attention is given to the function he sees representations perform in the pursuit of knowledge. He holds that the world cannot be known as a thing-in-itself but only through

representations. He divides representations into various kinds, the two most important being individual representations and collective representations, of which the latter are by far the more important since they give rise to knowledge in the general sense of the word. Collective representations are not metaphysical realities nor does their content remain constant; they are thus open to change. Yet, if they do change too much or too often they lose their stability. Such stability is essential to their functioning as a means of providing knowledge. The paradox of change/stability raises the question of how they change. Briefly noted and developed are his basic ideas about society as a system of representations and about sociology as ultimately a scientific study of representations.

There follows the first major section of the book, which concentrates on historical issues, for, as has just been noted, one basic concern in explicating Durkheim's thought is to place it in a historical context. That not only means seeing his thought in relation to French thought of the late nineteenth century but attempts to discover whence his ideas come, and how he differs from thinkers close to his own position. Unravelling these matters also helps the reader to see the way Durkheim uses the concept of representation.

Within this ambit it was thought to be of value to refer to the contents of some heretofore unknown but relevant lectures given by Durkheim in the Lycée de Sens, in the form of notes taken by a student in the class, André Lalande. Durkheim taught at several lycées before he entered the academic world as a teacher in the university of Bordeaux in 1887. The Sens lectures are on various philosophical topics, which lead to problems relating to scientific methodology, all according to the syllabus set out by the government. There are no references to the key words of this book—for example, collective representations and sociology—but there is a considerable discussion of science and its method which is an important issue in the matter of naturalistic representations. Warren Schmaus argues that there is much in the lectures that shows a hypothetico-deductive approach to an analysis of common mental states which are at the basis of sociology (chapter 2). Further, Durkheim shows the relation between mental sociology and categories of thought which are necessary for thought itself but which show variation from culture to culture.

From the Sens lectures it is clear that Durkheim had to come to terms with the popular philosophy of Victor Cousin (1792–1867). He agreed with Cousin that philosophy studies mental states but was opposed to Cousin's psychological approach. The work of Janet was important at the time. Pierre Janet, the psychologist, argued that hypotheses were a *sine qua non* of scientific experimentation. This is supported by Durkheim in the realm of psychology and philosophy generally. The latter, however, is seen as a science which seeks an explanation of states of consciousness. Durkheim refers to these in his book, *De la Division du travail social*. For Durkheim, states of unconsciousness

became collective representations in order to avoid any metaphysical associations with states of consciousness.

He saw that language was not necessary to thought but only useful. He rejected with Janet a nominalist philosophy in which general terms do not signify general ideas.

Durkheim asserted that categories such as cause and time are universal and a necessary condition for thought. They do not arise from internal experience, but in these lectures he associated them with the apriori— something he was later to reject in favour of their social origin. Interestingly, he holds that categories can be seen in two senses: one, categories as principles of reason which may be universal; two, concrete representations of categories which may be culturally variable.

Schmaus concludes from these lectures that it was methodology, that is scientific methodology, that was Durkheim's driving force.

These lectures show quite clearly that Durkheim had to come to terms with several French and German thinkers not only in the matter of philosophy in general but in the concept of representation itself. He was heavily influenced by Kant and the neo-Kantian Charles Renouvier (1815–1900), who was in fact the only thinker that he openly declared he had studied assiduously. Therefore, both Renouvier and Kant have a key place in this book and two chapters are given over to their influence on Durkheim. The notion of representation largely goes back to Kant. This is not to deny the influence of other thinkers on Durkheim's approach to knowledge, as is apparent in later chapters of the book. Sue Stedman Jones in chapter 3 attempts to demonstrate the influence of Kant and Renouvier on Durkheim's thought in connection with representations, and to show where the three thinkers differ. She covers the issue of reality and representation with regard to science, starting with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* where representation lies at the heart of reality and of science. It is true also for Renouvier and Durkheim, and means for all of them a rejection of empiricism, materialism and idealism. But it does not imply that sociology is anti-empirical: far from it, it is basically empirical because it is concerned with social phenomena which are in fact representations. Such a position is more akin to that of Renouvier than to that of Kant. Thus, like Renouvier, Durkheim points to the reality of representations. 'Inner' and 'outer' spheres of the real in Kant are similarly held by Durkheim in connection with representations and *conscience.*

The author relates these positions to Durkheim's concept of the mind and the issue of the unconscious, where he differs from Kant who sees representations as being produced by a faculty of the mind, whereas for Durkheim the mind is a set of representations. Durkheim rejects the notion of the thing-in-itself. To represent is to bring things before the mind, which is common to all three thinkers. For Renouvier and Durkheim this is a complex mental activity which constitutes the social world.

In the following chapter, Stedman Jones goes on to expound Durkheim's notion of representations with respect to his logic, which is of great importance in understanding what he means by representations. Science—scientific logic—is, Durkheim argued, derived from religion. But religion is a product of society. Therefore scientific logic has a similar origin. All scientific thought, however, is more perfect than religious thought. He does not share Kant's notion of a transcendental logic. But he is one with Kant in his approach to science in taking a non-positivist view. All experience relies on conceptual presuppositions. This is at the heart of Durkheim's critical rationalism, which contains a type of apriorism. Durkheim tried to answer the question left by Kant—what sustains and generates representations? He did this by positing that they stood on a collective foundation. Durkheim, like Kant, upholds an apriorism which is not, as in Kant, defined by innateness. The apriori is the armature of thought and at the foundation of representations, but with Renouvier he holds it gives rise to the logical presuppositions of thought.

The next major section deals with specific issues—changes in Durkheim's ideas and notions of reality and belief—which may arise from historical matters just mentioned. A contribution by Némedi (chapter 5) brings to the fore a much debated issue, namely, the fact that in Durkheim's early works he abandoned the notions of the *conscience collective,* and mechanical and organic solidarity, which were expounded in *De la Division du travail social.* However he retained the idea of morphological determinism. In place of *conscience collective* he began to use more extensively in items published in the late 1890s the notion of collective representations which constituted a realm of social facts and which were for Durkheim the social sphere *par excellence.* By use of collective representations, devoid of all psychological implications, Durkheim was able to give sociology an independence in the academic world.

In several ways Némedi's chapter has close links with Schmaus' commentary on the Sens lectures. They both show that states of the collective *conscience* as in *De la Division du travail social* grow out of Durkheim's concern with states of individual consciousness evident in the early lectures.

The notion of representation within Durkheim's frequent use of collective representations, and to a lesser degree in individual representations, implies that representations represent something. The immediate question arises: what do they represent? But first, are representations a mode of thinking and therefore related to the mind? Or do they refer only to content? On the whole Durkheim, while admitting the first position, is more concerned with the second. Representations are only approximate reflections of what they represent. They are therefore not metaphysical or in any sense idealist. But no matter how imperfect they may be they do represent that which is real. This question has been raised before, but in chapter 6 Pickering sets the notion of reality in a somewhat wider framework. For Durkheim reality is not unitary

and is therefore not just metaphysical. There are many realities and in one direction they relate to the subject matter of various scientific disciplines. Sociology reveals the way in which realities are created. They are brought about through the work of society, through the social. In the end, however, all that is available to the sociologist and to other scientists is the fact that reality can only be established by a series of indicators. One of the problems of the dualism, reality/representation, is that representation may be mistaken for the reality. This is known to happen in religion where the representation supersedes the reality.

But Durkheim uses the notion of reality in another sphere, namely, in that associated with *la vie sérieuse*—a notion that is often overlooked in studies of Durkheim. *La vie sérieuse* is seen as a quality of social life in which morality and knowledge are of supreme importance. This is contrasted with excessive leisure and the work of the artist who is not really concerned with reality and the ethical but with the imagination which is often unchecked by boundaries. *La vie sérieuse* is thus associated with reality and not the sphere of the arts.

In looking at the relation between belief and representation, Giovanni Paoletti begins by examining it in a historical mode by referring to Kant's philosophy (chapter 7). He shows that the theory of collective representation is in fact a theory of belief. Paoletti then turns to the issue in the work of Renouvier, who saw a problem in bridging the gap between faith and science. Kant had distinguished faith and science by relating the former to noumena and the latter to phenomena. Faith is sufficient for the subject but insufficient for the object. In science, the subject holds to be true what is objectively true. In Kant rational or moral faith has primacy over science (practical reason). Renouvier rejects this dualism. The real is the world of phenomena. He also rejects things-in-themselves as being a metaphysical concept. Paoletti mentions other writers such as Ollé-Laprune, but above all Brochard, who were concerned with the same issue.

Durkheim does not systematically employ the concept of belief, yet there is a hidden theory of it which for Paoletti is directly related to his theory of collective representations. The notion of belief is primarily to be found in religion. Since philosophy came from religion, there exists a relation between belief and knowledge, and therefore between belief and representations. In *Les Formes élémentaires* Durkheim refers to beliefs as states of opinion which consist of representations. Representation is the only term that can properly designate the whole psychic activity of the individual and society. Beliefs are a special type of collective representation and here Durkheim is in agreement with the neo-Kantians. Collective representations must be true and in harmony with other collective representations, that is, socially true.

How should the sociologist approach collective representations? Through institutions, which can be said to be true or false, which means that, if true, they correspond adequately to the given conditions of society.

At a practical level society cannot wait for a scientific answer to all its problems: it has to decide what to do. It needs beliefs to help it make a decision. This is not an abandonment of reason. As in *Les Formes élémentaires,* divine reason is replaced by social and historical reason and belief remains uttermost.

The final section of the book deals with the issue of assessment and evaluation. Here we present two quite opposing views. The first is by Warren Schmaus who adopts a critical position about the value of collective representations for the social sciences (chapter 8). He argues that collective representations can be dispensed with. Their retention remains useful only in the sphere of individual representations. Individuals may share moral directives, religious beliefs and other social components which can be said to keep society together yet people represent these to themselves in various ways. The meanings of such components relate to social facts, not their representations.

According to Schmaus it is not necessary for a group of people to have the same types of mental representations: what is crucial is to participate in the same social functions. By contrast Durkheim identified social facts with their collective representations. For him all general ideas and concepts are collective representations, which are formed through collective effervescence and fusion. Thus he identified meanings of concepts with collective representations. In modern societies it is implausible that members have mental states with the same representation about content. Durkheim therefore turned to preliterate societies for purposes of sociological explanation because members all had similar ideas. In *Les Formes élémentaires* he investigated the origin and function of religious representations, together with asserting the social origin of categories. He identified categories with their collective representations; for example, the categories of space or time are identified with the ways people think about them through collective representations.

Some anthropologists and philosophers have identified categories with collective representations, with the resulting failure to separate fundamental categories from classificatory concepts.

The theory of the cultural construction of reality questions the possibility of the interpretation of other cultures. Certain anthropologists question this, by saying, for example, that colour perception is in fact physiologically determined. No longer are people said to be born with a *tabula rasa:* they do not accept ready-made categories.

Schmaus turns to a new social functionalism as a satisfying explanation of social behaviour, which is modelled on psychological functionalism rather than the anthropological functionalism of someone like Malinowski. Types of social facts are defined in terms of their relationships to other social facts, environmental inputs and so forth. He thus sees society as being held together by rules, which imply accountability. In applying this to the category of causality, he argues that people are the cause of their actions, hence the notion of causality.

Finally, collective representations were used to give a rational interpretation of apparent irrational behaviour. They are surely held by individuals and not by the collectivity. Schmaus sees Lévy-Bruhl as someone who is sympathetic to his own point of view, who regretted that Durkheim and his followers had equated social facts with collective representations.

In the second of these assessments, David Bloor adopts a new, positive approach to the understanding of collective representations in relating them to social institutions (chapter 9). He argues, like Némedi above, that they are closely connected to Durkheim's idea of collective *conscience,* but that hinders rather than helps understanding because of the suspicion that Durkheim encourages people to believe in a mysterious group mind. Some commentators have attempted to demystify these ideas by reference to the category of public opinion, but are in danger of merely replacing one puzzling idea with others which are equally obscure. The attempt is made by Bloor to analyse collective representations by appealing to the notion of a social institution, where the idea of an institution is itself given structure and content in terms of identifiable processes of self-reference. The thesis is that collective representations are institutions, and institutions are self-referencing systems. The self-referential model is taken from the work of the sociologist Barry Barnes. This reading of Durkheim is then tested against certain objections. There are, for example, passages in Durkheim that appear at first sight to contradict the reading. There are also interesting problems about the origins of institutions when conceived in this way. An attempt is made to outline the way in which such problems can be solved within the terms of the self-referential model. This reading of collective representations has the merit of grasping a part of Durkheim's thought which all too often seems to be glossed over. It also allows scholars to see the overlap between Durkheim's ideas and current philosophical preoccupations with meaning, rules and intentionality.

Viewing the academic scene in a wider perspective it is evident that the notion of representation has now become a key topic in various disciplines— sociology, psychology in its various subdisciplines, and philosophy, notably in the philosophy of science. What has been written here, therefore, about Durkheim on the subject of representations, is not just another issue in the history of ideas but is relevant to what is happening in these academic areas.

REPRESENTATIONS AS UNDERSTOOD BY DURKHEIM

An introductory sketch

W.S.F.Pickering

Introduction: definition

Whether one considers Durkheim was a sociologist pure and simple, a sociologist with an interest in philosophy, a philosopher devoted to sociology, a moralist, or a man of common sense with an interest in society, one thing cannot be denied: he firmly set his mind on acquiring knowledge. This goal *par excellence* dominated his life. It is reflected most surely in the seriousness of his character (see Pickering 1984:352ff.).

The knowledge he sought was external to himself: it was not self-knowledge. What was to be known existed 'out there' and was not dependent on his own attitudes or character, nor was it acquired through intuition. It was something to be acquired, to be discovered, and in so many cases very laboriously, for that is the nature of scientific knowledge which Durkheim saw as the surest of all knowledge. He held that science bestows autonomy and it supremely imparts the way to recognize the nature of things and to understand them.

But how is one to proceed practically in the quest of obtaining this knowledge of the exterior world? The way for Durkheim was through the gate of representations—representations of the phenomena of the world. It is of course true that representations exist in the mind of individuals, though they may not be consciously realized as such. Whether representations are universal, whether things can be understood in themselves without further representations, are matters to be considered later.

We start where Durkheim starts, with the assumption that knowledge can only be established through representations. In a slightly different vein he wrote that people cannot become attached to external objects unless they imagine them in some fashion: 'they exist and live in us in the form of the representation expressing them' (1925a:255–6/t.1961a:223–4).

Although Durkheim always held that it was necessary to define terms precisely, he did not always live up to the ideal. Only after years of writing

about religion did he define it in a way that satisfied him (Pickering 1984:163ff.). Nor did he offer a precise definition of the key concept, society. It might be argued that he did not trouble to define words on which he thought there might be general agreement. After all, no writer has time to define everything!

A non-controversial, general usage may well have been the reason why Durkheim never defined representation. The concept was in fact commonly used in his day among artists and other professionals such as lawyers, as well as philosophers. Durkheim, it seems, unhesitatingly accepted what might be held to be the generally recognized meaning. So, for contemporary philosophers and the public at large, a representation meant quite simply a mental or intellectual idea—a picture or projection held in the mind. Its equivalent in German is *Vorstellung* (representation, performance, etc.). In English, the word *représentation* used by the French is difficult to translate. Obviously it means a representation. But that is too vague in conveying the way Durkheim and contemporary philosophers used it. In most respects *représentation* is, therefore, best left in the French, with the implication that the French meaning or meanings must be employed. However, here, for reasons given in the Preface, the English word representation is used to translate the French *representation*. The French word *idée* is very seldom used as a substitute for *représentation*. As sometimes with the English word idea, *idée* is associated with phantasy, originality or uniqueness, whereas the French *représentation* is connected with the aim of accurate portrayal. A representation is like a mental photographic picture rather than a painting. But in addition, representations relate to ideas, ways of evaluating, seeing and imagining objects or persons. Poggi defines representations as 'mental entities': we might say mental pictures or projections (Poggi 1971:xxx).

Where they relate to the social world, representations are not just ideological reflections or superstructures of various social orders. The claim is that they picture the social order as an objective expression of systems of ideas (Evans-Pritchard 1960:17).

Around the turn of the century Octave Hamelin, a friend of Durkheim in his Bordeaux days, wrote a thesis which became a famous book, *Essai sur les éléments principaux de la représentation*. Némedi has shown that the book, important in its day on the subject of epistemology, does not deal with representations as Durkheim and others used the term (see Némedi and Pickering 1995; this volume chapter 5). It is concerned with the theoretical problem of representation as a whole.

Importance of representations: their function

As we have just said, for Durkheim representations constitute the key to knowledge, to logic and to an understanding of mankind (and see Pickering 1984:ch. 15; Lukes 1973:436–8). In this he was merely taking a position

similar to that of many Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes, Hegel, Kant, Malebranche, Renouvier, Hamelin, Wundt, Bergson, Schopenhauer, and so on (for the use of representations by certain European thinkers, see Mauss 1950:3, 12; Mestrovic 1988:46ff.; and chapters 2, 3 and 7 here).

By representations knowledge is derived and through them the person can visualize a world beyond that of his immediate senses. In an academic debate in 1913 in which Durkheim gave a paper, 'Le Problème religieux et la dualité de la nature humaine', he said:

> Collective representations originate only when they are embodied in material objects, things, or beings of every sort—figures, movements, sounds, words, and so on—that symbolize and delineate them in some outward appearance. For it is only by expressing their feelings, by translating them into signs, by symbolizing them externally, that the individual consciences, which are, by nature, closed to each other, can feel that they are communicating and are in unison.
>
> (1913b/1970a:328/t.1960c:335–6)

Elsewhere Durkheim gave as an example the fact that the whiteness of paper is not the same as that of snow and that 'the two appear in different representations' (1898b/1924a:16/t.1953b:11). He went on to argue that there is no evidence to show that they both rely on a general impression of whiteness common to the two. Human beings create a psychic continuum which is made up of a series of representations and this gives rise to the general notion of whiteness.

As the basis of all knowledge, Durkheim held that human beings cannot represent to themselves the world at large other than in the terms of 'the small social world in which they live' (1897a:245/t.1951a:227). This small social world, as we shall see, is based on the collective representations of the society in which men live.

In *Les Formes élémentaires* Durkheim wrote that representations 'are as necessary for the well working of our moral life as our food is for the maintenance of physical life' (546/382).[1] Of course, it is not only in moral life that representations are necessary but in all areas where man uses his mind. Human beings are essentially representational, for 'a man who did not think with concepts would not be a man, because he would not be a social being. If he were reduced to having only individual perceptions, he would be indistinguishable from beasts' (626/438–9). Only through representations can human beings communicate with one another (1914a/t.1960c:336).

Going beyond the general, Durkheim asserted that representations are the chief components of individual minds and are at the basis of all social reality (see 1898b; Dennes 1924:32). Social institutions are founded on

representations. Further, religion itself 'appears to us as a system of representations' (1913b:66/t.1984b:4). Indeed, society itself is a similar system (see below). Durkheim would argue that collective representations originated in religion, with its fundamental notions of gods and spirits (see, e.g., 1913a(ii)(6) and (7):35/t.1975a:171).

Further, Durkheim asserts that representations are what makes a human being human. In *Les Formes élémentaires* he said that a man who does not think in concepts (collective representations) 'would not be a social being' (626/ 439). 'If reduced to having only individual perceptions, he would be indistinguishable from animals' *(ibid.)*.

These diverse quotations are sufficient to demonstrate that for Durkheim representations in one form or another are of the greatest importance for both knowledge and social existence. Up to now we have presented a random selection of quotations. Something more specific is required and we must now look at the types of representations human beings have devised in their search for knowledge.

Types of representations

Classification is a necessary condition of all generalized knowledge. But classifications are frequently subdivided. According to Durkheim, representations can be so broken down. One way to classify them is according to the area of experience, culture or thought in which they are involved. There are, therefore, representations relating to science, morals, law, religion, the family, to name but some of the areas.

But more important is the major division between collective and individual representations. Collective representations relate to representations which can be said to be held by a group or a society as a whole. Durkheim wrote that they were made up of 'mental states of a people or a social group which thinks in common' (1955a:173/t.1983a:84). These are in contrast to individual representations which are ways of mentally dealing with experience but which are unique to the individual. A dichotomy Durkheim constantly used from the very beginning of his excursion into sociology was the rigid contrast between the individual and the social. Nevertheless both individual and collective life are made up of representations and both relate to a corresponding substratum, not very clearly defined (1898b/1924a:2/ t.1953b:2). In a relatively early work he maintained that collective representations were 'of an altogether different nature to those of the individual' (1897a:352/t.1951a:312). They express the way the group thinks about itself; whereas individual representations reflect only what an individual thinks.

Other types of representations can be found in Durkheim's writings, for example empirical representations (1899a(ii):19/t.1975a:90). Another type of representation which Durkheim finds of little worth for his work is impressionable *(sensibles)* representations, which are open to rapid change and

flux (618/433). Along another line of differentiation, some representations are obligatory for society, such as moral representations, and some are optional, for example scientific representations (1899a(ii):20/t.1975a:91).

Because of the central place that collective representations have in Durkheim's work, we consider them in more detail and in connection with individual representations.

Individual and collective representations contrasted

There are many reasons why for Durkheim individual representations are of less importance than collective representations. Chief among them is that individual representations are imperfect reflections of collective representations. Each person has a particular set of representations which is never identical to that of society. The distinct personality of each individual modifies collective representations accordingly. Thus, the process of socialization is never perfect in that individuals completely accept the collective representations of their society. If this were so, it would deny the notion of autonomy which was so central to Durkheim's thinking (1925a:ch. 7). Each person is differentiated from another, according endless variations. Thus, in the language of Parsons, individual representations make up the actor's knowledge of external phenomena, which are independent of the existence of social relationships, of heredity and environment (1937:359).

In his article on representations, Durkheim maintained that individual representations are produced by the action and reaction of neurological elements but they are not in fact inherent in these elements (1898b/1924a:33/ t.1953b:24). In other words, representations are in some way determined by but transcend neurological elements. Thus, the neurological element forms a substratum of individual representations.

In studying individual representations practical difficulties present themselves on account of the infinite number and variety. Their extent is so great that they are beyond management, classification and therefore generalization.

By contrast, collective representations are of a much higher order. They are the summit of the psychic scale or hierarchy (Dennes 1924:37). They are superior to individual representations because of their wider scope in time and space, for they are not only social in origin, they are also social in form and in content *(ibid.)*. Collective representations are exterior to individual minds, differing in quality, character and kind (*ibid.*:35). As Durkheim wrote: 'The group thinks, feels, acts, quite differently from what its members would if they were isolated' (1895a/1901c:128). Nowhere does Durkheim give greater evidence for their essential connection with society than in analysing representations relating to religion and morality. Just as society has an existence and reality over and above the individuals who constitute it, so collective representations have an existence beyond individual representations (see 1898b).

All this does not mean that individual representations or minds can be overlooked. Collective representations depend on them. There can be no society without individuals who stand at its base. Collective representations are to individual representations what individual representations are to brain cells (1898b/1924a:36/t.1953b:25–6; Dennes 1924:33).

But how do collective representations come into existence? The answer is through fusion or synthesis of individual representations (1898b/1924a:38/ t.1953b:27).

Durkheim demonstrates at least to his own satisfaction that collective representations exert force over individuals to a far greater extent than individual representations. This is demonstrated by the fact that they are backed by the authority of society and make individuals carry out actions and hold ideas which may be unpleasant (295/207). Opinion, which constitutes individual representations, carries no weight compared with that knowledge which is mediated by society (297/208).

Since collective representations exert force over the individual they constitute a controlling mechanism (*ibid.*:295/207). Just as important is the fact that collective representations are a means for expressing the feelings of individuals by symbolizing them externally to the person (1914a:218/ t.1960c:336). Through such means people communicate with one another and so create a sense of unity with one another *(ibid.)*. Here once again Durkheim's argument assumes that collective representations have an existence external to individuals who embrace them.

The importance of collective representations comes home in another way. Durkheim held that everything which is uniquely human, for example language, ideas and therefore the idea of the individual itself, is social in origin, and therefore related to collective representations *(ibid.)*.

But collective representations are qualitatively superior in another way. They carry in themselves the past. Near the end of his life he wrote that collective representations 'add to that which we can learn by our own experience all that wisdom and science which the group has accumulated in the course of centuries' (621/435). Nevertheless, he did not allow his readers to think that individual and collective representations were totally distinct. To the contrary he argued in *The Rules,* in the preface to the second edition, that they were indeed representations (1895a/1901c:xix/t.1938b:lii). Further, certain laws of combination affected both in much the same way (*ibid.*:xvii/ li). This allowed Durkheim to assume that formal individual psychology and sociology might have something of a common starting-point.[2]

Stability and change in collective representations

From what has already been said it is obvious that the main requirement of collective representations is that they are stable and not given to change. If they were perpetually changing, their value to mankind would be negated.

Such necessary stability is in part determined by some form of restraint. Durkheim wrote towards the end of his life: 'But a collective representation is necessarily submitted to a control that is repeated indefinitely; the men who accept it verify it by their own experience' (625/438; Lévy-Bruhl maintains the same point in 1910/t.1926:13). As is so often the case, Durkheim found the best example for his argument in the realm of religion. He argued that the idea of gods, of mysterious forces, and so on, would have been passing phantasies had they been merely individually held. But 'by becoming collective, impressions have become fixed, consolidated and crystallized' (1910a(iii)(2)). This process was also acknowledged by the Viennese philosopher Jérusalem, who called it social condensation. All too obvious is the fact that individual representations tend to be unstable and are short-lived. DeGré sees Durkheim's main thesis amply and indubitably demonstrated, namely, that collective representations transcend and constrain the particular thoughts of individuals (1985:91). Collective representations can only become stable if they are passed through society, for example handed on from generation to generation. That means they have to transcend the personal, the individual (Durkheim 1913a(ii)(6) and (7):36/ t.1975a:172).

But if collective representations are absolutes, permanent and unchangeable, they have affinities with Plato's Ideas, which have an existence that transcends this world. Although he saw the need for stability in representations, Durkheim by no means accepted Plato's concept of Ideas. Representations are both unchangeable and changeable. He saw the need for stability but also the possibility of modification. He visualized representations very much like language, which both changes and does not change. 'Now language is something fixed: it changes but very slowly' (619/433). These characteristics also relate to society, as well as to collective representations. Durkheim was constantly aware that societies change in matters which are not just peripheral: they relate to the ways in which social man views the most fundamental aspects of his experience.

In all this, Durkheim was very much a supporter of the notion of evolution but not of a theory of evolution in which an overall principle is said to determine the evolutionary process. He wrote: 'Far from being immutable, humanity is in fact involved in an interminable process of evolution, disintegration, reconstruction; far from being a unit, is in fact infinite in its variety, with regard to both time and space' (1938a/1969f:372/ t.1977a:324).

One type of change gives rise to another but there is not necessarily a predetermined or determinable pattern. At the same time that he published *Les Formes élémentaires,* he wrote: 'If then human mentality has varied over the centuries and with societies—if it has evolved—the different types of mentality it has successively produced have each given rise to the other' (1913a(ii)(6) and (7):37/t.1975a:172). The point is that Durkheim admits to

various kinds of evolutions which vary with each society and its conditions of existence. Each society, for example, creates its own system of constraints and sanctions—its religion and morality (Palante 1913:281).

No representation is completely universal. There may be universal types such as representations of time and the person, but the actual content of the representations varies a great deal from society to society, and with time. This raises the question of basic categories, which clearly come within the sphere of collective representations discussed in the pages ahead. Nevertheless relativism, most apparent in Durkheim's notion of collective representations, creates great problems. For Durkheim, one obvious example of relativism is in connection with the notion of God as a divine person who is immutable and whose characteristics are held to be eternal. The foundation of the Judaeo-Christian religion in supporting such notions of invariability and eternality as the characteristics of God, which are not found in other religions, probably caused Durkheim to reject the truth-value of any religion (see Pickering 1984:10).

The question which immediately arises is how collective representations change and how new representations emerge. Durkheim had various kinds of answers. He maintained that representations change through association with other representations: the relationship is established in which one modifies the other, that is, where they mutually bring about a representation in an almost dialectic fashion. In *The Rules of Sociological Method* he said: 'We need to investigate, by comparison of mythical themes, popular legends, traditions, and languages, the manner in which *représentations sociales* adhere to and repel one another, how they fuse or separate from one another, etc.' (1895a/1901c:xviii/t.1938b:li).

Early in his academic life he held that practical courses, rather than theoretical—might we say philosophical? —ones, have been the determining reasons for emergence of collective representations. The obvious examples come from religion (1887b:308/t.1975a:34). Representations also become strengthened and changed through effervescent gatherings. The strengthening comes as a result of ritual (Pickering 1984:chs. 21 and 22). This raises the difficulty that although Durkheim always testified to the strength of institutions he nevertheless saw that social life, based as it is on representations, is brittle. People's involvement in it can be feeble. What is necessary is to create such conditions as to stabilize representations and so give unity and cohesion to society. This is achieved by people gathering together and participating in common rituals which are associated with collective representations. Thus he could write: 'So they [representations] necessarily partake of this self-same intermittancy. They attain their greatest intensity at the moment when men are assembled together and are in an immediate relation with one another, when they all partake of the same idea and the same sentiment' (493/345).

Facts and representations

Durkheim saw collective representations as facts—social facts. Such facts are external to the individual; they exist as part of reality. In *The Rules of Sociological Method* he stressed that sociology was essentially a science, whose subject matter was social facts. Social facts were held to be ways of acting, feeling and thinking found to be general in society (1895a/1901c:5/t.1938b:3). The emphasis was on action but it was not by any means exclusively so. When Durkheim held later that collective representations were very much the subject matter of sociology, he did not significantly shift his ground. Collective representations differ from social facts only by the degree of consolidation they represent (Lukes 1973:1). They are 'social facts in the super-structure' of society *(ibid.)*.

The process of representing

The notion of representing is very far from a static concept. It implies a process in relating a knowing subject to an object outside the self, and a relation between them (Bohannan 1960:90). The relation turns on the social collectivity in which the individual is situated. Therefore in this dialectical relation emotion plays a part (Alexander 1982, 2:248). Representing means internalizing, as Durkheim clearly states (1925a:246/t.1961a:215). The notion of process and internalization, as Alexander notes, is a way by which the rigid dichotomy of subject and object is broken down as things become part of the individual through internalization (Alexander 1982, 2:249).

   The stress on collective representations which appears in the preface to the second edition of *The Rules* of 1901 is brought out by Durkheim to counteract a false reading of the book which occurred after it was published in 1895. Although the book had referred to collective representations his analysis of social phenomena was materialistic for it excluded 'the mental element' of the social (1895a/1901c:ix/t.1938b:xli). But the charge was refuted in his concept of society.

Society, a system of representations

In a relatively early reference to representations in 'La Prohibition de l'inceste et ses origines', Durkheim wrote: 'all that is social consists of representations and consequently it is a product of representations' (1898a(ii):69/t.1963a:114). A few years later he wrote in a similar vein in the second edition of *The Rules,* which has just been mentioned: 'we had expressly stated and reiterated that social life is constituted wholly of "collective representations"' (1895a/1901c:ix/t.1938b:xli). Durkheim tended to think of institutions or components of society as systems of representations (see chapter 8 here). As we have already noted, religion is so viewed as 'a system of ideas by which individuals

represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations that they maintain within it' (323/225). But Durkheim went beyond the components of society to society itself. In the preface to the second edition of *The Rules* he wrote: 'Whereas we had expressly stated and reiterated in every possible way that social life was made up entirely of representations' (1895a/1901c:xi/t.1938b:xli). Durkheim used almost identical words earlier in his book on suicide (1897a:352/ t.1951a:312; see also 1900b:649). He did not imagine that he was original in such thinking. Saint-Simon had held a similar position.

Just because society is a system of ideas, it is not an epiphenomenon of social morphology, nor is it an organ just to satisfy material needs (Evans-Pritchard 1960:17–18).

Social life in all its aspects and at every moment of its history is possible only by a vast system of symbolism, which for the moment we will assume is contained within collective representations (331/231). Representations are not only a basic constituent of society, they are ways by which a society looks at itself.

In some of his last lectures, which were on pragmatism, Durkheim went even further when he said: 'The major rôle of collective representations is to "make" that higher reality which is *society* itself' (1955a:174/t.1983a:85).

At this point one might enter a note of criticism. Durkheim frequently states that society is made up of collective representations, but nowhere, as Paul Vogt observes, does Durkheim spell out with precision the relation between society and the representations of which it is composed. Is society created by representations? How is society bound to representations? Are representations just parallel to society? And so on (Vogt 1979:106–7).

Representations and science

Crudely stated, science is primarily concerned with understanding nature or what might be called natural. Durkheim would divide nature into two broad categories—the social and the non-social. The non-social approximates to what is commonly thought of as the natural or the material. To those categories there are corresponding representations.

Fully recognizing that representations have been very much the subject matter of philosophers, he wished to demonstrate that they are also the subject matter of the sociologist. Despite the fact that representations are, roughly speaking, ideas, they nevertheless have an objective reality and an existence beyond that contained in individual minds. The issue was one of the subjects raised in his 1898 article, 'Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives' (1898b). He said: 'Since observation has revealed an order of phenomena called representations, distinguishable by certain characteristics from all other natural phenomena, it is scarcely methodical to treat them as though they did not exist' (1898b/1924a:5/t.1953b:4).

Durkheim held that collective representations were by definition social, and therefore observable and empirical. They did not exist at the back of the mind and were therefore, unlike Kant's noumena, within the realm of empirical examination. In rejecting the then current psychological theories which would relate representations to the nervous system, Durkheim argued:

> If representations, once they exist, continue to exist in *themselves* without their existence being perpetually dependent upon the disposition of neural centres, if they have power to react directly upon each other and to combine according to their own laws, they are the realities which, while maintaining an intimate relation with their substratum, are to a certain extent independent of it.
>
> <div align="right">(ibid.:32–3/23)</div>

Durkheim's argument at the end of the article was that representations constitute a body of knowledge—a body of natural facts, despite their metaphysical appearances. They are social facts and therefore open to scientific investigation. This was confirmed in the notion that representations are undoubtedly caused and 'are in turn causes' (*ibid.*:5/4). Here is 'a body of natural facts which have to be explained by natural' causes (*ibid.*:48/34). What is now before the scientist is a new world surpassing 'all others in complexity' *(ibid.)*.

The basis of sociology

Perhaps just because philosophers saw that representations are the basis of man's knowledge, so Durkheim held that they were the foundations of sociology. This he expounded in an article on the history of sociology where he witnessed to the influence of Espinas on his thought. Espinas (1844–1922) was professor at Bordeaux university and it has been suggested that he to some extent paved the way for Durkheim to follow him when he left. Durkheim was appointed to be *chargé de cours* in social science and pedagogy in 1887 (Lukes 1973:95). Accepting some of the ideas of Espinas he wrote: 'If societies are organisms, they are distinguished from purely physical organisms in that they are essentially consciences. They are nothing if they are not systems of representations…they are living consciences, organisms of ideas' (1900b:648/t.1973a:13). Here Durkheim makes a firm assumption about the nature of human societies which are seen as organisms and which are differentiated from other organisms by the existence of representations. Since sociology is concerned with societies which are seen to be like human organisms, it has at its heart the study of representations, their nature and the way they form, develop and combine (Lukes 1973:6–8).

But sociology has as its subject matter collective representations, not individual representations, although they can both be studied objectively (1895a/1901c:xii n.1/t.1938b:xliv n.2). The reason is logical enough.

In the preface to the second edition of *The Rules,* Durkheim maintained that there should be a special branch of sociology—he called it social psychology—which was distinct from individual psychology. It would study laws of collective ideation and, on a comparative basis, 'mythical themes, popular legends, traditions, and languages, the manner in which social representations adhere to and repel one another, how they fuse and separate from one another, etc.' (*ibid.*:xviii/li). Psychology and sociology proper are distinct sciences, each having its own laws (*ibid.*:xvi/xlix). Bouglé, defending Durkheim's position, argued that Durkheim would admit the validity of a kind of social psychology which was very near to sociology. Bouglé, who succeeded Durkheim at the Sorbonne, wrote: 'puisque les représentations dont est faite la vie sociale sont des synthèses originales des représentations individuelles, c'est par une psychologie spéciale, proprement collective, que la science ne doit être constitué' (1898:155).

Vogt has argued that virtually all Durkheim's sociology was a sociology of knowledge, or at least a sociology of belief (1979:102). That contention, which perhaps is a deliberate exaggeration, is supported by the mere fact, as we have noted, that at the heart of all Durkheim's sociology are collective representations.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter we have presented very briefly a number of assertions made by Durkheim about representations. In analysing the use he made of them, three issues stand out. The first is that all knowledge is dependent on representations: nothing of a generalized knowledge can be known apart from ideas—even when the subject matter is a 'thing'. Thus, the world can be known not as a thing in itself but only through representations. Second, although philosophers have always seen ideas or representations as being very much within their immediate concern, sociology has a contribution to make in a study of them. This is so because, third, representations are closely related to the social, to society itself, and that, loosely stated, is the subject matter of sociology.

This is not the place to offer criticisms of Durkheim's use of representations. They will become apparent in the chapters ahead. Suffice it to say here that he can be accused of failing to differentiate categories within a general category. For example within individual or collective representations, he makes no distinction between conscious or unconscious representations, between deep and surface representations, between those that are related to sounds and speech, those that come from writing and those from symbols and signs. And what is the relation to each other and the relative importance

of these kinds of representations. Perhaps Durkheim never thought of them. They are problems which will not go away.

Notes

1 References to *Les Formes élémentaires* in this chapter do not have the dating-enumeration of 1912a. The first number in the bracket refers to the page number in the French edition; the second, to the corresponding page number of Swain's translation (t.1915d). In cases where it has been thought necessary, that translation has been modified.

2 Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, while he was never a member of the Année Sociologique group, had interests very close to those of Durkheim. He offered a useful résumé of the properties of collective representations, which appeared in 1910 in *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. He wrote:

> The representations which are termed collective, defined as whole without entering into detail, may be recognized by the following signs. They are common to the members of a given social group; they are transmitted from one generation to another; they impress themselves upon its individual members, and awaken in them sentiments of respect, fear, adoration, and so on, according to the circumstances of the case. Their existence does not depend on the individual; not that they imply a collective unity distinct from the individuals composing the social group, but because they present themselves in aspects which cannot be accounted for by considering individuals merely as such. Thus it is that a language, although, properly speaking, in the minds of the individuals who speak it, is none the less an incontestable social reality, founded upon an ensemble of collective representations, for it imposes its claims on each one of these individuals; it is in existence before them, and it survives them.
>
> (Lévy-Bruhl 1910/t.1926:13)

REPRESENTATIONS IN DURKHEIM'S SENS LECTURES

An early approach to the subject

Warren Schmaus

Durkheim's philosophy lectures at the Lycée de Sens during the academic year 1883–4, which pre-date any of his published works, shed new light on the development of his concept of collective representations as the subject matter of his sociology.[1] To be sure, he did not use the terms sociology and collective representations in these lectures. However, we find in them a defence of a hypothetico-deductive approach to the study of mental states in psychology that would also allow the postulation of shared mental states in sociology. We also discover a theory of the meanings of general terms that identifies them with shared mental states, a theory that prefigures his identification of general concepts with collective representations. In addition, Durkheim carefully explained in these lectures the relationship between mental representations and our most fundamental categories of thought. This explanation suggests a way to resolve an outstanding problem from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912a), in which he presented the categories as universal and necessary and yet as culturally variable collective representations dependent on social causes.

Durkheim on the goals and methods of philosophy and psychology

The Sens lectures reveal Durkheim struggling with the legacy of Victor Cousin (1792–1867), which dominated French academic philosophy in the nineteenth century. Cousin had been the Minister of Public Education and Director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, the leading institution in France for the training of academics, where Durkheim was a student. Although Durkheim accepted from the Cousinian tradition the notion that philosophy is the study of mental states, he broke with its conception of the methods appropriate to this study.

Cousin preferred spiritualism over eclecticism as the name for his philosophy. For Cousin, philosophy was a Cartesian, foundationalist enterprise, characterized by what he called the *méthode psychologique*. He seems to have meant two things by this term. He used it to refer to the grounding of all of philosophy, including logic, metaphysics and ethics, in an introspective psychology that inquired into the laws, scope and limits of our cognitive faculties (1846:67; 1860:3–6, 34). However, he also used it to refer to the very method of introspection that this philosophical psychology used (1846:4). In accord with the polemic against hypotheses of Thomas Reid (1710–96), Cousin emphasized that this foundational discipline must rest on neither hypotheses nor empirical laws but must have the sort of absolute certainty that he believed Descartes was able to attain only through the method of internal observation (1860:34).

Cousin's posthumous influence on the philosophical curriculum is reflected in the syllabus published by the Ministry of Public Instruction in 1880 for the baccalaureate examination in philosophy, the examination for which Durkheim was preparing his students at the Lycée de Sens. Durkheim's lectures followed the order of the syllabus of 1880, beginning with psychology and continuing with logic, followed by morals, and then ending with metaphysics. Cousin's division of philosophy, he said, was the simplest and the best (25–6).[2] The syllabus of 1880 was drafted by a committee of academics that included Paul Janet (1823–99), a former student of Cousin's and a member of Durkheim's dissertation committee at the Ecole Normale (Lukes 1973:297; cf. Brooks 1996). Janet was also the author of a standard philosophy text used in the lycées, the *Traité élémentaire de philosophie à l'usage des classes,* first published in 1879. It was reissued in a new edition in 1883 to conform to the syllabus of 1880, while Durkheim was teaching at the Lycée de Sens.[3]

With Janet, the spiritualists' strongly anti-hypothetical stance had begun to weaken. Janet's text discussed how the anti-hypothetical attitude characteristic of the post-Newtonian period had changed and argued that hypotheses were necessary to direct experimentation in the natural sciences (1883:474, 468). While Cousin, curiously, had regarded Descartes' work as free of hypotheses (1860:3), Janet openly conceded the hypothetical status of Cartesian vortices, along with Stahlian phlogiston and Ptolemaic astronomy (1883:474). He also allowed a role for hypothesis and experiment in animal, physiological, pathological and cross-cultural psychology (*ibid.:*490). Most notably, Janet defended psychological hypotheses that postulate representative ideas against the attacks of Reid, Pierre Royer-Collard (1762–1845) and Cousin (cf. Madden 1984:97; Hatfield 1995:229n.119). According to Janet, these philosophers had shown only that representative ideas do not mediate external perception. Hypotheses postulating representative ideas were still useful in providing accounts of memory and the meaning of concepts (Janet 1883:369). Nevertheless, like Cousin, Janet continued to seek a foundation

for philosophy in the introspective psychological study of the faculties of the human mind (*ibid.:*13).

In Durkheim's Sens lectures, on the other hand, we find a more thorough-going defence of the use of hypotheses in psychology and in philosophy generally. Philosophy is a science, Durkheim argued, and thus, like all sciences, has explanation as its goal. The mathematical sciences explain through relations of identity and the physical through relations of causality. Each science must have its own object of study, of either a mathematical or a physical nature, and a method of study appropriate to this object (13). Philosophy takes states of consciousness *(états de conscience)* for its object of study (19–20). Durkheim rejected Eduard von Hartmann's (1842–1906) suggestion that conscious mental states are grounded in unconscious states (107–8). Nor does psychology include for him the notion of a substantial soul that escapes our conscious awareness (116–17). For Durkheim, the object of study of a science must be accessible in some way, and that which is outside consciousness is inaccessible.

As conscious mental states are subject to causal relations, Durkheim argued, philosophy must rely on what he called the 'experimental' method (19–20). Breaking with tradition, he rejected the Cartesian *cogito* as a foundation for philosophy (210–11). Durkheim characterized his method even in moral philosophy as experimental (489). In agreement with Claude Bernard, Durkheim defined the experimental method in terms of hypothesis testing rather than the manipulation or artificial creation of phenomena (13–14, 368–9). Durkheim found the method of hypothesis dangerous but necessary in the physical sciences: no discovery could be made without hypotheses. The growth of knowledge requires the construction of hypotheses through the use of our creative imagination (366–7; cf. 188–9, 191–2).

Once Durkheim had endorsed a hypothetico-deductive method for the study of individual psychological states, it was then a short step for him to apply the same method to collectively shared mental states, which subsequently constituted the subject matter of his sociology. Questions of epistemology and ethics that had formerly been grounded in Cartesian certainties about the soul were now to be rethought in terms of the empirical, hypothetical sciences of sociology and psychology. At this early point of his career, he was still using the term states of consciousness rather than representations as the name for the mental states postulated by these sciences. In his earliest published works, such as the *Division of Labor in Society* (1893b), he characterized sociology as the study of states of the collective consciousness. However, he used the term states of consciousness to refer to a type of mental entity, a representative idea, that contains the meanings of our concepts yet exists independently of language. Collective representations simply constituted a new term that he subsequently adopted to avoid the metaphysical associations people had made with the locution 'states of the collective consciousness'.

Durkheim's conception of philosophy as a science should be confused with neither materialism nor the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte. As Durkheim made clear, for Comte, philosophy is a synthesis of the methods and results of the sciences, not the study of mental states (20). Also, Durkheim defended an idealist position in these lectures. He said that the only thing that is real is force or spirit (101) and argued that one of the virtues of 'our' spiritualism is that of not having to introduce into nature a break in continuity between two sorts of reality, that is, mind and matter (498). What we *call* matter, he said, is only an ensemble of appearances (503). For Durkheim, then, as for idealist philosophers like Berkeley, for matter to exist is for it to be the content of a mental state. Durkheim continued to maintain this idealist metaphysics throughout his career. In a review of Hippolyte Taine (1828–93) published in 1897, Durkheim agreed with him that there is no reality beyond the sensible world of appearances (1897f:173). Even in his later works, he affirmed that nothing exists for us except in representations (1909d:756;1912a:493n.1/t.1915d:386n.55/t.1995c:349n.55).

In his works subsequent to the Sens lectures, however, Durkheim denied that spiritual as well as material substance existed outside and independently of our representations. When he adopted the 'dualist' position that there are two consciousnesses in each of us, he was not affirming a duality of substances, entities, souls, or any other such metaphysical substrata. He meant only that he now believed that there were two sets of representations in each person, individual and collective representations. The two sorts of things that existed for him, the individual personality and the society, existed as the contents represented by these two sorts of mental states (1893b/1902b:74/t.1933b:105/t.1984a:61;1912a:23/t.1915d:29/t.1995c:15; 1913b:64, 73; 1914a/1970a:316–20, 330).

Durkheim on language, thought and meaning

Although in some ways Durkheim's metaphysics may have resembled Berkeley's, his conception of meaning is quite different. Without so much as even mentioning Berkeley's critique of Locke's notion of abstract general ideas, Durkheim identified the meaning of general terms with general ideas formed by comparison and abstraction from particular ideas (206). Durkheim's discussion of meaning took Condillac rather than Berkeley as its point of departure. In both his rejection of extreme nominalism and his appeal to a theory of representative ideas as a way to account for the meanings of concepts, Durkheim's Sens lectures once again reflect Janet's text (cf. Janet 1883:369).

Durkheim's views on meaning are best revealed in his account of the role of language in thinking, in which he inquired into whether the use of linguistic signs is either necessary or sufficient for thought (394ff.). He divided the question as to whether language is *necessary* to thought into three parts,

concerning particular, abstract and general ideas respectively. Particular or concrete ideas, he argued, are the only ideas of which we can think without naming them. However, even this process is facilitated by the use of language (394–5).

According to Durkheim, Condillac held that language is necessary for thinking about abstract ideas, since abstract ideas could not exist without their signs. Durkheim, however, disagreed and thought that abstract ideas *could* exist independently of language or signs. For example, he said, we can mentally separate the extension *(étendu)* of a table from the table and do so without the use of signs. But every time we wanted to think about such an abstract thing without its sign, he added, we would have to go through the laborious mental operation of abstraction all over again. This is so laborious, that, given the role of abstract ideas in the sciences, the sciences would be nearly impossible without language. The word 'fixes' the abstract idea so that we do not have to form it again every time that we need it (396–7).

Durkheim then turned to the question of general ideas. He took as his example the idea of humanity, which for purposes of argument he defined as the collection of beings that are intelligent and free. The only way to represent these qualities without signs, he argued, would be to represent to ourselves a being who had them. However, then we would have the idea of an individual, not of humanity. It is true that one could attempt to consider in this individual, say, only intelligence, without concerning ourselves with the various manifestations this faculty could take. But this would be difficult. The word would decrease the effort required to retain the general idea of humanity (397–8).

Hence, with regard to the question of whether language is necessary to thought, Durkheim concluded that we could think without signs, but not as well (398).

Durkheim then turned to the issue of whether the use of language or signs is *sufficient* for thought. He considered Taine's theory that we can think with signs alone, abstracting from any ideas, but only to reject it:

> It is always necessary to think about something and we are able to think about only an idea. It is thus necessary that we see something beneath the words. This idea will be very vague, if one wants, but it will exist nonetheless. We are not able to think of the word except under the condition of seeing at least the shadow of an idea under the word.
>
> But this shadow of an idea could not be sufficient for thought. Thanks to the word, it takes on a sort of body: it thus aids thought, but without substituting entirely for the idea.
>
> (399)

Durkheim's position here closely resembles Janet's, who argued that if words did not signify ideas, there would be nothing in our heads as we speak, and we would be talking like parrots do, without meaning. Anticipating the objection that it is possible at least in algebra to consider signs in abstraction from the thing represented by each sign, Janet replied that nevertheless the signs retain the degree of signification necessary to perform the operation. To wit, one sign may represent a known quantity, another the unknown that is sought, and so on (1883:162–3).

As a consequence of their position that words must signify ideas, Durkheim (207) and Janet (1883:162) rejected the nominalist philosophy that general terms do not signify general ideas but are only names or signs that refer to a class of particular things or ideas. For both philosophers, there are two parts to the meaning of a term, which the scholastics called the 'comprehension' and the 'extension' (209–10, 316; Janet 1883:378ff.). The comprehension of a term, Durkheim explained, consists of the elements shared by all the individuals that fall under the extension. It is the 'collection of characteristics that distinguishes the represented idea from every other.' The extension, on the other hand, is the collection of individuals that present these characteristics. The extension and comprehension of general terms are in inverse proportion to one another: the greater the number of shared characteristics, the smaller the number of particular things that share them, and the greater the number of particular things in the extension of a term, the fewer the distinctive characters presented by the idea we have of them (316).

The notion of the comprehension of a general term sounds like the very notion of an abstract general idea that was championed by Locke and ridiculed by Berkeley. Berkeley challenged the reader to form the abstract general idea of a human being or an animal that would consist in what is shared in common by everything denoted by each of these terms (1710:10–11). Berkeley found himself incapable of forming even the abstract general idea of a triangle that would answer to everything from scalene to equilateral triangles (1710:14). For Berkeley, a word becomes general not by being the sign of an abstract general idea but by standing for several particular ideas (1710:12–13). For Durkheim or Janet, Berkeley would thus provide us with only the extension of a general term and not its comprehension. At the time Durkheim was teaching philosophy at the Lycée de Sens, there appears to have been no conception of what Gottlob Frege (1892) was later to call the sense of a term other than the traditional notion of its comprehension. In particular, the sense of a term does not appear to have been identified with anything like rules of usage or synonymy, at least not in France.

In rejecting nominalism, Durkheim and Janet did not wish to go to the other extreme of Platonic realism, according to which general ideas correspond to things such as essences or forms that are supposed to exist independently of us. They adopted instead what they took to be the mediating conceptualist philosophy of Peter Abelard (1079–1144). According to their

reading of Abelard's philosophy, general ideas are neither mere words nor independently existing substances, but exist 'subjectively' or 'substantially' in the minds of each individual who knows the meaning of the corresponding term (207–8). During the nineteenth century, Abelard's works had become accessible and familiar to French scholars through the efforts of Cousin, who had edited and published the *Ouvrages inédits d'Abélard* in 1836 and Abelard's two-volume *Opera* in 1848–59. However, it is not clear that Cousin, with his stand against the use of hypotheses in psychology, could have endorsed Abelard's notion of a shared mental entity. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier, Cousin had dismissed the hypothesis of representative ideas existing independently of language.[4] Durkheim's hypothetico-deductivism, on the other hand, was consistent with his adoption of conceptualism.

Abelard's conceptualism may have suggested to Durkheim his later notion of collective representations. For Durkheim, the meaning of a general term was identified with its comprehension, which we have seen is an idea or mental entity. His adoption of conceptualism would then suggest that a mental entity of the same sort could exist in the mind of each individual who knows the meaning of this general term. Conceptualism could then have served as the inspiration or model for Durkheim's subsequent view that identifies the meanings of general concepts, including the categories, with collective representations or states of the collective consciousness. Indeed, the conceptualist philosophy appears to be reflected in the way that Durkheim later in his career defended his views on the collective consciousness against charges of ontologizing. That is, the collective consciousness is not to be thought of as some ghostly entity but rather as merely the collection of shared mental states that exist in the minds of the individual members of society.[5]

The categories

Like Cousin, Durkheim regarded such fundamental categories as space, time, causality and substance as universally shared, necessary conditions for thought. Against Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73), he argued that these concepts could not be constructed from external experience (135–7, 145–51, 157–62). However, he also rejected attempts to derive the categories from our internal experience of willed effort (138–40). Pierre Maine de Biran (1766–1824) had defended against Hume's objections the notion that the concept of causality derives from our introspection of the power of the will over the body (Maine de Biran 1817). Cousin found Biran's question-begging replies to Hume nevertheless compelling and republished them in 1834 and 1841 (1834:xxv–xxvi). Janet (1883:201ff.) and Rabier (1884–6:295ff.) regarded these arguments as adequate as well. Drawing on Cousin's and Naville's (Maine de Biran 1859) posthumous editions of Biran's works, they revived his attempt to derive causality, substance and the

other Kantian categories from the supposed inner experience of the will and its effects. In a major departure from this spiritualist tradition, Durkheim recognized that that which is necessary cannot depend on causes (126). He also pointed out the circularity of attempting to derive the categories from experience, since one would need these categories in order to recognize them in experience (136).[6]

For the early Durkheim, the categories are not derived from experience but rather are apriori. In the Sens lectures he appears to have identified apriori with innate concepts. For example, he argued for the apriori *origins* of the ideas of space and time (135). The notion of external space, he said, 'derives' and is 'inseparable' from the nature of the mind (88–9). Now one might think that in his later sociology of knowledge, where he at least said that he rejected the apriori philosophy (1912a:18ff./t.1915d:26ff./ t.1995c:12ff.), Durkheim had abandoned his youthful views. However, thirty years later, in *The Elementary Forms,* he was still allowing for innate psychological capacities on which the categories were supposed to depend (*ibid.:*628ff. and 206/488ff. and 170/:441ff. and 146).

In *The Elementary Forms,* Durkheim appears to have imposed rather conflicting demands on a theory of the categories. On the one hand, he criticized empiricist attempts to derive the categories from experience on the grounds that they could explain neither the universality nor the necessity of the categories. On the other hand, however, he rejected the apriori philosophy for its failure to account for the variability of the categories (*ibid.:*19ff./ 26ff./ 13ff.). On his own theory, according to which the categories are contingent on social causes and culturally variable, it is not at all clear how he can account for their universality and necessity.

In the Sens lectures, in his attempt to resolve an apparent contradiction in the thought of Cousin, Durkheim drew an important distinction between two senses of the categories that also helps to clarify his position in *The Elementary Forms*. As Durkheim explained, Cousin had criticized Biran's position that the principles of reason, such as that every event has a cause, are generalized from internal experience. Although the categories may derive from this source, Cousin had argued, the principles of reason are apriori. But, Durkheim queried, how can this be? How can the principle of causality be apriori if the category of cause is not? Similarly, how can the principle that every attribute presupposes something in which it inheres be apriori if the category of substance is not? To resolve this problem, Durkheim distinguished two senses of the categories, one in which they are regarded as universal and necessary principles of reason and the other in which they are regarded as concrete representations, drawn from experience, that fall under these principles. For example, reason merely tells us to relate phenomena to something else, but does not tell us what that something ought to be. Experience intervenes and provides the concrete representation of the idea of substance. Similarly, reason provides the idea of a necessary

antecedent of a phenomenon, while only (internal) experience can yield the concrete representation of a cause (138–40). In his account of what he regarded as the category of space, he distinguished the apriori concept of exteriority, by which we spontaneously locate the causes of our perceptions outside of us, from the concept of a spatial ordering, which is introduced by experience (89).

This distinction between two senses of the categories allows us to resolve the tension in his later sociological theory of the categories. That is, the categories understood as principles of reason may be universal and necessary while the concrete representations of the categories may be culturally variable and dependent on social causes. The most significant difference between the Sens lectures and his later work seems to be that, in his sociology of knowledge, the representational content of the categories derives from social life rather than individual experience. We can thus interpret *The Elementary Forms* as maintaining that there can be culturally variable collective representations of the same universal categories. This interpretation makes it consistent with the Sens lectures, where he said that while no observed tribe lacks the rational principles, a tribe may be in an underdeveloped state and apply these principles in a naïve way; for example, they may not understand causality the way our scientists *(savants)* do (160). Thus the research programme in the sociology of knowledge that Durkheim helped to establish, which included the work of Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), Henri Hubert (1872–1927), Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) and many others, may be regarded as having investigated alternative cultural representations of the universal principles of reason.

Conclusion

In these early philosophy lectures, which are prior to Durkheim's invention of the notion of a collective representation, we can find several assumptions regarding mental representations that he retained and developed in his subsequent sociological career. These include the identification of the meanings of words with mental states, most notably the identification of the meanings of general words with shared or collective rather than individual representations. He also continued to identify reality with the contents of mental representations, whether individual or collective. Another assumption he appears to have retained throughout his career is that the hypothetico-deductive method is the appropriate method to study mental states.

It was Durkheim's methodology that most distinguished him from the Cousinian eclectic, spiritualist tradition in philosophy. Durkheim was seeking a more 'scientific' approach to the study of what had traditionally been the domain of philosophy, including such topics as meaning, language, thought and the categories. Unlike Cousin's *méthode psychologique,* Durkheim's methodology allowed him to postulate mental entities, including a type of

shared mental entity that he later came to call collective representations. Once he was willing to entertain hypotheses about shared mental states, he would then have been open to the possibility of testing these hypotheses with various sorts of empirical evidence. Specifically, he would have been open to the suggestions of scholars such as Wilhelm Wundt, whom he met on his subsequent trip to Germany in 1885–6, regarding the role of historical and ethnographic evidence in testing hypotheses about shared mental states. These kinds of empirical evidence became very important in Durkheim's later sociological works. Would it then be too much to say that it was Durkheim's methodology, which was apparent from the earliest stage of his career, that was driving his thought?

Notes

1 In 1995, Neil Gross, a graduate student in sociology conducting research at the Sorbonne, discovered a set of notes taken by André Lalande (1867–1962) as a student in Durkheim's course at the Lycée de Sens. Durkheim was transferred to the Lycée de Saint-Quentin in February 1884. For the remainder of the course, Lalande copied the notes taken the previous year by another of Durkheim's students. For further details of the notes, see N.Gross, 'Durkheim's Lectures at Sens', *Durkheimian Studies/Etudes Durkheimiennes,* 2:1–4, 1996; also extracts from the lectures to be found in the same issue, pp. 5–30.
2 All future references in which there are numbers only in brackets relate to Durkheim's Sens Lectures. The dating-enumeration of 1996a has been omitted in each reference for the sake of brevity. All translations into English from the Lectures have been made by the author.
3 The other main philosophy text intended for lycée students was Elie Rabier's *Leçons de Philosophie*. However, although Durkheim cited this as well as Janet's text in his later published works, the first volume of Rabier's text, on psychology, appeared only in 1884, the volume on logic appeared in 1886, and the remainder of this projected work was never completed. Thus Rabier's text was not yet available when Lalande was studying with Durkheim.
4 Madden (1984:98) quotes Cousin as having said: 'if by ideas be understood something real, which exist independently of language, and which is an intermediate between things and the mind, I say that there are absolutely no ideas' (Cousin 1864:280–1).
5 Durkheim first used this defence in his account of the notion of the social consciousness in his review of Schaeffle (1885a:92). He then applied this argument to the collective consciousness in *Suicide* (1897a:361/t.1951a:319) and in a letter to Céléstin Bouglé written in 1896 or 1897 (Besnard 1983:44; Durkheim 1975b, 2:393).
6 Ironically, in a critique of *The Elementary Forms,* William Ray Dennes had argued that Durkheim would run into a circularity problem in assigning social causes to the categories if he held a genuinely Kantian conception of the mind and its categories (1924:39).

REPRESENTATIONS IN DURKHEIM'S MASTERS: KANT AND RENOUVIER

I: Representation, reality and the question of science

Sue Stedman Jones

Introduction

The importance of the concept of representation in Durkheim's thought has been outlined in chapter 1. The concept is indeed central to his sociology and epistemology. What follows is a critical examination of his use of the term by examining its philosophical roots. The purpose of analysing Durkheim's philosophical background is to locate him as heir to a tradition of European philosophy and to rescue his thought from its association with American sociological functionalism and from classical positivism. Need it be said that Comte never used the term representation to characterize reality, society or science? Both of these associations mar the epistemological significance of Durkheim's theory. The Parsonian tradition has effectively captured much of the interpretation of Durkheim. However adequate or inadequate this may be, the effect is to treat representation as though it is invisible or of no theoretical import. It is of course bypassed in favour of a system and its automatic functioning. This tradition offers no explanation as to why Durkheim espouses representation. Yet Durkheim insisted over and over again not only that representation is the crucial epistemological point by which social reality can be accessed, but that the very reality of society consists in collective representations.

  To elucidate Durkheim's use of representation challenges the dominant characterization of Durkheim as the bogey-man of social theory—the positivist apostle of a science of facts and things. It demonstrates that he had acknowledged the discursive nature of social consciousness. Equally to insist on his constant concern with representation is to challenge the interpretation that it was only as he moved towards his 'idealist' phase that he acknowledged the role of consciousness in the determination of social reality.

In the latest intellectual fashions within social science and its new discourses, the concept of representations has become *de rigeur*. However, the use made of it here makes it sound as though it is simply an arbitrary and free-floating cultural variable. Although Durkheim was the first to acknowledge that social and historical character of representation, his education as a philosopher had taught him that representation is a complex mental procedure. It is this that his Kantian forebears elucidated for him. Although Durkheim expanded it into the terms of a new science, he did not in so doing bypass this but extended and developed it.

An examination of the Kantian elements in his thought should rebut those constant accusations of him as an empiricist, a positivist or even a materialist. Representation is neither a positivist, an empiricist nor an idealist concept. It is central to the meaning of reality and its philosophical articulation, which are central to the tradition out of which Durkheim came, and which will be the concern of this chapter.

Social reality and representation

There is a distinct and constant account of representation in Durkheim's works. This is belied by the still widely held belief that the early Durkheim is a positivist and that the late Durkheim is an idealist, with a break in his thinking occurring around 1897 (Parsons 1937:305). Lukes confirms this, by implying that Durkheim's use of the concept representation coincides with that of collective representation, which he started using in 1897 (Lukes 1973:6). It follows that Durkheim must have developed it after he wrote both *The Division of Labor* (1893b) and *The Rules* (1895a). It is certainly true that extended reflection on the nature and logic of representation does not occur until his middle-period essay, 'Individual and Collective Representations' (1898b/t.1953b). The concept is, however, evident in both the earlier books. This will become clear in what follows, which will also serve to demonstrate that it is central to what Durkheim means by consciousness *(conscience)* and action. But above all, it goes to the heart of what Durkheim means by social reality.

In the second preface to *The Rules* Durkheim argues that 'Social life is *entirely* made of representations' (1895a/1937c:xi). What is the force of this claim? Does it not imply that there is something insubstantial and subjective about the nature of society? How can society be both real and entirely representational? Since no thinker has more strongly insisted on the reality of society, it is clear that Durkheim equates reality and representation. To claim that representations are the core, the basis of social life, is thus not to argue for representations as illusory, fictional or purely subjective.

The connection between representation and the 'real' is obscured through a commonsense meaning of the concept of representation, which implies that it is somehow deficient or lacking in reality. Is not representation a substitute

for reality? Legal and artistic metaphors have contributed to this implication of an absent reality, and thus the purported deficiency of representation. A lawyer represents a client; a still-life represents the objects it portrays. Not just common sense, but also philosophical realism involves such an implication. It is no mere coincidence that Durkheim is opposed both to common sense and to realism, just as he explicitly rejects a reflectionist account of representation (1893b/1902b:64).

There is evidence in his thought of a philosophical dialogue about reality where the significance of representation is the obverse of the common-sense meaning, and concerns the relationship between knowledge and its objects. This is central to the all-important question of the constitution of social reality. Durkheim is clear that since social life consists in representations 'it consequently is a product of representations' (1898a(ii):69).[1] Social reality is made through and by representations. And this is possible because representations are not merely reflections of reality.

Kant, and above all Renouvier, oppose the view that representation is either defective or insufficient: it constitutes a reality. It cannot be set aside to get to reality 'in itself'. Renouvier turns this rejection of realism towards the practical interest of representation. It is these debates which inform Durkheim's account.

Kantianism, the question of reality and science

It was in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that the conception of representation, connected with reality and science, was first developed. During the early years of the Third Republic, there was a scientific and republican interest in Kant. He was recognized, not as a founder of idealism, but as a scientific thinker engaged with the problem of science and knowledge of reality. Boutroux, Durkheim's teacher at the Ecole Normale in Paris, acknowledged the epistemological and scientific significance of Kantian thought. 'The Kantian critique of pure reason is properly a theory of science' (Boutroux 1925:346). Representation is central to Kant's theory of transcendental idealism. Boutroux acknowledged that the latter is a doctrine of reality and accepted Kant's equation of transcendental idealism and empirical realism (Boutroux 1968:108).

Renouvier, the 'great master' who was Durkheim's 'educator', was the first French philosopher to recognize the scientific importance of Kant. He acknowledged that Kant had moved the question of reality beyond empiricism, materialism, positivism, idealism and realism. Kant had established representation as being central to a logic of reality and of science, and thus had shown that it is part of critical scientific thinking. 'Kant…is the greatest philosopher…whose work must be the point of departure for all questions of certainty and method' (1875a, 2:23). For Renouvier, what rationalism had delivered, which is 'incontestable', 'is the methodic reduction of all direct

knowledge *(connaissance)* to ways of thinking or as we say today to representations' (Renouvier 1881:121).

Representation lies at the heart of a doctrine of reality and of science for post-Kantian scientific thinking. The difference between Renouvier and Boutroux is that Renouvier developed representation into a theory of science. A dialogue with Kant, in both a positive and a negative sense, is a sustained feature of Renouvier's scientific philosophy. 'Our school…is nothing other than the school of Kant' (1872b:389). It is through his critique and continuation of Kant that we arrive at representations *tout court,* without the architectonic and divisions of Kant's First Critique. Renouvier begins his logic and theory of science with representations. In so doing, however, he presupposes much of Kantian theory of science. He accepts Kant's revolution in epistemology and the concept of representation as being identical to the field of general logic. But it is not just through Renouvier's continuation, it is most importantly through his critique of Kant that Durkheim is enabled to use representation as a concept compatible with a collective and human science. It is by this that Durkheim is able to identify representation as being identical to a social reality.

There are three broad areas under which the discussion of representation and reality must take place: first, the establishment of representation through critique of positions which undermine its reality and authority; second, the question of the mental nature of representation and the problem of the unconscious; and third, the question of realism and what hinges on it for a doctrine of representation.

Representation and the concept of reality: the critique of empiricism, materialism and idealism

The claim that representations are the core of social life for Durkheim is associated with his opposition to empiricism as a theory both of science and of reality. This is evident in both *The Rules* and *The Elementary Forms.* 'Empiricism culminates in irrationalism; it can perhaps even be designated by this name' (1912a:20). It is irrational precisely because it refuses all reality to logical life *(ibid.).* This theoretical critique of empiricism supports the practical interest of his thought, in his opposition to political economy, for the reason that empiricism is its logical foundation.

The critique of empiricism is central to the work of both Kant and Renouvier. Because of this, Durkheim could acknowledge that there is no direct reference to the raw data of experience—sensations or impressions, as Hume called them. All knowledge of experience is mediated, and it is mediated through the terms and conditions of representation. Sensory experience requires and relies on epistemic principles as logical presuppositions, for it to become ordered and coherent. It is for this reason that empiricism is an inadequate philosophy and theory of reality. Both Kant and Renouvier agree

that empiricism cannot account for these epistemic principles which order sensation.

The philosophy of Hume had shown Kant that pure empiricism not only led to scepticism about knowledge, but negated the objectivity of science. In particular, Hume had undermined causality by arguing that it has no foundation beyond our subjective habit of expectation which is tied to the principle of association. Durkheim takes up this condemnation of empiricism's treatment of the principle of causality (1912a:526). It follows that the logic of empiricism must be false if it entails the denial of the proven scientific reality of causality.

Kant, however, agreed with the first principle of empiricism that all knowledge begins with experience. By this he meant that we have no knowledge until consciousness is stimulated through the organs of sensation. But, in that famous phrase, he did not conclude that all knowledge derives from experience. Sensory experience requires a form which logically precedes it: without this it is incoherent. The form that sensory experience requires is given through representation. So he argued that the causal principle is presupposed by ordered and coherent experience; and this is imposed by the faculty of understanding on the raw data of sensation, given through the faculty of sensibility. The failure of empiricism to underscore a scientific knowledge of reality led to the discovery of those principles and activities of the mind which do. He thereby showed that the understanding is involved in science and the production of objective knowledge. Representation in combination with the data of sense is for Kant a work of the understanding.

In Durkheim's eyes science is also a work of the understanding. He condemns those who prefer to think with their sensibility rather than their understanding (1895a/1937c:34). The rejection of empiricism is directly connected to the espousal of representation as a definition of the reality of society and of the science which explains it. The concept of representation is central to *The Rules,* and its idea of science. All phenomena, as objects of science, 'are represented in the mind' (ibid.:15). The much debated idea of social fact consists in 'representation and actions' (1895a/1937c:5). These are 'ways of thinking and acting' (*ibid.*:8).

For Renouvier, Kant had destroyed empiricism both as a philosophical method and as a theory of reality. Kant had made it impossible to maintain sensation as a basis of knowledge (1872b:385). He agreed with Kant that empiricism was unsatisfactory, for in giving all knowledge a sensory origin, it had reduced the constitutive laws of the mind to an accidental formation through the action of experience (Renouvier 1878a:283). Kant had shown that experience was indispensable to the appearance of the constitutive laws of the mind. In this, experience is only chronologically prior to the laws of representation, for it gives the matter of representation. Kant showed that the form bestowed to experience by the laws of representation has a logical priority of experience (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:194).

Kant had thus shifted the question of the nature of reality away from empiricism. He had shown that it relied on principles which are not only irreducible to experience, but which are also inexplicable on empiricist principles (Renouvier 1872b:385). The intervention of the laws of representation is required for any approach to reality. In an anticipation of the twentieth-century critique of empiricism, he argued that there are no facts without representation. And in anticipation of the Popperian hypothetico-deductive method, he argued that the concept of pure facts which can be approached without hypotheses is an illusion (1875b/1912, 1:106ff.). Kant had also shifted the question of reality towards those principles which logically anticipate and form experience, as central to the constitution and formation of reality, and as central to science. What principles allow the discovery of the real thus became a central question of a post-Kantian theory of science. It was this that Renouvier undertook in his *Traité de logique générale* (1875b).

It follows that representation is logically independent of empirical data, since that which is given to sense presupposes the activity of co-ordination and form-giving which is central to representation. Since it logically precedes purely sensory information, it is independent of it, and thus representation has a conceptual autonomy of the strictly empirical, which has important consequences for Durkheim's thought. This conceptual autonomy is a presupposition of the relative autonomy of collective representations, and how they prescribe form and signification in culture. And in the moral dimension, it allows the development of collective moral and human interests over and above economic interests.

From this philosophical background, Durkheim inferred methodologically that all phenomena require and presuppose some level of representation to become objects of experience. Representation thus enters into the constitution of facts. There are no facts without representations: facticity presupposes representation. Conversely, Durkheim holds that the representational can become the factual. It is no philosophical accident that for Durkheim social facts are representations. Second, he was enabled to infer that collective representations have a distinctive reality. And that this reality was the subject of a non-empiricist science: it was the subject of a science of representation. The science of facts and things by which he has been constantly berated must be replaced. 'Science begins when the mind…approaches things with the sole aim of representing them' (1900b/1970a:113).

Phenomenalism and the question of reality

Although Durkheim has been constantly presented in the history of sociology as the founder of empiricist sociology, it is clear that for him the all important business of the empirical research into social phenomena has a conceptual foundation in the science of representation. Sociology, while it is not empiricist, must for Durkheim be empirical. The central question

thus inevitably turns on how representation coincides with facticity. This is a crucial question for the social sciences, for if social phenomena are not phenomenally graspable the subject has no empirical basis. Durkheim insists that social phenomena are not empirical in one sense. That is, the major social phenomena—like marriage, morality or exchange—are not phenomena of the senses, in the same sense as the colour blue for example. Yet whilst not being based on sensation, they are empirical in a different and particular sense. They present themselves to consciousness. They have the same title to reality as material things, for both exist in this sense as representations. As such they are real objects of knowledge. They are empirical in the sense that they are phenomenal. And they are phenomenal because they are representations.

This argument is supported by Renouvier's rather than Kant's theory of phenomena. Phenomena and law constitute the corner-stone of any scientific knowledge of reality. Kant, through the argument of the Transcendental Aesthetic, makes space the form of the external senses. Thus for anything to count as phenomenal it must be spatial. This definition of Kant serves the interest of physical and mathematical sciences: on this definition nothing social would count as phenomenal. Renouvier, through his critique of Kant (and of the ordering of the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic), argues that the concept of the phenomenal need not be so restricted. Renouvier claimed to be the first in nineteenth-century philosophy to extend the word phenomena from its restriction to sense-objects, to cover ideas, feelings and 'other modes of representation as given' (1878b:371). A phenomenon covers all that is given to consciousness. This is not necessarily sensible in origin for ideas and beliefs, in so far as they are present in consciousness as phenomenal. A phenomenon is that which is represented.

There is thus a phenomenalism built into Durkheim's theory of representation. It is for this reason that he can say that social facts are representations. Now one distinctive movement in the social sciences, that of phenomenology, opposes itself to Durkheim's 'positivism' on precisely this point. It is clear that Durkheim makes social meaning problematic, but he does not deny what became the defining moment for the subsequent movement— that is the phenomenality of social experience. This for Durkheim was a minimal but not a maximal point of social theory. The relation between representation and phenomenality is further that which explains the connection between the two Durkheims—the 'positivist' of *The Rules,* who insists on facts and laws, and the 'idealist' of *The Elementary Forms,* who claims all is representation. Social facts are representations and as such are phenomenally available. Equally representations are graspable phenomenally. Whether they are each graspable in the same sense as each other is a question I will leave aside here. To insist on facts is not to deny representations. To insist on representations is not to deny facticity. Both coincide in phenomena for Renouvier (1875b/1912, 1:7).

Renouvier argues that reality and the phenomenal are co-extensive. Reality must not be distinguished from the phenomenal: this is the error of the 'ideological schools', who argue that the real does not appear, and who conversely imply that the apparent is not the real. All those things that cannot be realized phenomenally are 'idols' of thought. The clearest philosophical example is that of 'substance'. It is unknowable and ungraspable and therefore cannot play the role of the support for phenomena that it is made to play in many philosophical systems. Durkheim argues that 'science can have no knowledge of substance or of pure forms' (1898b/1951b:23). He argues that Comte's view of humanity is ideological or a subjective representation, that is nowhere found in reality: that is, it is not realized phenomenally (1895a/1937c:20). The concept of phenomena is thus tied to critical scientific thinking.

Nevertheless, phenomena are only the elementary, the 'first degree' of reality (Renouvier 1884:136). There are, however, other characteristics which indicate a deeper level of reality: permanence and coherence. Phenomena, which have a coherence and a duration, have 'more' reality than an isolated and fugitive phenomenon. Here is a difference between reality and illusion *(ibid.)*. This coherence and duration centres around the functions by which the phenomena are interrelated to each other, and by which they are dependent on each other. To identify the phenomenon and its immediate dependencies in functional relationships is for Renouvier to identify and to determine a law. Law, which is the constancy of functional relations, gives the phenomenal world a stability and solidity. Representation thus accommodates science in its discovery of phenomena and law in functional relations. It does so under the cognitive presuppositions of representation. It also accommodates the concept of reality, for what we really mean by reality are the 'syntheses and functions of phenomena' (Renouvier 1898:14). This is so no matter what types of phenomena are under consideration—whether they are *psychique* or not. Now in this sense of reality and of science, social phenomena present characteristics of law-likeness. They are syntheses and have functional relations and thus have reality. They are relations, which have a coherence and a degree of permanence over time. Marriage on this definition is a form of relationship which is general in society and has a coherence and a relative degree of permanence over time. And because social phenomena are *psychique,* that is representational, the cognitive discursive quality is included.

Representation and the critique of materialism

The philosophical critique of empiricism shows that there is a logical autonomy of representation from sensation. This in turn is tied to the autonomy of representations from a material base. Representation is connected to the rejection of materialism. Thus the reality of representation is non-material. This opposes a view still prevalent in sociology that Durkheim's

sociology is materialist (Hirst 1975:14; Walsh 1998:191). Durkheim rejects materialism in *The Division of Labor,* where he argues that the psychic life cannot be 'an efflorescence of physical life' (1893b/1902b:340). And in *The Rules* he insists on the 'extreme immateriality of social facts' (1985a/ 1937c:111). In his important middle-period article 'Individual and Collective Representations', he insists that 'Collective life, like individual life, is made of representations' (1898b/1951b:14). He rejects the 'physicalism' which makes mind epiphenomenal, and argues that reductionism makes psychic life an appearance without a reality *(ibid.).* Representation is associated with the critique of reductionism, central to the doctrine of irreducibility. His denial of reductionism is central to his rejection of social and political Darwinism. Methodologically, he rejects the explanation of human institutions by terms that are only adequate for zoology (1897e/1970a:248). Further, for Durkheim the rejection of materialism is connected with his definition of society as 'psychic' in nature. Social facts are an elaboration 'sui generis of psychic facts' (1895a/1937c:110). The nature of society is 'a psychic being' (1925a/ 1963c:56). Representation and the psychic are connected for Durkheim (1898b/1951b:25). This psychic life, Durkheim maintains in 1898, following William James, is a 'continuous course of representations' *(ibid.).* But there are distinctions in it, and these are 'our work' *(ibid.).* Action and reflection require this.

In holding that the concept of social reality as representational opposes materialism, Durkheim follows in the Kantian tradition. For Kant the significance of representation is that it opposes not just empiricism, but also materialism (and) idealism. 'Criticism alone can sever the roots of materialism… [and] …idealism' (1781/1963:34 B xxxix). Through the argument of the Transcendental Aesthetic of *The Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant shows that matter has no ontological priority, and is not epistemologically significant except as known through representation and its laws as applied to the data of sensibility. It follows that matter, like space, must be treated 'under the conditions of sensibility' (1781/1963:286 A 277/B 333). It is an appearance of outer sense, and can only be known through outer relations. Matter is *'substantiae phaenomena'* (*ibid.*:287 A 278/B 334).

For Renouvier it is through representation and its laws that the doctrine of materialism is refuted. Logically, materialism maintains that the object is always anterior to representation. But he argues that objects are constituted and have epistemological existence only within representation. In this sense, matter cannot be the basis of representation (1875b/1912, 1:25ff.). For Renouvier materialism is 'contrary to the facts'. Material facts have no 'privilege' of reality or of priority. It is false in denying the existence of phenomena specifically different from matter. In particular in denying the existence of *psychique* phenomena. Psychic phenomena are not simply effects of physical causes. Not only are they real, but since it is only through these that we can know the material, it is they that have logical priority. 'Psychic

facts are also facts, and are facts which are indispensable for testifying to others' (Renouvier 1872a:130).

Here Renouvier argues for the reality of consciousness as a given datum of experience, and a crucial one, for it is through this that all knowledge of reality is given. Thus, it was he who showed Durkheim that the psychic and the representational are logically connected. But for Renouvier it was Kant who showed that the 'psychic' can be a matter for science through his doctrine of representation, even though Kant did not use the word.

Durkheim's use of the psychic has been overlooked in Durkheimian scholarship, probably because it is an inexplicable embarrassment. But it is central to his account of the nature of society, for it is the development of the 'psychic life' into a 'vast system of *sui generis* realities' that is central to his view of collective ideation, and its 'hyper-spirituality' (1898b/1951b:48).

Representation and the question of general reality

The reality of representation far exceeds its independence of the empirical and the material. It expresses a reality *sui generis* which expresses a social reality that is objective. It is collective and as such it is general. 'Nothing exists except through representation.' This is 'doubly true' with respect to religion (1912a:493). 'Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities' (*ibid.*:13). This connection between reality and representation indicates a reality that is neither a form of subjective idealism nor a form of Hegelian objective idealism for Durkheim (1898b/1951b:44).

If the concept of representation is developed in opposition to empiricism and materialism, it is through refuting what he calls 'problematic idealism' that Kant develops his argument for the reality and objectivity of representation. It is through a dialogue with Descartes that representations are conceived of as the sphere of the actual and not as subjective or imaginary. For Kant, Descartes is the main exponent of problematic idealism (1781/1963:244 B 274). This holds that only the 'I am' is indubitably certain. Kant rejects the assumption of idealism that only inner experience is immediately experienced, and that we thus have to infer the existence of outer things (*ibid.*:245 B 276). Kant turns this on its head by showing that inner experience of the self is only possible because of outer experience. Experience of the self is only possible mediately, not immediately (*ibid.*:246 B 277). The conclusion of Kant's argument is that reality cannot thus be collapsed into a solipsistic egocentric world. Kant has shown that both the inner and the outer are known through representations; it follows that representation is non-subjective and covers both the inner and the outer and thus accommodates what we mean by reality.

Renouvier, also like Kant, argues for a general sense of representation. But further than Kant, he maintains that this general sense of representation

is only possible if it is shared. He builds this into the logic of representation, and so underlines the authority of collective representations. Shared cognitive assumptions go to the heart of what Renouvier means by a general sense of representation. It is tied to pluralistic logic, which I will examine in chapter 4. He argues that representation is 'adequate' to reality. That is, reality can be encompassed by representation. A central question for this theory of reality is whether representation can adequately deal both with the self and with nature. Durkheim argues that the social milieu encompasses both people and things (1895a/1937c:112). How can reality as 'entirely representation' encompass these? We must examine Renouvier's argument that representation is sufficient to answer all questions about reality, and that it opposes subjective idealism and materialist objectivism. The person is experienced as an 'I', just as the object is a thing. How are they both accommodated within representation without falling into either subjective idealism or materialism? Neither of these positions supports the interests of a social science. Durkheim was the first to establish what is fundamental to the sociological vision, that is, to see the person as part of a system of social relations, and his or her identity as largely constituted through this system of relations and the way the world is so represented. Equally, material things are the repository of cultural and economic values—they are the signified in a signifying cultural and economic practice.

Renouvier's theory of the reality of representation shows how this is possible. He establishes it through his rejection of subjective idealism and material objectivism. The former requires that the self is the foundation of representation just as the latter makes the object the foundation of representation. Renouvier insists that his theory of representation avoids both pitfalls. He asserts that we know nothing of the self except through the logical forms of representation. In this sense the self is not logically anterior to representation. Equally the object is known only through forms of thought that are non-material, and thus is not logically anterior to representation. However, we do experience a difference between that which is self and that which is nature. This he acknowledges and builds into his definition of representation. He accommodates them by a distinction that is logical rather than ontological. The self logically belongs to the inner aspect of representation, and nature to the outer aspect. It acknowledges the Kantian point that all reality is known only logically through representation and its logical forms.

Through arguing that representation is only possible if it is shared, he opposes the egocentric approach of Cartesian idealism. 'I say representation and not my representation, for I know nothing of myself and my representations except through representation' (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:59–60). In this way, he argues for representations as a reality which is independent both of the self and of nature. He opposes representation to both subjective idealism and materialism and identifies it with a general sense of reality.

Reality, representation and the question of the 'outside'

This analysis throws light on a problematic aspect of Durkheim's argument in *The Rules*. He has been much criticized for his claim that social facts are outside *(en dehors)* of individual *consciences*. Critics of Durkheim on this point gloss over the fact that the 'outside' must apply to social facts as representations. What is overlooked as well is that in *The Rules* he also insists on 'the inside' *(le dedans)* just as much as the outside (1895a/1937c:28). The origin of this is the Kantian distinction between inner and outer as spheres of the real. Kant had shown that the outside really means the forms of outer experience which are attached to the objective forms of representation. The argument, central to the refutation of problematic idealism, in no way denies the reality of the subject which exists on the inner side of representation.

Renouvier develops this Kantian distinction. If the concept of representation is adequate for a doctrine of reality, it must accommodate the inner, where the self can be located, and the outer, the sphere, as he puts it, of external relations. These two aspects of representation are the inner *(le dedans)* and the outer *(le dehors)* respectively. The latter indicates externality, which can of course include nature. But it has this peculiarity in Renouvier's logic of indicating relations other than the self, that is, external relations (Hamelin 1927:183). In this sense it is quite appropriate to hold that social facts, as representations, are constituted in a sphere of relations other than the self, or the 'individual *conscience*' (Durkheim 1895a/1937c:4). In this Durkheim preserves the meaning of the subject (the inner), through the inner (and through the concept of *conscience*), as well as the meaning of the outer in terms of representation. It corrects the view that Durkheim's account of society opposes the subjective *per se* (Walsh 1998:278).

And most importantly, to say social facts are constituted outside of individual *consciences* does not mean that they are outside the representational sphere. He indicates that meaning is constituted both internally and externally in terms of the system of representations. This is not therefore to deny internal signification, but to include its general signification in terms of social and historical reality.

The mental nature of representation: the concept of mind and the problem of the unconscious

For Durkheim the whole nature of representation is mental. He rejects the accusation that he has eliminated the mental from sociology by pointing to its representational nature. 'Although we have expressly said and repeated in every way that social life was entirely made of representation, we have been accused of eliminating the mental element from sociology' (1895a/1937c:xi). He argues in *The Elementary Forms,* his last book, as he does in his middle

period, that 'the human being is nothing else…from the mental point of view, than a system of representations' (1912a:325). Representation implies the activity of mind and is central to a reality. The dependence of a reality on the activity of consciousness is central to what Durkheim means by culture. But what does Durkheim mean by the mental?

It was Kant, of course, who established the identification of the mental with representation. The mind for Kant is a set of faculties which produces representation: representation is the sum total of the activities of sensibility, understanding and reason. That which enables us to receive impressions is sensibility and is a receptive capacity. In contrast, the power to think them is active and belongs to understanding. This is an active 'power or capacity of the mind, and is a spontaneous force of the mind' (1781/1963, A 50 B 74). Without sensibility no object is given, and without understanding no object is thought. In terms of the structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* the Transcendental Aesthetic concerns the forms of sensibility, that is, the rules by which objects are presented to the mind. The Transcendental Analytic concerns the rules by which objects are thought. The two together constitute the sphere of representation, which thus covers the capacities of the mind to represent and the form by which it receives and knows objects. The latter is active, in contrast to the passivity of the former. The conceptual is the active work of understanding: a concept is a general representation.

Durkheim, like Kant, draws a distinction between sensibility and understanding. With Kant, he insists on a separation between that which is derived from sensibility and that which relates to the understanding and is conceptual. Kant had shown that no reality can be disclosed without the cognitive presuppositions of the understanding. Renouvier accepted that it is in terms of these that reality can be known and only through these. It is clear that for Durkheim the understanding is involved in the discrimination of reality. 'The understanding can teach us to interpret our sensations' (1893b/ 1902b:69). In *The Rules* he argues for the activity of understanding as central to science. This is contrasted to a weak science centring on sensibility, which 'prefers the immediate and confused syntheses of sensation to the patient and illuminating analyses of reason' (1895a/1937c:34). In *The Elementary Forms* Durkheim argues that a 'whole system of representations exists outside of *(en dehors de)* sensations and images' (1912a:623).

Similarly to Kant, the mental for Durkheim means the conceptual. 'Concepts are the supreme instrument of all intellectual commerce' (1914a/ 1970a:318). And like Kant, the conceptual is the work of the understanding. We think with a system of concepts; representations are conceptual (1912a:619). Unlike Kant, he calls the understanding one of 'our psychic functions': it is 'a representative faculty' (1925a/1963c:34).

However, there is an important difference: for Kant representations are what the mind, as a set of faculties, produces. For Durkheim, the mind itself is a set of representations: it consists of 'past and present representations'

(1898b/1951b:31). Now if Durkheim means that *au fond* the mind is just a set of representations, what sense can be made of the mind as the potentiality or power to produce representations? The concept of faculty has, since Aristotle, indicated either a power or a potentiality of the mind. So Kant uses the faculty of sensibility, understanding and reason to indicate different powers or capacities of the mind which are each equally necessary for the production of knowledge. By sensibility objects are given, by understanding they are thought, and by reason they are unified under principles (Kant 1781/1963:303 A 302/B 359).

However, Durkheim argues that 'the ancient theory of the faculties no longer has any defenders', for it is 'metaphysical' and substantialist. One sees the modes of conscious activity no more as separate forces which only connect and find unity through a 'metaphysical substance', but as 'solidary functions' (1897a:25). This rejection of the concept of faculty is an important contributory factor to his sociological explanation of the mental, for he rejects explanation by reference to that which is 'inherent in the nature of human intelligence' as inadequate (1912a:20). Mental dualism must be explained by the social dualism of the sacred and the profane. We ascribe unequal values 'to our different psychic functions' (1914a/1970a:327). What has to be explained is this hierarchy: it is this that the theory of the faculties fails adequately to account for.

Renouvier criticized the very concept of a faculty of mind. The concept of faculty is a kind of 'thinker in itself' which is an empty idea, for it implies a thinking behind thinking: we do not need to make the mind a ghostly presence behind its activities (1875a/1912, 1:54–5). The concept of faculty is not needed with representation. Renouvier rejects the whole faculty structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He rejects the division into separate faculties of sensibility, understanding and above all reason. Their functions can be retained within the logic of representation. This is a crucial step towards 'representations' without Kant's architectonic.

The concept of faculty can only be a useful shorthand, to express those cognitive functions without which representation is impossible. The totality of these is indicated by the term *conscience*. Durkheim, who claims that '*conscience* is a system of functions' (1893b/1902b:217), also argues that representation is impossible without *conscience* (1898b/1951b:37). He agrees with Renouvier that '*conscience* is the condition of the representation of anything' (Renouvier 1898:18). In stating this, however, Renouvier has broken with a feature of classic rationalism's account and developed a functionalist theory of the mind. But further, by associating this with representation he has shifted the concept of knowledge towards a definition which allows the collective to imprint its mark on knowledge. 'Intelligence is thus eminently representation' (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:216). It is composed of 'psychic functions'. He releases representation from the Kantian architectonic, but like Kant he insists that it is inseparable from certain mental acts. His characterization of these, however,

does not follow Kant. First, there is the concept of attention. For a reality to be represented it must be attended to. For Durkheim attention also plays a 'capital role' in all cognition (1898b/ 1951b:31). Similarly, for Renouvier, 'attention is always fundamentally a representation maintained by effort' (Hamelin 1907/1952:231). Further, representation requires that we distinguish and determine a portion of reality. It also requires imagination, memory and judgment—that is, the capacity to abstract, and to generalize. 'All these faculties are what we call intelligence or understanding which under the condition of becoming, is thought' (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 2:181). Representation covers as much as Descartes' sense of thought *(pensée):* doubting, understanding, conceiving, affirming, denying, willing, imagining and feeling (*ibid.,* 1:8). *Conscience* is the term which covers this set of mental functions without which representation is impossible.

Durkheim criticizes classic rationalism for inhibiting understanding of the 'obscure depths of things' (1925a/1963c:215). In 'Individual and Collective Representations', he insists that 'collective life, like individual life, is made of representations' (1898b/1951b:14). Does he mean that these representations, as in classic rationalism, are conscious and clear? No, for in the same article he develops the important idea of an unconscious representation (*ibid.:*32). Psychic life, he argues, can be representable to the mind without our being aware of it. Even though *conscience* might not be aware of it, 'there are characters within representation which are not conscious, but which are active in conduct' (*ibid.:*33). 'The limits of conscience are not the limits of psychic activity' (*ibid.:*36). He identifies a partial unconscious with a *'conscience obscure'* (*ibid.:*36). I suggest that this must be connected to the footnote in *The Division of Labor* where he argues that there are levels of conscious life, and that the understanding is the most superficial level of conscience (1893b/ 1902b:266–7n.4). The deeper layers of *conscience* are part of what he later describes as the 'obscure conscience' which is associated with the unconscious (1898b/ 1951b:36).

These features of representation have an important place in sociological explanation and play a role, for example, in Durkheim's rejection of Marxism and the base/superstructure model in particular. In his middle-period review of Richard's, *Le Socialisme et la science sociale* (1897d), he identifies socialism through the concept of representation: it is the way in which certain strata of society 'particularly tested by collective suffering' represent this to themselves (1897d/1970a:244). In another review, that of Labriola's book on the materialist conception of history, Durkheim rejects an objective conception of history, identified with the doctrine of economic materialism, through the concept of representation (1897e/1970a:251).

His interest in the concept of 'profound causes which escape *conscience*' might be taken as evidence of a kind of base/superstructure model (*ibid.:*250). But this ignores the concepts of unconscious representation and of levels of *conscience*. I suggest that these 'profound causes' are not extra-representational.

They are part of the deep unconscious levels of representation that are crucial to social action. They are also of course connected to structural and historical conditions of society, but they exist in the structured layers of the representational consciousness of the agent. Durkheim is clear that 'the course of representations is determined by causes which are not represented by the subject' (*ibid.:*251). But the fact that the subject is not aware of them (at the 'superficial' level of understanding within the structure of *conscience*) does not mean that they are not causally effective at the level of unconscious representation, for this has an effect on action which is probably more profound than the superficial layers of consciousness. 'Not everything that is psychic is *conscience*' (1898b/1951b:36). 'Even though a phenomenon is not clearly representable to the mind, one has no right to deny it, if it manifests by definite effects, which are representable through signs' (*ibid.:*33). Lukes says that Durkheim has a conception of knowledge that ignores the question of meaning for the human subject (1973:12). The concept of an unconscious representation complicates the question of meaning—particularly its rational apprehension by the conscious mind—but it does not deny it *per se.*

Kant, at least in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* focuses on representations with consciousness, although he does discuss the concept of an unconscious representation in his pre-critical writings (1781/1963:314 A 320). Renouvier develops the idea of an unconscious representation through the idea of an 'obscure representation' in his *Traité de psychologie rationelle* (1875a). He argues against the idea of the pure unconscious, but at the same time admits that there are forms of representation that are active even though not before the mind *(conscience).* These are obscure representations, but not all intellectual functions exist in the 'domain of reflection'. They are none the less intellectually and indeed practically active. In this way he argues for degrees of *conscience,* and there are levels of consciousness and memory throughout representation (1875B/1912, 1:88–9).

So far then, we can see that representations are independent of an empirical or material base: they constitute a shared reality which is not reducible to the egocentric 'I'. And representations can be seen to accommodate reality, both self and nature. And their nature accommodates the unconscious. But how can social reality 'be entirely made up' of representations and still be a reality? Is there no reality beyond representation? Here we must confront the problem of the 'thing-in-itself.

Representations and the 'thing-in-itself'

Durkheim argues that the reality of representations is compromised by the 'thing-in-itself'. 'To admit their reality [representations] it is not at all necessary to imagine that representations are things in themselves' (1898b/ 1951b:29). Unfortunately this important reference is obliterated by the (only) English translation by Pocock, which renders the infamous 'thing-in-itself' of

philosophical history as 'thing having a separate existence' (Durkheim 1898b/ 1924a/t.1953b:15). Durkheim's rejection of this is closely connected with his rejection of realism in the preface to the second edition of *The Rules,* and with the rejection of reflectionist accounts of representation in *The Division of Labor.* This is tied to the practical interest of his work and of the possibility of change and transformation and to the concept of human interest. It is expressed in a neglected remark. 'A representation is not a simple image of reality, an inert shadow projected on us by things; but it is a force which raises a whirlwind of organic and psychic phenomena around itself' (1893b/ 1902b:64). 'It is the motor force of our psychic life; it is central to its free functioning and to our energy in action' (*ibid.:*65).

Durkheim's neglected and mistranslated statement contains a whole dialectic of reality. To argue that the reality of representations does not require the admission of the thing-in-itself shows an affinity with Kant, but more importantly with Renouvier. For Kant, representations are real objects of experience. However it is also central to Kant's claim that 'objects of experience are never given in themselves, but only in experience and never outside it' (1781/1963:440 A 493 B 521). That is, representations are not things in themselves. In drawing this distinction, Kant invokes the infamous thing-in-itself *(Ding an sich)* which will become a fundamental problem for all post-Kantian thinking. Although he has quite conclusively proved that all of reality and science can be accommodated within representation and its laws, he still insists that we can think a thing-in-itself, even though we cannot know it. It is necessary to oppose the 'absurd' conclusion that there can be appearance without anything which appears (*ibid.:*27 B xxvi). (He sometimes also insists that it is the correlate of sensibility.)

The thing-in-itself, for Renouvier, is totally incompatible with the theory of representation. His argument against the thing-in-itself and all it implies, informs the whole of Renouvier's scientific philosophy. It is through this that the concept of a human and collective reality gains philosophical significance, as the replacement for this lost, but illusory foundation for representation.

For Renouvier Kant had established a scientific system of philosophy. To affirm the existence of the thing-in-itself is to contradict his own epistemological principles: it is to misuse the fundamental laws of representation which are limited to possible experience. How can we think something which we cannot know and of which there is no possible knowledge? Kant fails his own critical test: Kantianism is vitiated by its failure to overcome metaphysics. Renouvier claims to be faithful to the critical and scientific spirit of Kantianism which Kant was not. Renouvier is aware that Kant claimed that his transcendental idealism was an empirical realism. His own doctrine of representation followed this claim. Kant had shown that representation is the objective sphere of knowledge. This was subverted by the thing-in-itself, which is postulated as 'real' but unknowable: it turns the

representational world, which is reality, into a world of appearances and is a form of 'ideology'.

It is no accident that Durkheim defends himself against the accusation of realism and ontologism at the same time as he supports the concept of representation and *conscience* (Durkheim 1895a/1937c:xi). This seems to be overlooked by the pronounced tendency to call Durkheim a realist. Of course Durkheim sees society as real, and explanation as grounded in the real and in causally effective structures of society. How can he do this and reject realism? His philosophical background helps elucidate the problem.

Kant, despite his retention of the thing-in-itself, had nevertheless shown that scientific philosophy cannot be a science of things-in-themselves. Renouvier extends this into a critique of realism and ontologism, for the thing-in-itself is the prototype of all realist argument. For Renouvier, logically, realist materialism is the attempt to constitute a thing-in-itself independent of representation: it turns representation into either an illusion or a subjective interference with the order of reality. If we reject it, then all questions of reality and of its knowledge must be found within the structure of representation. It establishes that knowledge consists in representation and its elements (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:59).

It is important to note that Durkheim's explicit rejection of the thing-in-itself constitutes a fundamental difference between Durkheim and Schopenhauer, whom Mestrovic argues is the fundamental source of Durkheim's thinking (Mestrovic 1988). The analogy is misconceived. First, Durkheim does not hold, unlike Schopenhauer, that representations are governed by the principle of sufficient reason. Second and more importantly, Schopenhauer argues *for* the utility of the distinction between the thing-in-itself and representation, precisely because it finally shows that the phenomenal world is *maya* or illusion (Schopenhauer 1969, 1:17, 421). But Durkheim denies the necessity for retaining the thing-in-itself precisely to maintain the reality of representation. He does not talk of 'mere representation', as does Schopenhauer (*ibid.,* 1:19).

And since he does not retain the thing-in-itself, he does not identify it with will, as does Schopenhauer. It is also wrong to identify Durkheim's theoretical intent with fatalism or pessimism. Fatalistic suicide is a pathology of society. And rather than viewing Buddhism positively, as does Schopenhauer, he condemns it as occurring when society is 'disintegrating', for he identifies it with the cult of the self and 'le mal de l'infini' (1925a/ 1963c:61). Quite differently from Schopenhauer, he does have a positive view of will 'as personal power' (1912a:521), but not as a dark striving behind things or as a 'tyrannical will' (Mestrovic 1988:61). Such a conception of the will he condemned as pathological: it is part and parcel of a view of the state which he rejected (Durkheim 1915c/1991b:84). The necessity for education and moderation of this in and by the milieu indicates a positive role for society. However despairing he personally became, his thought is marked by a positive

constructive spirit, which characterized republican thought. As Watts Miller shows, it is marked by the ethics of hope (1996). It is interesting to note that Renouvier, who greatly admired Schopenhauer, criticized his retention of the thing-in-itself, and its identification with will and above all the 'metaphysics of pessimism' (Renouvier 1892).

The consequences of the rejection of the thing-in-itself

If knowledge consists in representation and its elements, what is the foundation of this, if not a thing-in-itself? For Renouvier, if there is no 'reality in itself' separate from what is knowable, then it must be held in common. The rejection of the thing-in-itself leads first to the collective and plural nature of representation. It is the community of beings which supports representation: this is the only foundation of knowledge if there is no thing-in-itself.

Second, if there is no thing-in-itself, then there is no objective correlative which guarantees the objectivity of representation. Thus all terms and conditions for the objectivity of knowledge must be found within the structure of representation. Representation, rather than being subjective, is the condition of objectivity, for it is only in this that we discover evidence, data, laws and facts. So Durkheim in *The Rules* argues for 'a constant and identical reference point', to which representations are related, as the condition of 'all objectivity' (1895a/1937c:44).

Third, it may be asked, what is the significance of the infamous 'science of things' for which Durkheim has been so widely criticized? What is the ontological and epistemic significance of 'things' *(choses)* if there are no things-in-themselves? Thing clearly indicates a reality for Durkheim, but this is not a material reality. Thing must relate to representation, if social reality is 'entirely made of representations'. Indeed, *chose* relates to representation in two clear ways: (a) it is that to which representative mental acts, on which science depends, refer. In this sense it means the data of a science, (b) It is the external aspect of representation, by which all those objects of knowledge, other than the self, are understood. Thing indicates the totality of relations other than the self. Thing is thus not extra-representational, but indicates, in this dialogue of representation, a viable datum of science and a reality beyond the subjective.[2]

Fourth, if there is no thing-in-itself, then all questions of reality must pass to representation, for all questions of reality must now be articulated within representation. The epistemological conclusion of this dialectic of reality has a unique resonance for sociology, for it allows society as representational to have a reality, to have being. This allows us to understand how, in *The Rules,* the ways of being *(manières d'êtres)* central to collective life are compatible with social facts as representations.

Fifth, the rejection of the thing-in-itself is connected to the human character of representation. For it undermines the reality of representations, in the sense that it is a kind of absolute, which denies the reality of human beings—their thoughts, actions and decisions. In this way Renouvier argues for the personal and therefore human character of representation. It is precisely the human character that is lacking from Kant's account of representation, permeated as it is with assumptions drawn from Newtonian physics. It follows that 'Human representation is the only one of which we can speak with assurance' (Renouvier 1859:1). Relation is the first logical law of representation: this makes representation compatible with the social world as a system of relations. But equally important for Renouvier are the features of typification (through the concept of types), symbolization, totality (through which wholes are given), becoming *(devenir)* (through which change is understood), and force (through which action is understood).

Durkheim, in that neglected phrase from *De la Division du travail social,* shows that since representation is not a reflection of things, it is a force central to psychic phenomena. In other words, the rejection of a reflectionist account of representation entails the practical force of representation. This is overlooked through the tendency to tie Durkheim and his account of representation to essentialist and realist accounts (Keat and Urry 1975; Schmaus 1994). To understand Durkheim's scientific language on an analogy with thermodynamics is to eradicate just how much he builds agency and action into his account of social reality.[3] These accounts fail to see the significance of action and its connection with representation. But without this, there is no link to morality and the practical interest of his work. In *Moral Education* he makes clear the connection with action. 'We must repeat this representation, but in repeating it, give the idea enough colour, form and life to stimulate action. It must warm the heart and set the will in motion' (1925a/1963c:229).

This is central to his thinking from his first book. In the now discarded introduction to the first edition of the *Division of Labor,* Durkheim makes clear the connection between representation and action. 'For collective utility to be the source of moral evolution, it is necessary that…it can be the object of representation which is clear enough to determine conduct' (1893b/1902b:13). It is associated with *conscience,* will and energy, which are central features of morality and action *(ibid.).* Even in the 'positivist' *Rules,* he insists on the connection between representation and morality (1895a/1937c:23).

In this account of the practical force of representation, Durkheim does not follow Kant. Renouvier criticizes Kant's account of action in the *Critique of Practical Reason,* for it is based on the unknowable thing-in-itself. This is a wholly inadequate basis for a theory of action, and for moral action in particular. Like Kant, he holds that action is a form of practical reason. Action must be founded in the laws of representation. To represent something to oneself is the first condition of action. The second is the agency and the will

to bring it about: this is human force. Action is a type of causality —it brings things about. Durkheim argued: 'What is implied in the idea of the causal relation is the idea of efficacity, of productive power, of active force…the cause is the force before it has manifested the power which is in it; the effect is the same power but actualized' (1912a:519).

In this he repeats Renouvier's definition of causality (1875b/1912, 1:53ff.). Force is the synthesis of *acte* and *puissance*—action and power. These are the triadic moments of causality in representation. Force, which expresses the power of agency, is the conceptual basis of our knowledge of causality: successful agency, Renouvier argued, is the only real example of the connection between cause and effect. In this way the power of agency is central to the concept of force, and thus to representation. Social reality for Durkheim consists in *sui generis* forces (1898b/1951b:40). This includes agency, but as it develops in the 'aggregate in its totality' it 'becomes something else' *(ibid.).* Through its relative autonomy of the *conscience particulière* it acquires its own causal force over action and thus establishes the characteristic sense of social causality. There is thus a dialectical tension in the constitution of social realities between action, power and social causality.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows that the reality of society as collective representation is tied to its non-empirical, non-material, non-idealist nature. And it shows that the reality of the social world, as a general system of representations having a relative autonomy of the individual, in no way denies its mental nature. It also demonstrates that the reality of this collective sphere of representations is not compromised as a reflection of a 'reality in itself'.

I have argued that representation in the philosophical sense concerns the relationship between knowledge and its objects. A social world consists in ways of seeing and acting: with different ways of seeing we have different worlds. And different ways of seeing lead to different actions. Representations define a reality. But in a practical sense they constitute a reality since they entail a way of acting. So for Durkheim, representation is fundamental to both signification and action. In this are the echoes of Kant, who argued that representation concerns the activity of reason in a science: in the theoretical part, knowledge determines the object, while in the practical sense, reason makes it actual (1781/1963:18 B x).

For all three thinkers there is shared meaning to representation: to represent is to bring 'things' before the mind.[4] This is the condition of all knowledge: it is also the condition of action for Durkheim and Renouvier. Representations thus presuppose representing, which is a complex mental activity. Representing cannot be understood without certain mental acts in the absence of which it would not be possible. And these are central to the constituting of a social world.

Notes

1 Nearly all the references to Durkheim in this chapter relate to the French text only. The translations into English have been made by the author.

2 See my article 'What Does Durkheim Mean by Thing?' in *Durkheimian Studies* 2:43–59, 1996.

3 The fact that agency is built into the concept of force does not imply that society as a totality of such forces does not have its own *sui generis* force and is not causally effective over individual actions. But it does this through subtle forms of communication—understood as being *'force representative',* and not by being an unobservable entity, or a 'force-in-itself' which is the realist sense of force.

4 The evidence for the association of *chose* and *représenté* (represented) can be found in *The Elementary Forms:* 'it is only on things *(choses)* that we have seen it [totem] represented *(représenté)*' (1912a:162).

REPRESENTATION IN DURKHEIM'S MASTERS: KANT AND RENOUVIER

II: Representation and logic

Sue Stedman Jones

Introduction

I have considered the philosophical background to Durkheim's use of the concept of representation in relation to the question of reality. There is however a distinct logic to representation which is a crucial aspect of his explanatory apparatus. As with the last chapter, the following arguments will show us that Durkheim is far more of a European philosopher than he has been presented in the sociological tradition, which has tended to identify him with American functionalism. This chapter will show that he accepts and develops certain philosophical positions and builds them into the conceptual foundations of his thought. Again largely through the dominant Parsonian interpretation of Durkheim, no attention is given to his logic of representation. Since this is tied to change and development, even the most recent and the best accounts leave that old chestnut, initiated by Parsons, that Durkheim has no theory of change unchallenged.

Thus, this chapter concerns all those neglected philosophical aspects of Durkheim that pertain to the logic of representation. Those which have been either misunderstood or ignored in Durkheim are: the concept of the apriori and the representative, correlative logic and synthesis, the logic of pluralism, and becoming. Once again, the influence of Kant and Renouvier will illuminate these. But we must begin with the challenge Durkheim throws down to the philosophical tradition—that logic is of social origin.

Representation and the question of logic

Durkheim's sociology of knowledge is a direct challenge to the philosophical tradition. The principles of logic depend 'at least in part on historical and consequently social factors' (1912a:18). This revolves around his further claim:

'The essential ideas of scientific logic are of religious origin' (*ibid.:*613). And since religious faith has its origins in society it follows that logic, for Durkheim, has its origins in society. But the argument for the social origin of logical thought centres around his definition that 'The matter of logical thought is made of concepts' (*ibid.:*617). He argues that to show how society can play a role in the genesis of logical thought is to argue for its role in the genesis of concepts *(ibid.)*. The nature of the concept indicates its origins. 'If it is common to all, this is because it is the work of the community' (*ibid.:*619).

Here he differs from Kant, for whom a genetic argument about origins can tell us nothing about the transcendental necessity of thought: concepts are commonly shared because they are transcendentally necessary to the discrimination of reality. Durkheim holds that because concepts are shared, through their social origin, their necessity is social. So concepts for Durkheim, rather than being the sphere of general and transcendental logic as for Kant, are collective representations and enter into the sphere of social and historical causes. In doing this he challenges not only the timeless certainties of classic rationalism; he challenges a whole philosophical tradition stemming from Aristotle.

The sociology of knowledge opposes transcendental philosophy. Godlove maintains that in advocating a context-dependent logic Durkheim was rejecting Kant (Godlove 1998). However, the approaches are closer than at first sight. It is only really in terms of both a continuation of certain theses of Kant that we can understand the challenge that Durkheim offers. Kant both pointed to the general nature of representation and identified logic with representation.

Kant argued that logic since Aristotle has 'not been able to advance a single step' (1781/1963:17 B viii). He attempted to extend logic beyond its concerns with the forms of syllogism and correct inference. This was informed by the Cartesian tradition, where logic was concerned not so much with forms of inference, so important to the Aristotelian tradition, but with training the judgment to distinguish between the true and the false. This threw emphasis on conception and judgment as central to the concern of logic. In such a sense Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is an extended reflection on logic, in particular on the forms of conception and forms of judgment. The 'sole concern [of logic] is to give an exhaustive exposition of the formal rules of all thought' (*ibid.:*18 B ix). Logic leaves 'the understanding nothing to deal with save itself and its form' *(ibid.)*.

Kant argued that representation is central to the field of general logic. 'General logic…only considers representations…with that form which the understanding is able to impart to the representations' (*ibid.:*96 A 56). In this way he recast logic as concerned with the form of thought (*ibid.:*95 B 80). 'Logic is concerned with the form of thought in general' (*ibid.:*26 B xxiii). Representation is that which carries the form of thought.

There are different kinds of representation for Kant.

> A perception which relates solely to the subject as the modification
> of its state is sensation, an objective perception is knowledge *(cognitio)*.
> This is either an intuition or a concept. The former relates to the
> object and is single, the latter relates mediately to the object by means
> of a feature which several things have in common.
>
> (*ibid.*:314 A 320)

But he further argued that there is a serial arrangement of different kinds of
representation. Primary among these is 'the genus of representation in general'
(representatio). All other forms of consciousness attached to representation
(concepts, perceptions and intuitions) are subordinate to it (*ibid.*:314 A 320).

Durkheim accepted this Kantian concern with the general sense of
representation, and representation as carrying the form of thought. In arguing
that the collectivity is the foundation of representation, Durkheim can be seen
to be offering an answer to a problematic left by Kant: What sustains and
what generates representation in general? What sustains the *genera*
representation? He developed this general sense of representation into the
collective foundation of representation. It is central to his sociology and to
its differentiation from philosophy. 'Representations, emotions and collective
tendencies do not have for their generative cause certain states of the *conscience*
of the private individual, but the conditions in which the total social body
finds itself' (1895a/1937c:105).

Renouvier accepted the Kantian conception of representation in general
which is the starting-point for his *Traité de logique générale et formelle* (1875b). It
concerns 'representation in general and not that of man and his individual
representations' (1875b/1912, 1:115). The former he identified as the logical
as opposed to the psychological position. But in developing this position of
the logical generality of representation, he introduced the concept of a social
framework to knowledge. He argued that what makes representation possible
is a general framework that is not reducible to the 'I': it requires shared
relations between beings. The concept of shared relations thus enters into the
sphere of logic as the support for representation in general. In this way he
developed that Kantian general sense of representation into the collective
foundation of representation, so allowing the collectivity into the sphere of
logic.

We have seen that, for Kant, general logic concerns the form that the
understanding imparts to understanding. But how do we get from here to the
Durkheimian claim that the form of society imprints itself on the form of
knowledge? If we look more closely at Durkheim's argument, then we can
see that this revolves around specific arguments about communication,
generality and typification. Concepts are 'impersonal representations' through
which 'human intelligences communicate' (1912a:619). 'A concept is not my

concept; it is common to me and other men, or it can in any case be communicated to them' *(ibid.).* And while sensation is strictly tied to an individual organism and personality, concepts 'if not universal' are 'universalizable' *(ibid.).* Further, these are 'a type of thought and action', which through the manner of their imposition on particular wills and intelligences indicate the 'intervention of the collectivity' (*ibid.:*620). 'What they express is the manner in which the whole society represents objects of experience to itself' *(ibid.).* These concepts are Renouvierist rather than strictly Kantian. For it was Renouvier who argued that representation is only possible given communication between *consciences.* And he further argued that typification is a central mode of representation.

But a crucial stage on the way to Durkheim's claim that the form of society imprints itself on the form of knowledge is Renouvier's definition of form and content. Renouvier retains the Kantian distinction between form and content but changes their definition considerably. For Kant form is tied to the faculty structure. Space and time are the forms of outer and inner sense: they are forms imposed on experience by the faculty of sensibility. The form of thought is imposed by a faculty on the data of sense. In both cases form anticipates sensation and is imposed on sensation by the mind. Form anticipates experience by 'lying in wait' in the faculty structure. For Kant, form is logically universal and necessary and all experience must demonstrate the same formal features to count as spatio-temporal experience and as knowledge.

I showed in the last chapter that Renouvier disputes the faculty structure. There is thus no possibility of form being immanent in a faculty as with Kant. Form must be found in the structure of representation. And he argues that this has no eternal and unchanging form. Specifically, he denies the logical universality and necessity that Kant ascribes to forms of understanding. History has demonstrated that there is such a variety of claims to knowledge that it is impossible to argue for a strictly universal form of knowledge. The whole *tableau humaine,* rather than the Aristotelian tradition, must be consulted when we consider determining the form of thought. Nevertheless Renouvier believes that it is possible to argue that, even given the variety of experience, there are forms of representation without which representation would be impossible. He holds that all cognitive experience testifies to relation as the first law of representation. Whether he can do so without employing Kant's 'absolutist' and 'dogmatic' claims I will not pursue here. It is thus in terms of relation that form is given.

Further, he argues that relations must be understood in terms of generality. (This sense of generality opposes Kant's logical universality, that is, what is true for all possible worlds, but includes universality in a more modest form.) So form is a relation which anticipates content by its generality. The characteristic of this is to envelop the particular: it encloses an indefinite number of other relations. Form is thus the generality of a relation. The content then is that which is individual, that is, that which is distinct or

individual to each phenomenon. We can see that for Durkheim society as a totality of relations can be that which conveys form in representation on this definition. Society also 'encloses' the individual in this definition.

But it also does so through an argument for typification. For Renouvier a fundamental law of representation is that of 'types' *(espèces)*. Under the law of types all experience is ordered through typification: this is the crucial logical form of representation. It answers the question about 'quality': it is the 'how' of representation. In this way Renouvier indicates that these shared and typified relations will alter the form of thought, thus paving the way for the sociology of knowledge.

So we have seen that Durkheim can mount a challenge to Kant by accepting the reform of logic postulated by Kant. But he turns this against Kant and transcendentalism by accepting Renouvier's critique of the logical form of representation. In talking about the logical form of representation, however, we confront a theory that is central to Durkheim's thought, but which is totally overlooked in assessments of his theory of representation.

Logic, representation and the apriori

'The fundamental proposition of apriorism is that knowledge is formed out of two sorts of elements, irreducible to each other, as two distinct and superimposed elements, like two distinct and superimposed layers. Our hypothesis entirely upholds this principle' (1912a:21). Durkheim, like Kant, maintains a principle of the apriori. Further, like Kant (and unlike Leibniz), Durkheim does not define the apriori by innateness *(ibid.)*. Representations are associated with the apriori for Kant, Renouvier and Durkheim.

Given the widely held view of Durkheim as an empiricist, as a scientific systems theorist, it must be a massive shock to acknowledge that he espoused a theory of the apriori. This characterization of Durkheim is probably the reason that his claim has been passed over in silence. Parsons holds that Durkheim is an idealist in *The Elementary Forms,* inexplicably leaving behind the positivism of his earlier thought.

Not only is no acknowledgment given of his espousal of a theory of the apriori, there is no account given of how he can do so. Nor is there any account of how this could relate to science. He maintains that he is engaged in science just as much in *The Elementary Forms* as he does earlier. With what conception of science is the apriori compatible? Such a lacuna faces not just the Parsonian commentators, but even those who have acknowledged the centrality of representation to his philosophy of science.

In terms of Durkheimian scholarship, the lack of recognition of this concept goes hand in hand with the neglect of the concept of the representative. The concept occurs in both the early and the middle period. In the *Division of Labor,* his first book, representation is associated with the concept of the 'representative'. He talks of the 'representative life of nations'

(1893b/ 1902b:269). He discusses 'representative life' in 'Individual and Collective Representations' (1898b/1951b:34). Although it is clear that the representative does not enter directly into sociological explanation, it plays an important part in his explanatory logic (1897e:45). He argues that thinking is a 'representative function' (1899a(ii)/t.1975a:90). Given the constant accusations of his anti-epistemological functionalism, the neglect of this concept is a serious oversight for the understanding of his thought. And it has been neglected in assessments of his thought, largely because it is obliterated in translation.[1] But it plays a crucial role in the meaning of representation.

Certainly only this concept, together with that irreducibility, can explain the connection between representation and the apriori. Durkheim complains of 'that enormous apparatus of apriori concepts and intuitions with which Kant overburdened the mind' (1887a/1975b, 3:455). Nevertheless he says, 'everyone agrees with Kant in attributing to thought one or more *sui generis* functions, irreducible to experience' *(ibid.)*. The representative, I suggest, indicates those epistemological activities without which representation would be impossible: it is precisely these which are the conceptual presuppositions of experience and which empiricism cannot account for. The concept of the representative coincides with the apriori. This again shows the influence of Renouvier. As Hamelin explains: 'To say that there is an apriori element of representation is to say that representation, on the representative side, has its laws' (Hamelin 1927:87). If we identify the apriori with the representative, then the apriori is a constant of Durkheim's thought.

This concept has a philosophical ancestry which it is important to unravel. We have seen that representations concern the form of thought, as opposed to its content. In this sense representation in the formal sense is that which regulates the form of ideas. This is the reason for asserting that representations are not the same as ideas in the empiricist tradition. For Kant, transcendental logic, which is a logic of truth (1781/1963:100 B 87), deals with those principles without which no object can be thought, and it thus concerns the scope and origin of apriori knowledge (*ibid.*:97 B 82). These pure forms of thought for Kant anticipate experience as the logical structure of understanding. They are the apriori conditions of knowledge. Kant's conception of transcendental logic thus leads to the apriori, as that which precedes experience as its logical foundation. Such a foundational logic is entailed by the critique of empiricism.

Renouvier, with Kant and against the empiricists, argues that 'we hold that no form of investigation and analysis can avoid recognition of the apriority of certain laws of mental representation' (1872b:389). He also rejects the hypothesis of innateness: he rejects both innate ideas and innate faculties. It follows that nothing logically precedes representation and its laws. The apriori becomes those aspects of representation which logically precede the data of sense as its logical foundation: as such they are irreducible to sensation. He

called them representative functions. They are the apriori conditions of science, for they enter into the possibility of all scientific knowledge. 'The study of the apriori conditions of science becomes properly speaking the critical problem' (Janssens 1904:294).

So, Renouvier continues a sense of the apriori and he rejects the hypothesis of innateness. For him there is nothing beyond representation: he does not admit a higher principle or faculty of reason from which the fundamental form of experience can be deduced. And against Kant he disputed the idea of a pure apriori with no elements of experience in it. His general theory of representation shows that the representative is always in contact with the represented. In this sense experience always can count towards the constitution of the apriori. It becomes crystallized and thus serves as the foundation which forms and encloses new experience. In this way there is a constant formation and re-formation of the apriori. So Durkheim uses the concept of crystallization to characterize the manner in which collective representations are fixed (1912a:618).

Against Kant, Renouvier argues that the apriori is the skeleton of representation, which can only be discovered within experience, and particularly human and collective experience itself. This is the flesh that contains the skeleton and is the final source of the skeleton. In other words, it is Renouvier who argues that the logical armature of thought is the result of historical collective activity, which becomes ossified into the aprioristic forms of representation. I will not pursue the important question as to whether this can still be a theory of the apriori and whether the concept of irreducibility can bear this epistemological weight.

Here Renouvier develops not only the idea of collective representations as an answering to a fundamental question of epistemology, but also a form of social and historical apriori. He shows, against Kant, that the epistemic conditions which experience presupposes are not absolutely independent of historical and social activity. Durkheim through Renouvier thus espouses a form of social and historical apriori long before Foucault. Certainly this is not the pure rational apriori of Kant, characterized by absolute universality and necessity. This social apriori contrasts with the universalism of Kant's transcendental apriori.

We can see one example of this social apriori in Durkheim's conception of the 'representative ceremony', which is central to the conception of rite (1912a:546). The function of a rite is to create 'a general action, which, while always and everywhere similar to itself, is nevertheless capable of taking different forms according to the circumstances' (*ibid.*:552). Now we have seen that Durkheim uses the representative to describe the way the mind and its functions anticipate experience, which it regulates. Here he uses representative to refer to an institutional form which must remain the same, for it governs and anticipates particular circumstances. The latter, as we have seen, are characteristics of the apriori. He is allowed to use it in this way through

Renouvier's concept of the representative function, and more importantly, his extension of the representative to the general sphere of representation. It designates the character of phenomena 'suited to represent' (1875b/1912, 1:11). The representative function is thus that which serves to represent. And Durkheim uses it to mean that it guides and anticipates social experience and governs the terms under which action is undertaken.

Again, Durkheim can be seen to be dealing with a question left for post-Kantian thought. If the apriori is not innate, nor is immanent in a faculty of mind, awaiting the stimulus of experience, how does it come about? Like Kant, Durkheim holds that the apriori formal principles are the very armature of thought and are the backbone of all representation. But his answer, through Renouvier, is that it is the collectivity which generates the logical presuppositions of thought (1875b/1912, 2:203). In this the idea of social generation is preserved, but at two speeds. For Renouvier it is the slowest speed which gives the most forceful degree of ossification. It is a result of collective endeavours that we come to have awareness of relation, causality and force, numeration, typification, duration, passion and force. These become irreducible to the experience that they regulate. Thus irreducibility becomes a criterion of apriority for Renouvier.

From a strictly Kantian point of view, Renouvier's account blurs the distinction between the empirical and the apriori and that between transcendental and genetic arguments. However, Kant could not explain the diversity of cultural experience. Nor could he explain how these have a kind of presuppositional logic whereby a conceptual scheme determines a limited reality for a specific time. The kind of relative apriori which is the ossification of the relations of experience goes some way to explaining this, but is not explicable on a purely Kantian model.

However much Durkheim may oppose transcendentalism there are strongly Kantian elements in his sense of collective representations as shaping and defining experience. And the significance of representation in a social and cultural sense is that it prescribes the form experience should take. For Renouvier the forms of representation as general relations nevertheless regulate experience (1875b/1912, 1:125). This ruling of experience and prescribing form is central to what is meant by the apriori. Thus he allows for fixed and crystallized types of thought and action to govern thought and action at the social level as pre-established rules.

But surely it will be exclaimed by all empirically minded sociologists that Durkheim denied all abstract aprioristic speculation about social phenomena? He certainly did. But to espouse a theory of the apriori conditions of knowledge of phenomena in no way legitimizes armchair speculation. It entails empirical research in the philosophical sense of the empirical determination of phenomena. This is so for Renouvier, whose empirical tendency was very marked. To talk of the skeleton of representation without its specific empirical determination is to propel thought into a vacuum *(vide)* (1875b/1912, 1:118).

Kant opposes such speculation in his Transcendental Dialectic, which deals with 'the logic of illusion' (1781/1963:99 B 86). Logic furnishes criteria of truth only in a formal sense (*ibid.*:9 B 84). The form of representations constitutes the negative touchstone of truth: the form of experience independent of content cannot be a positive touchstone of truth. It cannot be an 'organon' of truth in itself without information—as such it becomes 'dialectical'. In this way Kant ensures that representations must never exceed the 'bounds of sense'. The empirical grounding of representations is thus founded.

Representation, meaning and the problem of signification

The characterization of Durkheim as the positivist of a science of facts and things makes him sound as though he had completely overlooked the central questions of meaning and signification, and as though his theory of reality overlooks the discursive nature of reality. The question of reference and meaning must be addressed in terms of the logic of representation. But how can this answer the questions of reference and meaning? What is it to refer to and how is meaning constituted? By talking about representations *tout court,* it sounds as if Durkheim does not answer these questions. But this is a misunderstanding.

Here we must recognize the role of the representative and the represented for Durkheim. Within Renouvier's logic of representation there are two poles of representation, that which does the referring and that which is referred to. The representative is that which represents; the represented is that which is represented. These in turn are broadly accommodated within the terms *conscience* and *chose* (thing). The discourse of reality in terms of representation must also include *conscience* and thing. The evidence of the association of *chose* and *représenté* (represented) can be found in *The Elementary Forms:* 'it is only on things *(choses)* that we have seen it represented *(représenté)*' (1912a:162).

Conscience covers those terms which are involved in epistemological discrimination and attribution—the totality of those mental activities by which a reality becomes present to consciousness. The neglect of this concept, together with those of the representative and the represented in Durkheimian scholarship, is particularly disastrous for understanding the logic of representation. It is for this reason, I suggest, that Durkheim argues that representation is impossible without *conscience*. Thing covers all that representations refer to, while not being independent logically of representation. In terms of a later discourse they are the signifier and signified respectively. Thus, social experience is made possible by the intermarriage of the representative functions of *conscience* and the particular details of social and historical experience. Conceptual presuppositions for him, unlike for Kant,

are not fixed for ever in transcendental reflection: they are imbued with social and historical elements.

The represented covers what is called the object while the representative covers all those epistemic activities which belong to the subject. Renouvier argues knowledge is only possible if subject and object are connected, that is, the representative and represented are connected. All representation presupposes logically this activity: a theory of the constitution of reality requires the subject—object division. 'I am not the first to notice the utility of the word representation to express the synthesis of subject and object in a *conscience,* and thus to serve as the point of departure for all analysis of knowledge' (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:8). Durkheim argues: 'As the world only exists in so far as it is represented—the study of the subject envelops in a sense that of the object' (1909d/1975b, 1:186). This opposes the widespread view that Durkheim's objectivist positivism overlooks the relation between subject and object (Walsh 1998:276).

The advantage of this theory of signification as attached to a general theory of representation is that it shows how a shared system of representations has its own referential logic. Hence it supports the idea of a cultural logic as a general system of communications. Through the general nature of representation, meaning and signification have become diffuse through the system, as well as being an act of orientation of the *conscience* of the person.

This relation between the representative and the represented helps us to explain an area that is puzzling in Durkheim's theory, but which goes to the heart of his account of sociological explanation. How is it that collective representations express social reality? (It is a version of the question: to what do categories refer?) The social milieu, he says, consists in 'things and persons' (1895a/1937c:112). Things are the repository of social and cultural signification. The totem as a sacred thing is ascribed a sacred value by social consciousness. Economic things are similarly ascribed value through the system of social relations of which they are a part. As such, in terms of the logic of representation, they belong to the pole of the represented.

But obviously there is a connection between that which does the referring (the representative, collective representations) and that to which they refer (the represented). For Renouvier, they are always connected, and no representation can occur without this relationship. This epistemological link flows two ways: thus not only is there the link of referential ascription, but the represented flows back in the system of communication between consciousness and its objects. As the signified, the latter confirm and reinforce the ascription of social consciousness. But since they are the repositories of these significations they express the reality of representation. There is thus a dynamic of communicative exchange between the represented and the representative, and, through this, collective representations are imbued with the mark of the reality in whose determination they are fundamentally involved.

Representation and the question of synthesis

For Durkheim, a collective reality is a synthetic reality. Society is characterized by 'its richness of diverse materials' (1912a:637). Elements of a world that are non-identical are brought together to form significant wholes. This is central to cultural logic, and later influenced Lévi-Strauss's characterizing of mythological thinking as related to a *bricoleur*. For Durkheim, collective representations are born out of these syntheses. It is the bringing together of disparate elements that characterizes the nature of 'the luxurious growth of myths and legends, theogonic and cosmological systems etc., which grew out of religious thought' (1898b/1951b:31).

So for Durkheim synthesis is a crucial aspect of representation. To understand Durkheim's conception of synthesis only through his analogy with 'chemical synthesis' and thereby to ally his thought with nineteenth-century natural science is to falsify this aspect of his thought. In particular it undermines the connection with creation and the new. 'All creation…is the product of a synthesis' (1912a:637). Synthesis is central to the mental acts by which a world becomes constituted and to how social worlds hold together. 'Particular representations' are synthesized in 'each individual *conscience*'. Since these produce 'new things', the 'vast syntheses of complete *consciences*' which make up society are even more effective *(ibid.)*. Synthesis is central to the possibility of a *conscience collective,* which requires a synthesis of particular *consciences* (1912a:605).

The connection of mental acts with synthesis is Kantian. The power to synthesize data is fundamental to the acts of mind by which representations are formed. For Kant it is the fundamental activity of mind that is central to knowledge (1781/1963:111–12 A 78/B 103). It is the 'act of putting representations together' (*ibid.*:111 A 77/B 103). It is this that the understanding operates on the manifold of intuition—that is, the data of sense. It is 'an act of spontaneity of the faculty of representation' (*ibid.*:151 B 130). He identifies the understanding with the faculty of representation, and synthesis is the central act of understanding. The autonomy and power of understanding is central to the synthetic nature of reality. For it is the power of concepts to synthesize the manifold of intuition into experience and knowledge.

It is clear, therefore, that for Durkheim the activity of synthesis is central to his concept of *conscience,* and thus, as for Kant, it is central to the activity of mind. For Durkheim it also indicates mental combination, and the extension of this into 'the vast syntheses of complete *consciences* which is society' is the conceptual basis for sociology (1912a:637). The synthesis of different elements, so central to the possibility of culture, is the result of a mental act of the community. Synthesis, understood in this sense, explains why Durkheim denies empirical associationism. To explain mental association by contiguity 'is to deny it all reality' (1898b/1951b:24).

But is there a logic to which this synthetic reality responds? The answer to this question is crucial, for it is central to how social experience is available to science and particularly to the logic of a science. First, Durkheim defined social facts as ways of thinking (and acting and feeling) (1895a/ 1937c:4). This supports social experience as conceptual in its nature. Second, he has shown that this is synthetic. Ways of seeing bring together elements of experience that are not analytically related.

This does respond to a definition of logic. There are two kinds of logic for Kant. The first and the most obvious concerns the 'prescriptions for common understanding'. The subject of general logic is the clarification of concepts; its method is analytic and its concerns 'intentional clarification' (Kant 1880/ 1988:69). The other kind is logic as an 'organon of the sciences'. This is a logic that follows the achieved sciences and examines the principles that are involved in the discovery of a reality. The concept of the synthetic is central to Kant's 'Transcendental doctrine of method', which defines the difference between philosophy and science. Whereas for Kant the method of philosophy is analytic, because it largely concerns the clarification of concepts, the method of science is synthetic, since science concerns the extension of knowledge, and all extension of knowledge is by definition synthetic. Thus, since the method of science is synthetic, the method of the logic of science must match this.

It is clear that for Durkheim the 'ways of thinking' are constitutive of a reality. As such they respond to a Kantian definition of transcendental logic which deals with the synthetic principles by which a reality is constituted, and with those principles by which a definite and therefore scientific knowledge of this reality can be achieved. Durkheim connects logic and science. 'The logic of a science is without value if the logician who attempts to do it has not practised that science' (1900b/1970a:127). And he makes clear that the science which examines this complex reality also deals with concepts. 'The concept elaborated by science has the function of expressing reality' (1925a/ 1963c:230).

Renouvier follows Kant's definition of logic as an organon of the sciences in his *Traité de logique générale et formelle* (1875b). Like Kant, he is concerned with a scientific knowledge of the world, and those concepts by which this is made possible. These concern the 'concept of the concept'. And like Kant he holds that the fundamental principles of science are synthetic. 'Syntheses are the data *(données)* of a science. All the data of representation, of whatever nature…are synthetic' (1875b/1912, 2:202). The science of representation which Durkheim follows inherits this view of scientific logic. If the ways of thinking are synthetic, then the logic which accounts for them is synthetic also. And it shows both how these ways of thinking are constitutive of a reality, and that this procedure can be mapped according to the logic of a science.

Synthesis is the bringing together of elements which are then related: it thus reveals a distinct kind of logic, that of relation. It is clear that for

Durkheim representations are connected with relation. 'The representations which form its [society's] network disengage themselves from the relations which establish themselves between individuals thus combined, or between the secondary groups which cut in between the individual and total society' (1898b/1951b:39).

For Durkheim a fundamental feature of society is its relational characteristic. This is shown in his concern with solidarity. Now this feature of society responds to the logic of relation. Following a reformed version of Kant's transcendental logic of the sciences, Renouvier argued that the fundamental principle of all knowledge and science is that of relation. To bring things before the mind is to establish a cognitive relationship with them: it is involved in the very possibility of knowledge and thus of science. As such, it is the first and most fundamental law of representation (1875b/1912, 1:146). Durkheim is quite clear that to explain is to establish relations between things and that the mind alone can do this (1912a:339–40). The concept of relation and its connection to science goes to the heart of Durkheim's view of science and social reality. It is precisely because relation is the first law of representation that Durkheim can argue that categories are relations (1912a:628).

The logic of the social is association for Durkheim. 'As association constitutes itself, it gives birth to phenomena which do not derive directly from the nature of the associated elements; and this partial independence is all the more marked when those elements are more numerous and more powerfully synthesised' (1898b/1951b:45). As such the social world finds its logic in relation.

Further, it is clear that in claiming that society consists entirely in collective representations, a social system is a conceptual and discursive system. As such, it has dynamic and developmental possibilities. To recognize this is to oppose Durkheim's view of relation as flat and unchanging, which is simply a reflection of 'things'. It is the dynamic form of consciousness, and when this is transferred to a conceptual and discursive system of the totality of *consciences,* it is not merely a principle of relatedness but also a principle of growth and development. It is for this reason that he insists that 'all creation is the work of synthesis' (1912a:637). It indicates a momentum of development in reality which Durkheim builds into his logic of social and historical explanation in *The Division of Labor*. I will return to this.

The social necessity of cultural systems: Durkheim and the synthetic apriori

Durkheim holds both to the synthetic and to the apriori. Adepts of Kantian and post-Kantian theories of reality and science will recognize that Durkheim thus holds to a form of the synthetic apriori. This is clear in his definition of social facts as ways of thinking, for these synthesize elements which form

a complex synthetic whole which appears necessary to all those who live with it. The synthetic apriori for Kant is that which marries the necessary and the synthetic in knowledge. Again, the Durkheim answer to the Kantian problematic is that it is the collectivity that synthesizes, and it synthesizes through that complex form of thinking called the *conscience collective*. What this synthesizes is significant cultural systems. These of course do not have the same necessity as the Kantian synthetic apriori, for these cultural and social wholes have a social necessity which rules 'in passing' as it were—not for all possible worlds. (Here we can see the use of the relative apriori, for it answers that important question about how there can be conceptual presuppositions which change.)

There is another way in which Durkheim differs from Kant. As I have shown above, Durkheim argues that the principles of logic developed from religious thought. 'Scientific thought is only a more perfect form of religious thought' (1912a:617). That is to say, collective representations stem from collective beliefs *(les croyances collectives)*. This is fundamental to his claim that religion is the source of science and philosophy. In other words it is belief that holds together these diverse disparate elements that go to make up the synthetic reality. Social realities are ultimately belief systems. Belief is what we can define as 'holding to be true'. As I have shown elsewhere, this involves passionate and affirming qualities that take it beyond the purely rational necessities of Kantian thought (Stedman Jones 1998:60ff.). For Renouvier this underlies all 'apodictic' sciences and undercuts their universalist pretensions.

Renouvier holds that the Kantian conception of the synthetic apriori is most important. Kant had demonstrated a highly significant feature of all conceptualization. This in its judgmental form involves the relation of a subject to a predicate (1875b/1912, 1:149ff.). Kant had raised the question of how this is connected if the connection is founded neither on the identity of the terms, nor on sensory experience. Renouvier answers it in terms of the question of certainty and argues that Kant's transcendental necessary judgments do not answer this. Unlike Kant, he argues that what connects the subject to the predicate in a synthetic judgment is belief (Hamelin 1907:104). It is belief that is the final source of all necessary synthesizing in knowledge. In this sense belief synthesizes possible worlds and belief holds these to be necessary. Here he shows Durkheim how belief *(croyance)* does not merely enter into representation but underlies it. Such logic allows religious systems as belief systems not only to synthesize worlds as significant systems but to be fundamental to the origin of science and logic.

Representation, the 'I think' and the problem of combination

Synthesis indicates combination. It is the unique activity of the understanding for Kant. 'Combination does not lie in the objects… On the contrary it is

work of the understanding' (1781/1963:154 B 134). For Kant, combination is an act of 'the self activity of the subject' (*ibid.*:151 B 130). In that most profound part of his *Critique*—the Transcendental Deduction—he asks this question of the representations that are combined in judgment: how do I know that they are mine? His answer is that all cognitive experience in representation is accompanied by an 'I think' which ensures that the experience I have is mine (*ibid.*:154 B 134).

Now Durkheim does not characterize representation as accompanied by an 'I'. As I have shown in the previous chapter, he argues that representation is impossible without *conscience* (1898b/1924a:37). He is widely viewed as having no theory of the self or of individuation. Durkheim's theoretical language uses the term *conscience particulière*. It is clear that it is through this that he accommodates the personal individuated aspect of representation.

For Kant, this 'I think' that accompanies all representation is a principle of unity which precedes all work of combination in the relating of representations one to another. The principle, in its development in the Fichtean philosophy, was a source of subjective idealism. There is, however, another route out of this central aspect of the Kantian philosophy, which points to the development of a shared world of representations and the idea of a general synthesis of representation that becomes the social world of representations in the work of Durkheim.

Kant argues that the 'I think' that accompanies all representations is an original and preconceptual unity on which the possibility of thought depends. The principle of the necessary unity of apperception is an identical and therefore an analytic proposition (1781/1963:154 B 135). But for Kant it also reveals the necessity of a synthesis: the unity of apperception is possible only under a presupposition of a certain synthetic unity. That is, a *conceptus communis,* a synthetic unity of different representations, which is equally a condition of the possibility of the analytic unity of consciousness *(ibid.).*

Kant, in arguing that a synthetic unity is central to the highest point of thinking, opens a route to a collective synthesis as central to conceptualization. The latter is central to Durkheim's project of a sociology of knowledge and is central to the concept of a collective consciousness. For the concept of synthetic unity points beyond the analytic unity of apperception, once the demands of self-consciousness have been satisfied. It raises the question: what synthesizes? This indicates a path beyond the unity of apperception and opens a new question about the community of knowledge to which Durkheim's collective representations are heir. However, Durkheim argues for a distinct logic to this world, and this is central to his holism.

Combination, pluralism and becoming

Durkheim develops the identification of representation with the general. He locates it with the 'conditions of the total social body'. In 'Individual and

Collective Representations' he argues that collective representations have their own life. This depends first on the whole, which, once formed, does not depend directly on the nature of the associated elements (1898b/1951b:45). Given this collective substratum, then, collective representations become autonomous realities and develop their own power 'to attract and repel each other and to form syntheses of all kinds between themselves, which are determined by their natural affinities and not by the state of the milieu in which they evolved' (*ibid.*:46).

Since, unlike Kant, he argues that concepts are always common to a plurality (1914a/1970a:317), he asserts that every combination of representations involves the logical doctrine of plurality. 'Combination presupposes plurality' (1898b/1951b:28). Combination is central to the formation of collective representation and thus is a logical prerequisite of the argument that collective representations have a different basis from individual representations. Collective representations have a 'relative autonomy' because they are irreducible and have a plural combinatory basis in the collectivity. Society has as its basis the 'collection *(ensemble)* of associated individuals' (*ibid.*:39).

As I have shown, Durkheim did not hold that there is an 'I think' which accompanies all experience, but he did hold that representation cannot be understood without a subject who represents or without a *conscience* (*ibid.*:37). Further, these *consciences* are always associated. The *conscience collective* is formed out of the combination of a plurality of particular *consciences* (1895a/1937c:103). Durkheim, unlike Kant, in holding that combination is associated with a logical doctrine of pluralism, argues for a synthesis *between* minds. Indeed, collective representations 'presuppose that *consciences* act and react on each other; they result from these reactions and actions' (1912a:330). It is this synthesis between minds that is the answer to Kant, for it is this that forms a *conceptus communis*.

Here we can see the influence of Renouvier's logical doctrine of both synthesis and pluralism. 'The entire objective order is nothing but a synthesis of relations, a synthesis of laws' (1875b/1912, 1:78). Synthesis shows how representations are brought together to form meaningful wholes. Pluralism is a logical doctrine for Renouvier: its logic centres around the concept of number. That is, we can only make the central claim of pluralism—that there are many things—if we have the means to identify each unit and to have terms for their totalization. For Durkheim, the concept of number is fundamental to characterizing social wholes and their character. In *The Rules* he argues that the number of social units *(unités)* is central to what he means by the volume of society (1895a/1937c:112). Just as, in *The Division of Labor,* he maintains that the numerical factor is 'of primary importance' (1893b/ 1902b:328). The overlooking of this concept of number in Durkheimian scholarship and its relation to representation has led to the false view that Durkheim's view of

volume and density is a materialist conception *per se*. This is still prevalent (see Walsh 1998:191).

The law of number, which is primary to the logic of representation, is composed of three moments: unity *(unité),* plurality and totality. This is a reworking of Kant's category of quantity which was equally composed of the same three moments (Kant 1781/1963:118 B 114). But to rework this through number gives a reworking of how wholes are conceived. They are constituted through their parts (units). 'The units of number are the parts of the whole' (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:165). The fact that totality only makes sense in relation to unity and plurality means first that a real diversity of things and relations is not threatened by the search for totality. This is stressed by Hamelin, who also holds that number is a central feature of representation and is central to its synthetic nature (1907:32ff.). Conversely the interest of science in conceiving the totality of things or of relations is not threatened by the diversity and plurality of phenomena.

This pluralism is built into the very possibility of representation for Renouvier. Logically he argues that representation is not possible if there is only one being who represents: it requires a plurality of beings. The conditions of combination pass to the collective. The doctrine of plural combination is central to the concept of a social reality. In this way Renouvier allows Durkheim to hold that representations have a different base from unitary rational consciousness: they are grounded in plural relations.

We can only understand this by examining his argument about the subject-object division which is central to all knowledge. He insists that knowledge is only possible if subject and object are in relation. That is, knowledge is only possible if there is a differentiation between that which knows and that which is known. In other words there must be a relation between the knower and its object but there must also be a cognitive distance between them. For example, if we think of a world of an infant the world of its perceptions is the world for it. This is not a world of knowledge but a solipsism that supports neither knowledge nor science. Equally he argues that knowledge is not possible if we identify it with a Hegelian sense of general reality as encompassed by one supreme conscience—*Geist*. Whilst this may support the sense of generality which is central to objective scientific knowledge, it is at the price of differentiation and knowledge of specific relations.

The only way for subject and object to be in relation is through there being more than one conscience which represents. For if there is only one then there can be assurance that there the differentiation between subject and object has obtained. In Renouvier's terms no one *conscience* can play the role of representative, that is, constitute the epistemic conditions of knowledge and therefore science. Logically, only under conditions of plurality does representation become possible. The many rather than the one become a logical feature of representation.

Change and representation

'This becoming *(devenir)* of representations, which is the subject matter of sociology, does not consist in the progressive realization of certain fundamental ideas… If new states produce themselves, it is in a great part because of the grouping and combination of the old ones' (1898a(ii)/ t.1963a:100). It is clear from this that, for Durkheim, combinations are not static: the theory of representation is not merely synchronic, it is diachronic. He expresses the dynamic and changeful aspect of representation through the concept of becoming *(devenir)*. 'It is a commonplace of science and philosophy that everything is subject to becoming' (1898b/1951b:16). This also explains how conceptual schemas change, for becoming is central to the logical structure of representation. It is through the grouping or combination of phenomena that change occurs. For Renouvier, becoming is a central feature of representation: it is that form of representative activity under which we grasp change. All that is conscious, and thus all forms of conscious human activity and awareness, are dynamic and changeful. Kant did not establish this as a law of representation, and thus in this respect it could not serve the interests of a historical science. Renouvier argues that experience only testifies to that which has become *(les devenus)*. But judgment can recognize a difference in that a phenomenon that was held at one moment no longer is so. Something that once was no longer is. To use a 'homely example', in Adam Smith's sense, Billie Holiday sang 'You've changed'. That is, once you loved me, now you no longer do. The judgment of change involves both the determination of the initial state and the passage of the one to the other. 'Becoming is thus the synthesis of a relation *(rapport)* and a non-relation *(non-rapport)*, existing at two instants which representation distinguishes, even though experience cannot distinguish them' (1875b/1912, 2:45).

For Renouvier this logic of change means that there is an intermittence which characterizes representation *(ibid.)*. In a crucial and overlooked phrase in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim argues: 'Such a representation [is] abstract, vague and furthermore intermittent, as are all complex representations' (1893b/1902b:352).

Now how does this apply to the social world as a representational and relational system, which far exceeds the logic of judgment in its complexity? It is, of course, a cognitive and therefore discursive system. First, Durkheim's insistence that all is subject to becoming indicates that, in a system of relations, change is always possible. Social phenomena cease to be, and become something else. Further it indicates that this is always actually going on even though the acknowledgment of this may lag behind the reality. But how does change occur in a social system? Indeed how does the momentous form, the type of change that transforms systems, occur? Durkheim's answer in *The Division of Labor* is that the change from mechanical to organic

solidarity occurs through differentiation, which is brought about through economic specialization. Now, specialization is a form of differentiation of tasks and therefore of social functions. Through it solidarity is transformed. Solidarity responds, as I have maintained, to the logic of relation. The first moment of the logic of relation is differentiation. In an intellectual judgment it is only the first moment, but in a relational system it occurs in a totality. Differentiation, for Durkheim, provokes becoming. Differentiation in relations provokes relational movement. And of course this relational change hits forms of consciousness. Forms of solidarity that were undifferentiated become differentiated. The *conscience collective* of mechanical solidarity becomes a new form of individuated *conscience collective* of organic solidarity. The key to the transformation is the differentiation of work relations.

Correlative logic and representation

So there is a clear logic to representation and relation for Durkheim. But this has a unique character. 'Every time we unite heterogeneous terms by an internal link, we necessarily identify contraries' (1912a:341). As I have shown, the process of bringing together diverse elements is central to the process of mythological thought. Durkheim makes clear that it is not merely mythological thought that identifies contraries, but scientific thought also. It is on this basis that he can compare scientific and mythological thought *(ibid.)*. For all conceptualization of a world as a significant system brings together elements that are not analytically related.

However Durkheim is not a Hegelian. 'It is an error to believe that two contradictory judgements can co-exist without danger in the same conscience' (1885a/1975b, 1:376). This correlative logic shows how Durkheim can conceptualize the relation of different elements without breaking the principle of contradiction. He does so by holding, as did Renouvier and Hamelin, that the logic of correlation applies to representation. This is opposed to the Hegelian logic of contradiction, but is inspired, as was Hegel's conception, by the synthetic and triadic relations of categorial thought in the Kantian system. Examples of the logic of correlation for Renouvier are unity and plurality: they are not contradictories. That is to assert one thing—that a unit does not deny plurality. Indeed, since they only make sense in terms of each other, they are contraries. The synthesis is totality. And as I have shown in chapter 3, in connection with the definition of causality which Durkheim accepts from Renouvier, force is the synthesis of the correlatives—action *(acte)* and power *(puissance)*.

This correlative logic is a principle not only of the logic and development of thought, but also of social relations, for logically it applies to relation. It is the principle of development of a representational and relational life and enters into a cultural logic and its momentum. Differentiation is the first moment, identification is the correlative, and determination is the synthesis.

The active process of thought, shown in all science and language, in the determination of phenomena is first to distinguish the process and then to identify it with something else. This means that distinction and union are aspects of all thinking (Renouvier 1875b/1912, 1:146ff.).

As applied to a conscious and discursive totality of society, it means that there is always to some degree a process of distinguishing and unification going on in the process of social reality: it is a characteristic of social relatedness. It is thus full of movement, which tends towards consolidation and so on. This is in part, I suggest, what Durkheim meant by the free currents of social life, which tend towards crystallization in social forms. In *The Division of Labor,* correlative logic enters into the logic of punishment. Punishment, Durkheim argues, 'consists essentially in a passionate reaction' (1893b/1902b:64). 'The representation of a contrary state' is the primary cause of passionate reaction: we react against that which is contrary to our feelings and beliefs 'to maintain the integrity of our *conscience*', for it 'diminishes us'. The *conscience commune* tolerates 'no contradiction' (*ibid.*:67). The contrary is a principle of change, for it causes the reaction which provokes action: it produces energy and active forces (*ibid.*:66), which is shown not just in the reaction to crime, but in the representation of the sacred (*ibid.*:68). It is also central to tolerance, for 'reciprocal tolerance' is possible when there is a sympathy which is stronger than antagonism (*ibid.*:66).

So all representation implies a correlative mental activity. It is central to the syntheses of thought, in social action and cultural activity: both, as forms of representation, imply communication. The process is shown also in that which is similar, not merely in the reaction to that which challenges us through being different. This shared process of thought provokes the passions of collective life (*ibid.*:67) and is central to collective effervescence. In the shared passions, there is development and a fusion takes place, from which comes a 'new idea which absorbs the precedents' (*ibid.*:67). Only by acknowledging correlative logic within representation can we adequately explain how collective effervescence is a principle of change for Durkheim.

Correlation operates within the logic of a representational reality, brought into being by the interaction between *consciences:* it operates on totality. We can see this in Durkheim's argument for the change from mechanical to organic solidarity. The forces which gave birth to individualism are 'contrary forces': one centrifugal, the other centripetal (*ibid.*:100). That is, individualism is not *logically* the contradiction of mechanical solidarity, but it is a contrary force. In this sense it opposes the undifferentiated nature of mechanical solidarity. To distinguish, in other words to differentiate, is the first moment of all relational wholes for Renouvier. It is the differentiation entailed by the division of labour that provoked this momentous change in social relatedness. The resolution of these two contrary forces is the development of a new form of social relatedness—organic solidarity. This logic, especially

when attached to the principle of becoming, indicates a certain principle of growth and development within the logic of representation.

Conclusion

What difference does the above make to the interpretation of Durkheim? It shows that from the very beginning of his thought he was dealing with a non-positivist sense of logic and science. There is and can be no theory of the apriori for Comte: it is part of metaphysical thinking which must be overcome in the positive stage of science. The acknowledgment of logical presuppositions of all experience also differentiated Durkheim's position from empiricism. This type of apriorism is central to his rationalism: it postulates the logical conditions for positive knowledge of phenomena. It helps to explain why he said 'What has been called our positivism is nothing but a consequence of this rationalism' (1895a/1937c:vii). He admits that all experience relies logically on conceptual presuppositions.

Further, to recognize this shows how the constant characterization of Durkheim as a positivist is so false. Neither classical positivism nor modern positivism accepted the discursive nature of reality nor the necessity of the subject—object relation in knowledge. Nor do these acknowledge the dynamic and developmental character of relation, nor do they acknowledge the logic of becoming and pluralism. It is the neglect of these concepts in Durkheimian scholarship that has contributed to these false interpretations.

Note

1 Durkheim talks of 'representative functions' *(fonctions représentatives)*. This appears in *La Division du travail social* (1893b/1902b:270), but also in *Le Suicide,* where he writes that 'the most cultivated societies are also those where the representative functions are the most necessary and the most developed' (1897a:45). In *L'Education morale,* psychic functions are connected with 'representative faculties' (1925a/ 1963c:34). What are these? They have been obliterated through translation: for example Pocock, who renders 'representative life' as 'the phenomenon of representation' (1898b/1924a:13/t.1953b:9). The representative is associated with the concept of function—as in *fonction représentative.* Halls's translation of *La Division du travail social* renders the words as 'functions of representation' (1893b/ t.1984a:228). And in *L'Education morale* the concept of 'representative faculty' is rendered by Wilson as 'symbolic faculties' (1925a/t.1961a:39). These mistranslations significantly affect the interpretation and comprehension of Durkheim's thought.

A CHANGE IN IDEAS

Collective consciousness, morphology, and collective representations[1]

Dénes Némedi

Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* was written as part of an extensive body of research activity. His published works reflect only a part of his vast programme. While he was in Bordeaux between 1887 and 1902, he investigated suicide, family, crime, punishment and religion, as he noted in the introduction to his lectures on socialism in 1895 (1928a:11). He also gave lectures on education and politics. We know only a proportion of this work; much of it is lost forever. The statements in *The Rules* (1895a) need to be compared and contrasted with remarks made in other works. In this chapter I analyse three central ideas of the Durkheimian sociology of knowledge (collective *conscience,* morphology and collective representations) in this broader context of which *The Rules* forms only a minor part. In particular, I show how these ideas developed and were transformed after the publication of *The Division of Labor* (1893b).

Conscience collective after 1893

It can be assumed that, while writing *The Division of Labor,* Durkheim was uneasy with the original typology of mechanical solidarity (resulting from *conscience collective*) and organic solidarity (resulting from the division of labour). He had partially modified it by the time he completed the book; most overtly in the concluding chapter (1893b/t.1984a:339–40). After the publication of *The Division of Labor,* he abandoned the whole typology and it never appeared again in his theoretical writings in a significant way. The notion of *conscience collective* was modified too, as Parsons pointed out (1937:320). It was not abandoned completely, but as I will demonstrate, it was not subsequently used in a theoretically precise sense.

In *The Rules* Durkheim declares that there are phenomena which are different from the organic ones, since they consist of representation and

actions (1895a/t.1982a:52).[2] Elsewhere in the same text he characterizes *conscience collective* as the totality of representations which are collective in the sense that they are present in several minds. He used *conscience collective* in this way in a famous note which was subsequently invoked by those who saw in Durkheim a theoretician of the group mind.

> In this sense and for these reasons we can speak of a *conscience collective* distinct from individual *consciences*. To justify this distinction there is no need to hypostatise the *conscience collective;* it is something special and must be designated by a special term, simply because the states which constitute it differ specifically from those which make up individual *consciences*. This specificity arises because they are not formed from the same elements.
>
> (*ibid.*:145)[3]

This is a decisive departure from the use of the term in *The Division of Labor*. As it is used here, *conscience collective* is not a specific mode of integration (opposed to the division of labour as it was in *The Division of Labor*) but a general condition of society.

This concept of *conscience collective* reappeared again and again in Durkheim's writings of the 1890s. The most detailed explication can be found in the first chapter of Book III of *Suicide,* where Durkheim considers methodological questions. Here he speaks of society as 'a psychical existence of a new species',[4] which has 'its own manner of thinking and feeling' (1897a/t.1951a:310),[5] and which is 'essentially…made up of representation' (*ibid.*:312).[6] In the course of the slow change in Durkheim's thought, religion acquired a paramount position and the new concept of *conscience collective* was developed in accordance with the new role of religion as a central example. Durkheim says, 'Religion is in a word the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence' (*ibid.*:316).[7]

The 'social being' has a certain exteriority in its relations to the individuals and materializes in things—in independent realities—and it shows itself in the free currents of collective life (*ibid.*:315). Exteriority means that *'there is not one of all the single centers of consciousness who make up the great body of the nation, to whom the collective current is not almost wholly exterior, since each contains only a spark of it'* (*ibid.*:316).[8] This formulation is obviously different from the one contained in *The Division of Labor*. There, *conscience collective,* in the case of mechanical solidarity, meant that there was a set of elements which was present in each individual *conscience*. Here, the only criterion of collectiveness which Durkheim thought to be important was that the element should not be bound to only one particular *conscience*. The implication of this drawn in the preceding quotation was that no particular individual *conscience* could comprise the totality of the 'collective current'.[9]

Durkheim uses several related terms to denote 'collective' phenomena. Some of them are terms which have a broader meaning with no specific reference to psychic processes or consciousness (e.g., 'social current', 'collective tendencies', 'social or collective being') but which are used by him in a context implying this; however, some of them *(conscience sociale, conscience commune, représentations collectives)* make explicit reference to the psychic. The terminological indeterminacy suggests that Durkheim abandoned the specific theory of the *conscience collective,* but retained the theory that, as a general methodological principle, ideas form part of the social context.

The principle of morphological determination after 1893

In *The Division of Labor,* Durkheim supposed that there was a general morphological or socio-ecological determination of ideas. In its general form, the thesis was rather difficult to maintain. The overall theory supposed that a belief system *(conscience collective)* and a particular morphological constellation (division of labor) were functional alternatives. It was difficult, however, to understand how two orders of phenomena could provide alternative mechanisms of integration, if one of them was determined causally by the other. However, the incompatibility of the causal and functional principles did not disturb Durkheim very much in *The Division of Labor*. And since the book is not very tightly organized, the problem is not obvious. The message the book conveyed was Durkheim's commitment to a deterministic approach to consciousness.

> Most of our states of consciousness would not have occurred among men isolated from one another and would have occurred completely differently among people grouped together in a different way. Thus they derive not from the psychological nature of man generally, but from the way in which men, once they associate together, exert a reciprocal effect upon one another, according to their number and proximity. Products of the life of the group, it is the nature of the group alone that can explain the states of consciousness.
>
> (Durkheim 1893b/t.1984a:287)[10]

The disappearance of the central tenets of *The Division of Labor,* the models of mechanical and organic solidarity, opened up the possibility of developing a detailed theory of morphological determinism. Yet, Durkheim did not exploit the possibility because, in large part, it was incompatible with some theoretical changes he had made in the meantime which gave rise to a fundamental conflict.

In *The Rules,* Durkheim stressed that society consists of representation. Durkheim's general theoretical orientation led him to reject any position which

would isolate the representation from other things—which would make a separate world *(un monde à part)* of them (Letter to Bouglé *c.*1898 in 1975b, 2:420). Separating some social elements, and considering them as the conditioning 'morphological' sphere, was incompatible with this idea. A consistent morphological determinism along these lines would lead to a 'two world theory' —as represented by the later German sociology of knowledge.[11] But if society consists of representation, if representations are the only 'world', so to speak, it is difficult to say what is cause and what is effect.

Durkheim produced many confusing statements and dubious formulations as a consequence of, and in the course of, his slow resolution of the conflict between the principle of morphological determinism and his emerging conception of social life as made of representations. In *The Rules,* for example, he says: 'Collective representation, emotions and tendencies have not as their causes certain states of consciousness of individuals, but the conditions under which the body social as a whole exists' (1895a/ t.1982a:131).[12] Taken out of context, this seems to be a clear formula for morphological determinism: the body is the morphological stuff, that is, representations are caused by its 'conditions'. But the larger argument in which the statement appears was a justification of his anti-individualist methodology. And in this argument, the 'conditions of the social body' to which he refers are not a distinct sphere of morphological facts, but rather the totality of antecedent collective states which generated the present constellation, and which include representations.

The same confusion reappeared in his lectures on socialism, at the point at which he justified his interest in socialist conceptions whose scientific and theoretical value he doubted. He saw two reasons to study socialism. 'First, one can hope that it will aid us in understanding the social conditions which gave rise to it. For precisely because it derives from certain conditions, socialism manifests and expresses them in its own way, and thereby gives us another means of viewing them' (1928a/t.1958b:44).[13] On the other hand, if one wishes to dispute the socialist doctrine, 'socialism must not be considered in the abstract, outside of every condition of time and place. On the contrary, it is necessary to relate it to the social setting in which it was born' *(ibid.).*[14] In these quotations, there are two distinct conceptions of the relationship of ideas and social states. On the one hand, Durkheim supposed that there is a causal relationship such that one can infer the causes (social conditions) from the effects (socialist doctrines). On the other hand, he saw an expressive relationship between the two. Nevertheless, how certain socialist ideas expressed concrete conditions was never explained in detail (cf., Filloux 1977:301).

As I have noted, the idea of morphological determinism was gradually softened and its use was reduced to rhetorical purposes. The resulting generality and indeterminacy make it difficult to discuss its theoretical content (cf., Birnbaum 1969:7–9). Durkheim did not bother to clarify the issue— his

interest was elsewhere. But there were two occasions where he felt it important to state his position. His statements, however, are seemingly contradictory.

The first occasion was in a review of a book by Labriola. It was one of the rare cases in which he openly confronted Marxist positions.[15] Labriola had also developed a morphological determinist theory, and Durkheim believed that he had to distinguish his position from Labriola's. He also saw that his own sociological determinism could be confused with some Marxian ideas. He explained his own views as follows:

> We believe it a fruitful idea that social life must be explained not by the conception of it formed by those who participate in it, but by the profound causes which escape their consciousness. We also think that these causes must be sought mainly in the way in which individuals associating together are formed in groups.
>
> (1897e/t.1982a:171)[16]

However, he added, the Marxist scheme of basis/superstructure was unacceptable to him, and he explained why: 'we know of no means of reducing religion to economics' (*ibid.*:173).[17]

Yet only two years later, he wrote an introductory note to the subsection *morphologie sociale,* in the *Année sociologique,* in which he developed a conception which was, at first sight, very close to the ideas of Labriola he had previously criticized:

> Social life rests upon a substratum determinate in both size and form. It is made up of the mass of individuals who constitute society, the manner in which they have settled upon the earth, the nature and configuration of those things of all kinds which affect collective relationships.... On the other hand, the constitution of this substratum directly or indirectly affects all social phenomena, just as all psychological phenomena are linked either obliquely or immediately to the condition of the brain.
>
> (1899a(iii)/t.1982a:241)[18]

But there are at least two ways in which Durkheim's position is profoundly different from the Marxist theory as well as from the 'classical' German sociology of knowledge. One, Durkheim says nothing about the specific nature of the social phenomena which are affected by the 'substratum'. The term itself is vague: it is very likely that everything except the demographic characteristics and spatial distribution of the population should be included under the social phenomena. There is at least a vague hint that consciousness and 'knowledge' elements form an important part of these 'phenomena'. The dividing line between two parts, substratum and social phenomena, does not

separate consciousness from the 'material' aspects of society. According to Durkheim, the two could not be separated, and, therefore, he did not believe that there could be a purely 'material' substratum determining a purely 'ideal' sphere of consciousness. His research remained free from this kind of dualism. Two, the notion of 'substratum' is very vaguely defined, and it is questionable whether Durkheim was thinking of morphological facts as social facts (see Alexander 1982:253–4). The last sentence in the quotation above, which states that the relationship between morphological phenomena and social life is similar to that of brain and mind, formulates a thesis which I discuss in the next section. However, note that Durkheim, by analogical argument, excludes morphological phenomena from the social domain.

The incompatibility of the principle of morphological determinism (which was in any case never examined in detail by Durkheim) with the thesis that everything in society is made up of representation was never discussed explicitly. But the conflict was, in a fashion, resolved: the principle of morphological determinism was slowly weakened, but not abandoned altogether. Unfortunately, the documentation of this slow drift is hindered by the superficial similarity of the idea of morphological determinism to the characteristic Durkheimian tenet of the autonomy of social facts. Because Durkheim was on only one occasion directly confronted with a theory which fervently affirmed the idea of morphological determinism in its 'materialist' form, he did not feel a need to develop his position in detail.[19]

Subsequent commentary on the principle has inadvertently distorted matters in another way. Durkheim's commentators in the 1970s and 1980s were very much preoccupied with relating his ideas to those of the many Marxisms and therefore overlooked the specificity or context of his arguments. In the 1890s, when Durkheim was speaking of consciousness and knowledge, his main insights were formulated not in terms of *conscience collective* or of morphological determinism but in terms of collective representation.

The problem of representations

The word *représentation* occurs frequently in the writings of Durkheim. In the 1890s, he used the term 'collective representation' more and more frequently as a scientific concept. The development of his ideas about collective representation was very important to the theoretical reorientation which led to his ethnological studies of religion. The word *représentation* was accepted in French vernacular and philosophical language. Littré (1968, 6:1379–81) distinguishes thirteen meanings of it. In the present context, two of them are important: the 'active' moment of *représentation (action de représenter)* and the 'result' of *représentation* (image) which are also distinguished in Lalande's vocabulary (*acte de se représenter quelque chose* against *ce qui est présent à l'esprit*) (1960:920–2). It is believed that the philosophical usage of the word goes back to Leibniz (who complemented the traditional meaning *se représenter* =

imaginer with *représentation* = *correspondance*). The French term was translated by Wolff as *Vorstellung* and the two terms were considered as equivalent.[20] *Représentation* is a central term in Renouvier, Taine or Hamelin.[21] The fact that Durkheim uses the word frequently is in no way specific or significant.[22] The curious double meaning of the word—'the ambiguous assimilation of the knowing instrument and the known thing' —was not specific to Durkheim either (Bohannan 1960:79, see Lukes 1973:7).

Durkheim used the word *représentation* in an early book review (1887b/ t.1975a:161). But its use did not become frequent until after 1893 when he came to the conclusion that social phenomena 'are made up of *représentations*' and *représentations* are to be regarded as social facts (1895a/1901c:8).[23] However, the conception in *The Rules* was rather weak, even if the word was used relatively frequently (Alexander 1982:483). The first substantial discussion was in *Suicide* (1897a/t.1951a:345ff.). The concept was later developed in an independent essay (1898b).

Durkheim's detailed explication of the term collective representation coincided with the disintegration of the original sense of *conscience collective* and with the weakening of morphological determinism (Lukes 1973:229–30).[24] The growing importance of the term collective representation allowed Durkheim to give a more detailed and better organized picture of social thought than he was able to do with the one-dimensional and crude concept of *conscience collective* (Beillevaire and Bensa 1984:532–3). The introduction and frequent use of the term was crucial for Durkheim. It helped him to avoid the dualism of material facts and consciousness *(conscience)* and the necessity of supposing a causal relationship between the two. Facts, which are considered as 'material' things in other theories, are 'made up' of representations according to Durkheim. By contrast, representations are just as external and thing-like as the so-called material facts (Turner 1983–4:52–3).[25]

The explication of the theory of collective representations was connected to Durkheim's repeated efforts to demonstrate the right of sociology to the status of autonomous science. The article 'Individual and Collective Representations' (1898b), which is his most important from this point of view, deals extensively with the psychological theory of representations; in fact, this part of the essay is much longer than that devoted to collective—that is, social—representations. This is highly symptomatic with respect to Durkheim's aims. He referred to psychology every time he needed an example of successful emancipation of science from philosophy and general speculation (e.g., 1895a/1901c:37, 173).[26] Here, the lengthy analysis of individual representations has the same function.

Durkheim discusses in great detail psychological epiphenomenalism, which by this time was no longer alive in the form represented by Huxley and Maudsley, but which had reappeared in a modified version in James and Rabier. He believes that the memory and the faculty of association cannot be understood if one supposes, as the epiphenomenalists do, that the mind

is identical with the actual physiological, nervous state (Durkheim 1898b). The extended (and, in the Durkheimian sense, dialectical) discussion comes to the conclusion that psychological phenomena constitute an independent realm of reality.

> If representations, once they exist, continue to exist in themselves without their existence being perpetually dependent upon the disposition of the neural centres, if they have the power to react directly upon each other and to combine according to their own laws, they are then realities which, while maintaining an intimate relation with their substratum, are to a certain extent independent of it.
>
> (Durkheim 1898b/t.1953b:23)

Durkheim's reasoning here is analogical. He supposed that collective representations were independent of the totality of individual minds in the same way as the mind was independent of brain; if for this reason psychology was properly considered to be independent of physiology, sociology should be independent of psychology too:

> The conception of the relationship which unites the social substratum and the social life is at every point analogous to that which undeniably exists between the physiological substratum and the psychic life of individuals, if, that is, one is not going to deny the existence of psychology in the proper sense of the word. The same consequences should then follow on both sides. The independence, the relative externality of social facts in relation to individuals, is even more immediately apparent than is that of mental facts in relation to the cerebral cells.
>
> (*ibid.*:25)

Durkheim was fond of saying in this context that the whole was more than the sum of its parts (e.g., 1895a/1901c:125).[27] He does so here as well:

> Representational life cannot be divided among and ascribed to particular neural elements, since several of these elements combine for its generation; *but it could not exist without the whole formed by their union, just as the collective could not exist without the whole formed by the union of individuals*. Neither the one nor the other is made up of particular parts that can be attributed to the corresponding parts of their respective substrata.
>
> (1898b/t.1953b:27–8)

The analogy of the brain-mind relationship with the relationship of psychological and social phenomena forced Durkheim to change the sense of the term 'substratum'.[28] Whereas earlier he regarded the substratum as belonging to the social sphere, here he was led to declare that the totality of individuals and individual representation—a *substrat collectif*—which constitute the necessary basis of social life, are outside it. Of course, he was not speaking here of substratum in the earlier, material sense—that is, of the soil and its characteristics, of population and its territorial repartition. The real substratum of society is constituted by individual representation. These are the preconditions of social life, which cannot be explained by them:[29] 'Also, while it is through the collective substratum that collective life is connected to the rest of the world, it is not absorbed in it. It is at the same time dependent on and distinct from it, as is the function of the organ' (*ibid.*:30).

In this essay, Durkheim gave an extra-social interpretation to the term substratum. He conceived it as the totality of individuals who have body and mind, but without taking into consideration the social bonds which unite them. This step was necessary to insist on the change in the meaning of collective representations. As these latter constitute the specific social element which has a peculiar and autonomous mode of movement it was important to reduce everything which did not belong to them to the status of mere preconditions of society.

> The basic matter of the social consciousness *(toute conscience sociale)* is in close relation with the number of social elements and the way in which they are grouped and distributed, etc. —that is to say, with the nature of the substratum. But once a basic number of representations has thus been created, they become, for the reasons which we have explained, partially autonomous realities with their own way of life. They have the power to attract and repel each other and to form amongst themselves various syntheses, which are determined by their natural affinities and not by the condition of their matrix *(l'état du milieu au sein duquel elles évoluent)*. As a consequence, the new representations born of these syntheses have the same nature; they are immediately caused by other collective representations and not by this or that characteristic of the social structure.
>
> (*ibid.*:30–1)

This conclusion implies that collective representations constitute the most important class of *things* which should be analysed by sociology. Durkheim considers representations as things in the most exact sense of the word.

In chapter 1 of Book III of *Suicide* (a chapter where the basic ideas of the 1898 essay were already formulated), he refutes those who take collective

tendencies or passions (which are here related to representation) only metaphorically, or in a nominalistic sense. These are, he repeats, really things, 'things sui generis and not mere verbal entities that they may be measured, their relative sizes compared, as is done with the intensity of electric currents or luminous foci' (1897a/t.1951a:310).[30] Collective representations should be investigated in a naturalistic manner—that was Durkheim's intention. This implies that he did not conceive them as the utterances of a gigantic collective subject—even if he sometimes used metaphors which were ambiguous in this respect.

Durkheim's research intentions are clearly stated in the second preface to *The Rules* in 1901. There, he defended the thesis that society, while it is made up of representations, conserves its externality to the individuals, and the thesis that its laws are different from the laws of psychology. 'What should be done is to investigate, by comparing mythical themes, legends and popular traditions, and languages, *how social representations are attracted to or exclude each other, amalgamate with or are distinguishable from each other, etc.*' (1895a/1901c/ t.1982a:41–2, emphasis added).[31] Durkheim conceived research into the laws of motion of collective *representation* in a classical, positivist manner. This conception still dominated the 1898 essay and, to a lesser extent, the 1901 second preface as well. Basic to this research and to this shift of emphasis was the idea that collective representations constitute a specific domain; they are independent beings and not just the epiphenomena of other, more real beings.

Durkheim's mode of expression reflects this conception. Abundant are the expressions he took over from physics: attraction, repulsion, natural affinity, causal relations, fusion and differentiation. However, around the turn of century he was drifting towards a less physics-dominated conception of research as exemplified in his first ethnological papers (cf. Durkheim 1898a(ii)). He came to conceive the structure produced by the mutual connections of collective representations as a special kind of grammar.

Durkheim always stressed that collective representations should be conceived independently from the subjects who have them. There is no expressive relationship between individual mind and collective representations. The latter are not thoughts of individuals. However, Durkheim could not abandon totally the idea that representations should be, in some sense, the thoughts of *someone*. Formulations that could be found already in *The Rules* reappeared again and again: he perceived society as a new kind of mind, a group consciousness. Talking of the *sui generis* reality of society which results from the combination of conscious beings but cannot be reduced to individual minds, he said: 'In order to understand it as it is one must take the aggregate in its totality into consideration. It is that which thinks, feels, wishes, even though it can neither wish, feel, nor act except through individual minds' (1898b/t.1953b:26).

He did not arrive at a comprehensive group mind theory, however, because he considered collective representations to be at the same time something similar to physical objects. Therefore he did not need to produce a conception of society which thinks and which has a will of its own.

His commitment to this 'elements' model of the *conscience collective* appeared early. In *The Division of Labor,* he conceived the *conscience collective* as being the sum of identical elements in individual *consciences*—that is, he did not assume that it is a colossal mind. The contradictory character of Durkheim's formulations can be seen in *Suicide* too, where the group mind analogy is interwoven with a research programme which postulates the similarity of collective representation to physical objects. Here, he took religious *representations* as the most typical example of collective *representations:*

> The power thus imposed on his respect and become the object of his adoration is society, of which the gods were only the hypostatic form. Here then is a great group of states of mind which would not have originated if individual states of consciousness had not combined, and which results from this union and are superadded to those which derive from individual natures.
>
> (1897a/t.1951a:312)[32]

To these phrases suggesting a group mind theory Durkheim added on the next page: 'Not only have we admitted that social states differ qualitatively from individual states, but that they are, in a certain sense, exterior to individuals. We have not even hesitated to compare this quality of being external with that of physical forces' (*ibid.*:313).[33] Durkheim's position here is the by-product of his scientific strategy. Psychology was regarded by him as the example of successful institutionalization. Therefore, sociology should follow the same route and should similarly become an independent science, in the same way. Two requirements follow from this strategy. The first is that a specific object area should be defined;[34] the second is that sociology's achievements should be comparable to those of psychology. The replacement of the category of mind with that of society was an obvious solution to these demands. As society and mind had similar categorical position, it was but a small step to suppose something which is similar to 'group mind'.

But as suggested earlier, Durkheim's research logic was more compatible with the idea that collective representations are quasi-physical, thing-like objects than with the conception of society as a gigantic subject. Fortunately, he followed the first approach in his ethnological studies. As indicated earlier, this intensive research resulted in a less physicist conception of representations. However, Durkheim did not revive the 'group mind' motif of his earlier writings. In fact, the naturalistic conception of representations was a step towards the famous *théorie*

sociologique de la connaissance which was Durkheim's final achievement in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912a).

Notes

1 This is a revised edition of an article, 'Collective Consciousness, Morphology, and Collective Representations: Durkheim's Sociology of Knowledge, 1894–1900', first published in *Sociological Perspectives* (1995), 38(1):41–56, with the permission of the Pacific Sociological Association.

2 'Puisqu'ils consistent en représentations et en actions' (Durkheim 1895a/1901c:8).

3 'Voilà dans quel sens et pour quelles raisons on peut et on doit parler d'une conscience collective distincte des consciences individuelles. Pour justifier cette distinction, il n'est pas nécessaire d'hypostasier la première; elle est quelque chose de spécial et doit être désignée par un terme spécial, simplement parce que les états qui la constituent diffèrent spécifiquement de ceux qui constituent les consciences particulières. Cette spécificité leur vient de ce qu'ils ne sont pas formés des mêmes éléments' (Durkheim 1895a/1901c:127n.).

4 'Un être psychique d'une espèce nouvelle' (Durkheim 1897a:350).

5 'Sa manière propre de penser et de sentir' (Durkheim 1897a:350).

6 '…est essentiellement faite de représentations' (Durkheim 1897a:352). Another concise formulation in the lectures on moral education: 'Mais la société, ce n'est pas l'œuvre des individus qu'elle comprend à telle ou telle phase de l'histoire; ce n'est pas davantage le sol qu'elle occupe; c'est, avant tout, un ensemble d'idées et de sentiments, de certaines manières de voir et de sentir, une certaine physionomie intellectuelle et morale qui est distinctive du groupe tout entier. La société est, avant tout, une conscience: c'est la conscience de la collectivité. C'est donc cette conscience collective qu'il faut faire passer dans l'âme de l'enfant' (Durkheim 1925a:318).

7 'La religion, c'est, en définitive, le système de symboles par lesquels la société prend conscience d'elle-même; c'est la manière de penser propre à l'être collectif' (Durkheim 1897a:352).

8 'De toutes les consciences particulières qui composent la grande masse de la nation, il n'en est aucune par rapport à laquelle le courant collectif ne soit extérieur presque en totalité, puisque chacune d'elles n'en contient qu'une parcelle' (Durkheim 1897a:357, emphasis in the original omitted).

9 Durkheim gives an important integrative role to this loosely defined 'social or collective *conscience*'. Speaking of religious groups he says that they are well integrated when religious belief is firm and well defined—when there is an 'opinion commune' (Durkheim 1897a:158). It occurs when people get their opinions ready-made (*ibid.*:171).

10 The most important continuous argument written in the spirit of morphological determinism is the well-known chapter of *The Division of Labor,* where Durkheim explains the rationalization and generalization of ideas by changes in the social milieu (Durkheim 1893b/t.1984a:229–33).

11 On 'two world theories' *(Zwei-Welten-Theorien)* and their role in the German sociology, see Lenk (1972).

12 'Les représentations, les émotions, les tendances collectives n'ont pas pour causes génératrices certains états de la conscience des particuliers, mais les conditions où se trouve le corps social dans son ensemble' (Durkheim 1895a/1901c:130).

13 'D'abord, on peut espérer qu'il nous aidera à comprendre les états sociaux qui l'ont suscité. Car précisément parce qu'il en dérive, il les manifeste et les exprime

à sa façon, et, par cela même, il nous donne un moyen de plus les atteindre' (Durkheim 1928a:7–8).

14 '…il ne faut pas considérer le socialisme dans l'abstrait, en dehors de toute condition de temps et de lieu, il faut, au contraire, le rattacher aux milieux sociaux où il a pris naissance' (Durkheim 1928a:11).

15 Alexander (1982:250) overstates the issue when he says that Durkheim was offering a theoretical alternative to Marxism. That was not his intention. He did not know Marx well and, therefore, it was not the Marxian theory to which he opposed his general conception.

16 'Nous croyons féconde cette idée que la vie sociale doit s'expliquer, non par la conception que s'en font ceux qui y participent, mais par des causes profondes qui échappent à la conscience: et nous pensons aussi que ces causes doivent être recherchées principalement dans la manière dont sont groupés les individus associés' (Durkheim 1897e/1969c:250).

17 '*Nous ne connaissons aucun moyen de réduire la religion* [which was, according to Durkheim at that time, the most elementary social phenomenon] *à l'économie*' (Durkheim 1897e/1969c:253).

18 'La vie sociale repose sur un substrat qui est déterminé dans sa grandeur comme dans sa forme. Ce qui le constitue, c'est la masse des individus qui composent la société, la manière dont ils sont disposés sur le sol, la nature et la configuration des choses de toute sorte qui affectent les relations collectives…. D'un autre coté, la constitution de ce substrat affecte, directement ou indirectement tous les phénomènes sociaux, de même que tous les phénomènes psychiques sont en rapports, médiats ou immédiats, avec l'état du cerveau' (Durkheim 1899a(iii):520– 1).

19 The confusion within the Durkheimian group was apparent in the article 'Sociologie' in the *Grande Encyclopédie,* written by Paul Fauconnet and Marcel Mauss (and certainly approved by Durkheim). There, after producing contradictory statements on the status of collective representations, they go on to formulate both the rejection and the affirmation of the morphological determinist thesis. 'Rien n'est vain comme de se demander si ce sont les idées qui ont suscité les sociétés ou si ce sont les sociétés qui, une fois formées, ont donné naissance aux idées collectives. Ce sont des phénomènes inséparables.' And then: 'Car les représentations collectives ne doivent pas être conçues comme se développant d'elles-mêmes, en vertu d'une sorte de dialectique interne… Les opinions, les sentiments de la collectivité ne changent que si les états sociaux dont ils dépendent ont également changé' (Fauconnet and Mauss 1901:163).

20 It is obvious that, in the German term, the original link to the sense of representation as acting or speaking for someone or something, on behalf of something (e.g., the king who represents in his person the immortal principle of royal power), is lost.

21 Hamelin was Durkheim's friend and colleague in Bordeaux and wrote a very Hegelian book with the title *Essai sur les elements principaux de la représentation.* Representation means there *Begriff, Idée, Geist* at the same time. On Hamelin's and Durkheim's relationship, see Strenski (1989), Némedi (1991), Némedi and Pickering (1995).

22 One need not suppose, as Mestrovic (1988) does, that it was Schopenhauer's influence that inspired Durkheim to use representation *(Vorstellung).*

23 Durkheim of course did not believe that collective representations are or should be true representations. In *The Rules,* he separated knowledge as correct, scientific (sociological) representations from representations as social facts. Hirst's problem is a false problem: 'In so far as it [collective representation] is a mental

phenomenon, an idea, he faces the threat that it is an illusion, a misrecognition of the real. But since it is the order of the real itself, the society-subject can only be a subject without illusions, a subject whose ideas are pure knowledge' (Hirst 1975:100). It is an exaggeration to suggest that Durkheim considered society as a huge subject.

24 As *conscience collective* and collective representations in an exact theoretical sense are not used by Durkheim at the same time, I find the common practice of treating them as meaning the same or something similar to be baseless. The resulting identification of the Durkheimian terms with the modern conception of culture is misleading too. LaCapra, for example, believes that collective representation 'primarily referred…to the shared model or paradigm which functioned as a mode of explanation and justification in society, especially as the core of the conscience collective which he treated in his moral philosophy as la morale' (LaCapra 1972:266). According to Nisbet, 'collective representation…is but a phrase for what most of us call more commonly traditions, codes, and themes in culture' (Nisbet 1974:88). Filloux sees that *conscience collective* and *représentations collectives* are different; both are inserted by him in his multilevel model of determination: 'Les représentations collectives ne sont que le premier degré d'objectivation de la conscience collective, dont les institutions et le substrat constituent les autres degrés', that is, in the sense that the substratum is 'below' the collective representations, *conscience collective* is 'above' them (see Filloux 1977:115). The scheme is really ingenious, but it combines ideas and theories which were never adopted by Durkheim in this combination.

25 Because representations are thing-like, it cannot be said that the social world, which is of 'ideal' character according to Durkheim, would be the emanation or 'objectivation' of a transcendent spirit or spiritual being. 'Assurément, on ne saurait trop le répéter, tout ce qui est social consiste en représentations, par conséquent est un produit de représentations. Seulement, ce devenir des représentations collectives, qui est la matière même de la sociologie, *ne consiste pas dans une réalisation progressive de certaines idées fondamentales* qui, d'abord obscurcies et voilées par des idées adventices, s'en affranchiraient peu à peu pour devenir de plus en plus complètement elles-mêmes. Si des états nouveaux se produisent, c'est, en grande partie, parce que des états anciens se sont groupés et combinés' (Durkheim 1898a(ii)/1969c:100, emphasis added).

26 Durkheim's proverbial anti-psychologism was of a methodological kind. He never questioned the scientific character of psychology, whereas he believed that classical economics was essentially unscientific, 'ideological' (Durkheim 1895a/1901c:31ff.). In his lectures on moral education, he repeatedly and positively referred to recent psychological monographs—he did not do that very often on other occasions (Durkheim 1925a:114, 154, 184, 191). We must not forget that in his youth he visited the psychological laboratory of Wundt in Leipzig and he had very positive impressions of it.

27 As Durkheim himself said, he took this banality from Comte and his own professor of philosophy, Emile Boutroux (Durkheim 1907b:613). It was connected to the statement that the particular sciences are built on those 'below', but are different and independent of them.

28 It reappeared in 1899 in the note on social morphology (1899a(iii):520/t.1982a:241).

29 He warns his adversaries that, if they do not accept the independence of sociology, they will be forced to abandon the independence of psychology, too. 'Those, then, who accuse us of leaving social life in the air because we refuse to reduce it to the individual mind have not, perhaps, recognized all the

consequences of their objection. If it were justified it would apply just as well to the relations between mind and brain' (Durkheim 1898b/t.1953b:28).

30 'Elles sont si bien des choses *sui generis,* et non des entités verbales, qu'on peut les mésurer, comparer leur grandeur relative, comme on fait pour l'intensité de courants électriques ou de foyers lumineux' (Durkheim 1897a:349, emphasis added).

31 'Ce qu'il faudrait, c'est chercher, par la comparaison des thèmes mythiques, des légendes et des traditions populaires, des langues, *de quelle façon les représentations sociales s'appellent et s'excluent, fusionnent les unes dans les autres ou se distinguent, etc.'* (Durkheim 1895a/1901c:xviii, emphasis added).

32 'La puissance qui s'est ainsi imposée à son respect et qui est devenue l'objet de son adoration, c'est la société, dont les Dieux ne furent que la forme hypostasiée. La religion, c'est, en définitive, le système de symboles par lesquels la société prend conscience d'elle-même; c'est la manière de penser propre à l'être collectif. Voilà donc un vaste ensemble d'états mentaux qui ne se seraient pas produits si les consciences particulières ne s'étaient pas unies, qui résultent de cette union et se sont surajoutés à ceux qui dérivent des natures individuelles' (Durkheim 1897a:352–3).

33 The Spaulding-Simpson version is misleading. 'Nous n'avons pas seulement admis que les états sociaux diffèrent qualitativement des états individuels, mais encore qu'ils sont, en un certain sens, extérieurs aux individus. Même nous n'avons pas craint de comparer cette extériorité à celle des forces physiques' (Durkheim 1897a:353/t.1951a:313).

34 In the introductory paragraphs to the essay on individual and collective representations Durkheim remarked that sociology should have a research area which is independent of psychology—even if both investigate representations (Durkheim 1898b/t.1953b:2).

WHAT DO REPRESENTATIONS REPRESENT?

The issue of reality

W.S.F.Pickering

Introduction

In this chapter I look again at some issues raised in earlier chapters, but particularly chapters 3 and 4. What follows attempts to approach them from a slightly different angle.

I begin with a sentence from *Les Formes élémentaires,* which is in a section concerned with the problem of defining religion. It is in a footnote which is well known. 'If we have thought it best to propose a new one [definition], it is because the first was more formal and neglected the contents of religious representations too much' (1912a:65n.1/t.1915d:47n.1). Religion *per se* is not considered here. More relevant in the quotation is the issue of the content of collective representations, and to remind readers, should they need reminding, of the great extent to which Durkheim used the concept collective representations in his last book.

At the outset I posit several assumptions.

1 As stated in the first chapter and subsequently reiterated here by other authors, collective representations stand at the centre of Durkheim's thought. Even in his early works, he gave them an important place, though another concept, *conscience collective,* appears to have been more important at that time (see chapter 5 here). Certainly from the late 1890s onwards they were extensively used.
2 For Durkheim, as has already been shown, there are many kinds of representations. In addition to collective representations, he refers to scientific, individual representations, representations of feeling *(sensibles),* religious representations, and so on (see chapter 1).
3 The concept of representation or representations was common in his day: it was not exclusive to him.

4   Perhaps because of their common usage amongst philosophers, he never defined the basic term representation or more precisely representations.

The problem

Although Durkheim never formally defined what was for him a key term, we may assume that, at a basic level, representations are mental constructs. But constructs of what? Logically they must represent something. But what in fact do they represent? Anything? Or certain classes of objects or things?

Quite clearly anything—any object—can be represented. As Gillet says, 'representations represent things other than themselves…they are of this or that' (1992:101). Representation means that there is the thing over against the idea—the representation of the thing—which is in the mind of the individual, or held to exist by a group of individuals in their minds. This non-contextual, wide application can often be found in Durkheim's work.

It can be argued that representations can represent everything. At one level this is obvious. At another more sophisticated level, and following Renouvier, and assumed by Durkheim, everything that is understandable is understood only through representations. 'The world exists for us only to the extent to which it is represented.' So wrote Durkheim in an article that was intended to be part of *Les Formes élémentaires,* but which never appeared in the book (1909d:756; see also chapter 3 here). In this sense, therefore, to try to derive a simple answer about the content of representations is pointless: their infinite scope prevents such a possibility or forestalls any simple or generalizable answer. Further, in Durkheim's eyes, representations are the main constituents of the mind (Dennes 1924:32). From this position two methods of procedure are open. One is to assert that the content of representations is not important for understanding what representations are all about. What is important is to see representations as functions of thought. The other is not so much to lay emphasis on function, as to try to establish content in a general way, perhaps using some kind of classification.

We deal with these two possibilities in turn.

Representations as modes of thinking

There is good reason to suggest that, in 'Primitive Classification', Durkheim and Mauss were concerned not so much with the contents of collective representations—what they can and do represent—but with the fact that representations are associated with a faculty of the mind (1903a(i)). By such a faculty of creating representations, classification is made possible, which in turn leads to the formation of categories which are the chief, but not the only means of gaining knowledge. Without classification, knowledge as we understand it at its most basic level is impossible. Representations are nothing more than techniques. They thus constitute a mode of thinking or perform a function of

the mind within the realm of human understanding. As Needham wrote in 1963, 'the entire venture [was] misconceived', for the real concern of the authors throughout the essay was 'to study a faculty of the human mind' (1963:xxvi). Durkheim and Mauss made no distinction between cognitive function and content arising from function. Needham was later to note that in 1898, some five years or so before the appearance of 'Primitive Classification', in his essay on representations, Durkheim did make a distinction between categorical forms of thought and the process of thinking but he seems then to have abandoned it (Needham 1972:157).

Kant held that the mind was centrally involved in the constitution of objective knowledge. In the structure of mind, logic is prior to time. The powers of the mind to create and to organize data predetermine logically the form that experience takes. Through rationality combined with sensory experience, all objects of knowledge become constituted.

I do not intend to pursue this aspect of representations further and I have dealt with certain facets of it in my article, 'The Origins of Conceptual Thinking in Durkheim: Social or Religious?' (Pickering 1993).

Representations refer to content

Clearly, one has to distinguish between the faculty of the person doing the representing, that is, the human being as representer, together with how he functions in this way, for example through the collectivity, and what he represents, that is, objects, verbal communications. Gehlke, in his notable essay covering Durkheim's use of representations which was published as early as 1915, was one of the first to attempt to deal with the subject. He assumed that representations did not constitute a mode of thinking but rather formed the content of the mind. And here later Needham stands alongside him in holding that Durkheim's concept of the mind was a system of representations rather than a system of functions (Needham 1963:xxiv). This is borne out in Durkheim's essay of 1898, in which it is clear that his concept of the mind is not as a faculty for organizing ideas but as a deposit of organized ideas. The mind is defined as 'representations, past and present' (1898b:287; and see Dennes 1924:36). That representations are significant for Durkheim rests on the fact that he stresses their importance by way of content. Bohannan spells this out more specifically and holds that in Durkheim '[collective] representations refer either to material objects or to categories of material objects, on the one hand, and to expectations of behavior, on the other' (1960:81).

As we have seen, Durkheim asserted that there are two major types of representations. In *Suicide,* he wrote that collective representations are states of the collective *conscience* which are different in nature from states of individual *conscience* (1897a:352–3/t.1951a:312–13). He believed this perhaps partly because he held that collective representations are the highest form of mental life but

also because he held that 'social life is made up essentially of [collective] representations' *(ibid)*.

Durkheim sees the mind as a *tabula rasa* to be filled by representations. This task is not fulfilled through some innate function. Further, if representations were merely functional, there would be no means of establishing truth or reality. The notion of truth is then null and void, except in so far as individuals accidentally come up with the same representation. This surely is an impossible position for any rationalist. That collective representations reflect reality allows Durkheim to proceed with a sociology of knowledge in which the issues of truth are involved. The point is that representations do not come into existence by an isolated individual with a *tabula rasa* just meditating and thinking. Rather, collective representations—from which individual representations may be derived—are conveyed through an initial process of socialization by which the individual is taught what to think by the absorption of collective representations. All too easily Durkheim's notion of socialization is overlooked in his sociology of knowledge and is ill developed by commentators (but see Steiner 1994:44ff.).

How well do representations represent?

We return to the central question: what do representations represent? The short, generalized answer is that for Durkheim they represent reality or some form of reality.[1] Here there is no doubting Durkheim's position. Durkheim is a realist in so far as he sees reality—I would be so bold as to say reality of any kind—being external to the knowing subject, with one exception, reality as the individual sees it, which will be considered shortly.

That said, two issues immediately present themselves. One, what is Durkheim's concept of reality? Two, are representations accurate reflections of reality? Since the second issue can be relatively easily dealt with, it is considered first. The first issue is more problematic.

Durkheim holds that representations both represent reality and also fail to represent it. They are at best only approximations. As early as 1895, in *The Rules,* he wrote that 'our representations of physical things are from these things themselves and express them more or less exactly', that is, they are approximations (1895a/1901c:30/t.1938b:23). Representations lack objective value and therefore do not portray things as they really are. They consist of artificial constructions. Further, since they may be inexact, they may mislead. In *Les Formes élémentaires* he wrote:

> In a sense it is true that our representation of the external world is also only a fabric of hallucinations, for the odours, tastes and colours that we ascribe to bodies are not there, or at least they are not what we perceive them to be. Nevertheless, our olfactory, gustatory and visual sensations correspond to certain objective states of things

represented… But collective representations very often attribute the things to which they refer properties which do not exist in any form or to any degree. Out of the commonest object they make a sacred or very powerful being.

(1912a:325–6/t.1915d:227–8)

What is clear from this statement is that collective representations contain certain characteristics which are not directly derived from the senses. Since representations are human-made devices, they are subject to human error. Durkheim wrote in connection with religion:

By the fact alone that representation presupposes a subject represented— (here individually and there collectively) —the nature of this subject is a factor in the representation and alters the shape of the thing represented. The individual…puts into these images something that is not there… The society does the same thing in picturing by means of religion the milieu that constitutes it. The distortion, however, is not the same in both instances, because the subjects differ.

(1950a/1969g:188–9/t.1957a:160–1)

One of the ways in which religion 'distorts' reality in producing representations is in designating certain actions and beliefs as being sacred, which becomes an added quality (see Pickering 1984:ch. 7.6).

Thus, it is society, with its 'fallibilities', that determines what the representation of the real is, or what the real itself is. This also is apparent in another passage in *Les Formes élémentaires:*

It is within its [society's] nature to see very frequently things in the large and under the aspect which they ordinarily have. But this generality is not necessary for them, and, in any case, even when these representations have the generic character which they ordinarily have, they are the work of society and are enriched by its experience.

(1912a:612/t.1915d:435)

So we are left with the proposition that representations are inaccurate but nevertheless are approximations in the right direction and are the only mental tools mankind has! As with many philosophers of his day, Durkheim held that the highest level of knowledge comes from representations (see chapter 1 here). Inaccurate though they may be, there is no substitute for them. Here is no reason to abandon them. That they are what they are is part of the human condition. There is no better alternative. What is required, therefore, is that there should be a means of improving or refining them. That entails

understanding the relation between representations and what they represent, what Durkheim would call reality.

However, Durkheim does not systematically investigate the relation of reality to its representation, other than to say that somehow society gives human beings representations. Thus, society offers a mixture of truth and falsehood. Again, in what he is attempting, Durkheim adopts, as we shall see, a realist conception of knowledge. But how does one know the reality if the representations are unreliable and, as we shall further demonstrate, subject to relativism? Of course Durkheim realizes that he must break the relativist circle and at the same time show how representations can be improved or are improved in the course of time.

Durkheim has no convincing answer to these basic questions, but he does offer what might be called a pragmatic solution and rests on the centrality of science. It is the scientific community that can bring about the improvements in representations and so make them a better reflection of reality—at least compared with non-scientific thinkers. He offers as an example collective representations used by contemporary scientists about the sun compared with the less developed attempts made by priests and astrologers in previous ages. But having said that, it seems that Hirst is right in asking by what criteria and in what manner can it be said that new collective representations are a better reflection of the reality they are supposed to represent than former ones (Hirst 1975:83). So, if scientific representations are nearer reality than non-scientific representations, one asks why this should be the case? The answer can only be in some pragmatic criterion, namely, that science 'gets results' and increases man's knowledge. In short, science is where truth is to be found. Science develops itself slowly but surely, building up truth piece by piece. This raises the question of Durkheim's love-affair with science, which he shares with many other thinkers. That, however, is not our immediate concern.

One of the weaknesses of Durkheim's reasoning is that he assumes the existence of a reality which the scientist knows but the non-scientist does not know. If the scientist indeed knows what reality is, then he is in a better position to state whether one representation is nearer reality than another. When Durkheim implies that the scientist states that one representation is 'truer' than another, he does state what the reality is.

This elitist view of knowledge, which might be acceptable in the realm of science, also applies according to Durkheim in other areas, for example morals, where the 'professional' has a clearer idea of the issues and problems and therefore of what are the 'best' moral representations than the 'lay' man or woman. This position he upheld as early as 1893 in his thesis and repeated to his dying day (1893b:38, reprinted in 1975b, 2:287; and see 1920a:83ff.).

For the sociologist old collective representations, whether relating to science or not, are not valueless as they nearly always are for the natural scientist. What is sometimes overlooked is that inaccurate or discarded

representations are not as useless or 'irrational' as one would think. They are not to be contemptuously discarded as indicators of ignorance. Rather, they provide clues as to how society formerly thought and created values. They reveal how it once viewed itself. In the preface to the second edition of *The Rules* he wrote: 'what the collective representations convey is the way in which the group conceives itself in its relation to objects which affect it' (1895a/1901c:xvi/t.1933b:xlix). It is not a question, therefore, of accuracy or rationality. Misunderstandings are a clue to the society which, in all ignorance, created them. Here is to be found basic material for the sociologist in his task of delineating the reality of social phenomena and the way they have been explained. Social phenomena, although they are immaterial, are nevertheless real things (*ibid.*:xxiv/lvii). As science progresses, it accepts only the historical value of old representations and replaces them with new and more accurate ones. In his 'Introduction to Ethics', which was not published in his lifetime, he wrote:

> In our minds we portray *(nous nous représentons)* the wind as a breath, the sun as a flat disc a few centimetres wide… The scientist divests himself of this so-called truth and replaces these false but useful notions with others, arrived at by quite different methods.
>
> (1920a:92/t.1979a:89)

At the base of these issues stands the question of what Durkheim meant by reality.

Durkheim's concept of reality

Not defined: its value

Durkheim never formally defined reality. Nor do philosophers agree about a definition: indeed, some philosophers do not like to use the concept. The roots of the problem go back to the age-old philosophical contrast between reality and appearance. What is real can be said to be 'what is "under" or "behind" or "more fundamental than" our everyday appearances' (Putnam 1988:4). Again, reality is all that exists apart from individual consciousness. Berger and Luckmann defined reality as 'a quality appertaining to phenomena which we recognize as having a being independent of volition' (1966:13). Durkheim frequently used the word reality in this sense. Some would argue that, in the light of his reputation, he did so as a sociologist interested in philosophical problems. But perhaps it might be better to say that he was a philosopher—and certainly he was that by training—who established sociology within French academia and eventually elsewhere. Today, scientists, and we would include sociologists, appear to scorn the employment of the concept of reality within their discipline. Sociologists have done so on a

number of grounds. For example, they argue that the word is technically that of the philosopher and has no significant place outside philosophy and that arguing over the nature of reality in social phenomena does not advance the science. Although contemporary philosophers generally pour scorn on the term, in Durkheim's time this was not the case. Reality was a term frequently and uncritically employed. Further, Durkheim assumed it had a valid place in the natural sciences, and therefore in sociology. Since he used it, it is incumbent on us to see the way he employed it in order to understand his thought (see chapter 3 here). What he meant by it has to be derived from usage.

Further preliminary observations

Throughout his writings, Durkheim refers to reality as that which is to be found at various levels of human experience. In a common-sense usage, he writes: 'Absolute altruism and absolute egoism are ideal limits which can never be attained in reality' (1913b:71/t.1984b:7). Reality is here directly related to what we might call experience of this world—a kind of commonsense notion of reality.

But reality also has endless points of reference—it is infinite in every direction (1938a/1969f:175/t.1977a:150). It is also infinitely complex: 'therefore we can succeed in expressing it only slowly and laboriously, and by using complex systems of distinct concepts'. Then finally we reach but 'an imperfect expression of reality' (1925a:321/t.1961a:279). He distances himself from the old-fashioned rationalists who saw reality in simple terms (1938a/1969f:319/t.1977a:279). In his lectures on moral education he wrote: 'reality is infinitely complex; and therefore we can succeed in expressing it slowly, laboriously, and by using complex systems of distinct concepts' (1925a:321/t.1961a:279). This is not an abandonment of rationalism, such as that derived from Descartes, but a rejection of a simple, facile rationalism (*ibid.:*321/280). For Durkheim the only alternative to rationalism is mysticism.

A possible definition of reality is everything that exists in the universe. This, some would argue, is almost valueless since it assumes that everyone knows what reality is.

As just stated, one can say negatively that for Durkheim reality cannot be defined in terms of the individual, although the individual has his or her own reality. He wrote in the second edition of *The Rules* in 1901: 'Myths, popular legends, religious conceptions of all sorts, moral beliefs, etc., reflect a reality different from the individual's reality' (1895a/1901c:xvii/t.1938b:1). Elsewhere he said: 'The individual himself…is only a part in relation to the whole and who never attains more than an infinitesimal fraction of reality' (1912a:629/t.1915d:441). The scientist therefore must look for reality outside the individual (1895a/1901c:xxii/t.1938b:lvi).

For Durkheim, therefore, there is a reality which is different from the reality possessed by the individual, and which is not necessarily that of the philosopher. Reality stands outside the philosopher. Durkheim did not attempt to differentiate reality from appearance. As Schmaus said, he did not 'drive a wedge' between reality and appearance' (1994:64). Further, Schmaus has asserted that Durkheim held that appearances are real phenomena (see Durkheim 1925a:292–4/t.1961a:254–7). Durkheim said that colours, odours and sounds are the realities in which the individual lives (*ibid.*:292/255). Thus, the prime or most important meaning of reality for Durkheim is that which objectively exists—it stands outside the observer. Concepts—representations—are created as representing reality; they cannot create or modify it but they may themselves become a reality. He observed that an appearance, which might be classified by some as non-reality, is not an unreality. For example, the reflection of an object in a mirror is not as real as the object' 'but it has another kind of reality' *(ibid.)*. The question remains: how is reality to be known outside the individual? Hirst has observed that what Durkheim had to face was whether the reality of which he speaks is indeed a real object (1975:83). If it is, then he does not offer any means of proving the connection.

Multi-reality

Those who would criticize Durkheim for his use of the term reality, and for his allegedly unguarded ventures into philosophy, are both justified and not justified.

One may criticize him for the loose way in which he appears to use the word reality. For example, in *The Rules of Sociological Method* he differentiated between reality and the essence of reality (1895a/1901c:53/t.1938b:42). What did he mean by this? Bluntly it is a contradiction of terms, if one holds that reality is that beyond which one cannot go. How can there be degrees of reality?

There is also an openness or infinity in reality. In one of his last set of new lectures, begun on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, on pragmatism, he concluded:

> We cannot exhaust reality either as whole or in its constituent parts. Therefore every object of knowledge offers an opportunity for an infinity of possible points of view, of purely mechanical movement, of stasis and dynamics, of continency and determinism, of physics and biology and so on.
>
> (1955a:185–6/t.1983a:91)

It cannot be denied that, from the outset, Durkheim adopted a multi-realist position. Not only is reality complex but it is of many kinds. Durkheim's stand

is supported by DeGré, who has argued that epistemologically reality can indeed be of various kinds, 'real or illusory, material or spiritual, sacred and profane, empirical and transcendental' (DeGré 1985:31). But some might argue that the term in this sense loses any value it might have.

Subject matter of scientific disciplines

One thing needs to be emphasized. For Durkheim, it is legitimate and indeed for him necessary to use the term reality for the subject matter of various disciplines. In part he stresses this in order to differentiate the subject areas of various disciplines. But in this, he is not committing an act of epistemological infiltration, because he has no intention in such contexts of defining reality beyond what he holds is the legitimate subject matter of a given science.

The point of reference is always science. Durkheim argued, as we have just noted, that science starts with what is real. As he openly stated: 'The scientist comes up against reality' (1955a:162/t.1983a:78). But at the same time he needs to define what is real in order 'to establish contact with things; and since the latter can be grasped by the mind only from exteriors, the definition expresses them in terms of their external qualities'—that is, the reality of phenomena (1895a/1901c:53/t.1938b:42). Again, 'scientific theory has only one goal—the expression of reality' (1925a:2/t.1961a:2). But here the issue of representations enters, for nothing can be known without them. We shelve the crucial problem of whether representations themselves are the reality or what they represent. Or whether representations are to be viewed as nothing more than the reality of phenomena.

Another difficulty is that Durkheim sometimes wanders into the province of the philosopher. For example, he said, 'the general exists only in the particular' (1912a:617/t.1915d:432). Of course this does not make him a nominalist, since the general or universal does exist. The last thing he would want to be called was a nominalist.

And in defence of Durkheim, might it not be said that over against the positivists with their rejection of all things metaphysical, he would point to mathematical relations between phenomena, which imply a hidden reality, which the scientist would bring to light (see Crewdson 1994:6).

And in sociology

The notion that reality is related to the subject matter of a scientific discipline might be briefly applied to sociology—Durkheim's chosen subject. In one of his earlier books, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique,* there is much repeated definition of the subject matter of sociology as the scientific study of social facts, which 'consist of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion' (1895a/ 1901c:5.t/

1933b:3). Clearly representations are social facts, but whether all social facts are representations is another matter. In the preface to the second edition of 1901, he referred to the subject matter of sociology as social phenomena, and in the face of criticism asserted that such phenomena are 'immaterial', but 'nevertheless real things' (*ibid.*:xxiv/lvii). Repeatedly he hammers home the premise of the 'objective reality of social facts' (*ibid.*:xxiii/ lvii).

In employing the notion of reality, he tries to find a way to ensure that sociology is separated from psychology on the one hand, and philosophy on the other, since they both deal with different types of reality, which to many are not seen to be widely different.

But the position is not so straightforward. On the one hand, the sociologist has to accept the definition of reality given by the society which he is studying. He cannot make ethical, political or philosophical judgments on what the individual in society or a society itself holds to be real (see DeGré in Curtis and Petras 1970:665).

In using reality in this way, as we have seen, Durkheim can thus be none other than an epistemological relativist, certainly within his own terms of reference. What society declares to be real has to be taken as real. He wrote: 'the nature of reality, that is the nature of different societies' (1938a/ 1969f:373/t.1977a:326). This implies that the nature of the reality which the sociologist studies is society and what pertains to society. Collective representations are the means by which society looks at itself, i.e., the way society declares what is real.

But Durkheim's position also implies that society creates reality. Each society is an 'absolute' force bringing into existence the real. The religion, morality, science and philosophy of a society, together and in various ways, declare what is real. Whereas various societies may not see themselves in relativist terms, for they may view knowledge in an absolutist or universal way, Durkheim's concept of reality has to remain relativist. Thus, he could say of one type of society—a humanistic one— 'What people wanted to know about was not how the real world actually is but rather what human beings have said about it, that is, so to speak, from its human point of view' (*ibid.*:319/ 279). Thus, as society has the means to declare what is real, society itself is the arbiter of reality.

But the quotation shows again Durkheim's ambiguous conception of reality. In the last analysis he is not prepared to accept the real as declared by society. The scientist knows what is real. As a member of an elite, the scientist has knowledge, as a specialist, that no one else has. This comes home in the fact that the collective representations of the scientist are 'more real' than those of the man in the street, for example as in the representation of the moon, the one seeing it through eyes of popular 'knowledge' and the other in scientific terms. This was the nearest Durkheim came to the concept of ideology and false consciousness. He certainly thought a belief in God was such.

Durkheim is an epistemological relativist, but not a simplistic one. In the face of fundamental laws of logic, he holds that there are degrees of reality—the relatively more real is known only to a relative few.

Indicators of reality

It is quite true that Durkheim never really answers the question: how is reality to be recognized? He rejects the idea of the 'thing-in-itself' and the nearest he comes to it is to employ a number of indicators of what is real— indicators which are external to the individual.

1   Reality is that which can be observed and therefore includes, if nothing more, all that is physical (e.g., 1919b:100/t.1975a:183). As we have already quoted, 'The colours, tastes, odours and heat that I perceive in my contact with these bodies are real' (1925a:292/t.1961a:255). In a debate which took place just about the time *Les Formes élémentaires* appeared, Durkheim spoke of 'sensible reality' (1913b:71/t.1984b:7). In this manner the real is to be contrasted with the ideal, which is clearly not real in the same sense as 'reality' is. He wrote in his paper on 'Judgments of Value and Judgments of Reality': 'Thus there is one way of considering the real and another, quite different, of considering the ideal' (1911b/1924a:127/t.1953b:87). Once more Durkheim refers to phenomenal reality.

2   Reality is indicated by 'force' —a term much favoured by Durkheim. There is a direct parallel with the physical world. It means in Durkheim's eyes that where force exists, be it physical, social or moral, that force emanates from what is real. *Ergo,* where something is held to exist but is not accompanied by force, it cannot be real. As early as *La Division du travail social,* he declared: 'A representation is not simply a mere image of reality, an inert shadow projected by things upon us, but is a force which raises around itself a turbulence of organic and psychical phenomena' (1893b/1902b:64/t.1933b:97). A couple of years later he wrote of reality that everything that was real had a definite nature which asserts control, and went on, it 'must be taken into account and is never completely overcome, even when we succeed in neutralizing it' (1895a/ 1901c:xxii/t.1933b:lvi). Reality, like a social fact, exerts a power over individuals (*ibid.:*15/10). Indeed, social facts, social currents, are real since they exert force over individuals and are an external force contained within society. In the same way, argued Durkheim, religion was a reality. God, however, could not be part of phenomenal reality since God did not exert any empirically attestable force. God, in fact, does not exist. One consequence was that for Durkheim religion could not be defined in terms of God (see Pickering 1984:ch. 11; 1912a:285/ t.1912a:200). Durkheim also held that collective representations 'are forces even more powerful than individual representations' (1912a:327n.1/ t.1915d:228n.1). Indeed, the notion of

force was a simple way of distinguishing between the two types of representations. But there are forces which are real within the individual, for example religious forces, which cause people to act and to receive comfort and these are associated with religious representations (1919b:100/t.1975a:183).

Force and reality are also closely connected in Durkheim's thinking, as in the case of effervescence as described in *Les Formes élémentaires* (see Pickering 1984:chs. 21 and 22). The upsurge of psychic forces at the time of effervescence is associated with an exaltation of mental life, which heightens a sense of reality in an individual (1912a:601/ t.1915d:421). The force of the moment may create the ideal. Ideals emerge which are part of the real. But is this not a contradiction in what has been said above? It is apparent that for Durkheim reality is heightened by religion. Above all, force is connected with what is real; it cannot be derived from phantasy or mere imagination. The real is indicated by its ability to bring about some change, movement or effect.[2]

3   Reality is associated with *la vie sérieuse.* When people behave with serious intent, what they do, together with their thoughts about their actions, constitutes what is real for them (see, for example, 1925a: ch. 18; 1938a/ 1969f:239/t.1977a:207). But something beyond such subjectivity is required. Durkheim held that the aesthetic was unreal because in its flights of fancy it went beyond what is real (1925a:307/t.1961a:268). In short, 'the domain of art is not of reality' (*ibid.:*308/269). Unlike aesthetics, ethics comes to grips with reality (*ibid.:*311/271). The puritanical streak in Durkheim is clearly visible in his denigration of what has been called *la vie légère,* which consists of all that is light-hearted and frivolous (see Pickering 1984:ch. 19). These basic ideas of Durkheim are enshrined in an obituary notice he wrote about his close and much admired friend, the philosopher Octave Hamelin, drowned near Bordeaux in 1907:

> He was a pure rationalist, an austere lover of pure reason *(la droite raison),* an enemy of every kind of dilettantism. For him, the most serious thing in life was to think; he loathed all those for whom reflective thought was a game or a means of success.
>
> (1907e)

Durkheim used the concept of *la vie sérieuse* in connection with social reality. Here the criterion is the content of thought and action of the responsible member of society.

One of the weaknesses of Durkheim's concept of reality is that he needed to introduce the notion of indicators, implying that reality cannot be immediately grasped. A further failing is that it is not just a question of using one type of indicator but the necessity of using various kinds of indicator,

so that where one does not apply, another is resorted to. If reality is unitary, then the indicator should be unitary. And that is applicable even to reality within a discipline. There cannot be various types of reality according to each indicator. Further, the danger may arise that the indicators themselves become the reality and the reality itself is conveniently forgotten (see below). Also, it is necessary to show the relation between the indicator and the reality. To none of these questions does Durkheim address himself.

Overall, then, Durkheim does not have a unitary philosophical position about reality. As he always claimed, he shunned metaphysics and ended up with a relativist position of reality. His concept of reality turns out to be very slippery, is riddled with ambiguity and does not stand up to philosophical rigour. But that does not seriously weaken his use of the word reality in the context of using it as the phenomena a discipline studies. He used it to break away from what he saw as unnecessary metaphysical and idealist clouds which hovered over sociology in its search for truth. Nevertheless, he wanted to avoid relativism and saw the way out of it through the primacy he gave to science, summed up in his stand by critical rationalism.

An ambiguity resolved? A problem with representations

Despite what has already been said about sociology and representations, the focal point of what is given here is not specifically centred on sociology. However, since Durkheim, in dealing with the issues of reality and representations, had in mind sociology, some attention has already been given to it and it is now raised again.

I do not raise in detail the much worked over arguments which seemed so important to people like Georges Davy and Talcott Parsons, of whether Durkheim changed his approach from an empirical, quasi-positivist or morphological position to one labelled idealistic. Such quibbling, to my mind, is unhelpful. From his earliest writings, Durkheim used the concept of representation—he was never suddenly converted to it—though it is true he used it more frequently as the years went by, notably of course in *Les Formes élémentaires* (see chapter 5 here). But, as we have already noted, the concept was much referred to in *Suicide* and *The Rules* (chapter 1 here). And let it be said that there is evidence to show that Durkheim wrote *Suicide* some time before it was published, i.e., shortly after he finished his thesis in 1893 (see Richard 1923:230). Durkheim never abandoned the notion of constraint or force *per se* but he turned more and more to the content of representations, hence to representations themselves.

The sociologist, in the eyes of Durkheim, studies representations as reflections of reality, as approximations of reality or, more accurately, as phenomenal reality. If one accuses Durkheim of being an idealist in connection with sociology, then the accusation stands on the basis that the

subject matter of sociology consists of representations. He said quite clearly, 'Whatever is social consists of representations, consequently is a product of representations' (1898a(ii):69/t.1963a:114). Durkheim maintained in *Suicide* that 'social life is essentially made up of representations' (1897a:352/ t.1951a:312). And, 'among peoples as well as individuals, representations function above all as an expresssion of a reality, not of their own making. They spring from it and if they subsequently modify it, do so only to a very limited extent (*ibid.*:245/226–7). Paoletti has observed that 'the representation of social reality conditions the formation of reality itself. Not only does it express it, it also creates it' (Paoletti 1998:88). Such are the representations of social reality that sociology studies. They represent the social in imperfect form. They are the total reality of society. But reality is observable. For Durkheim what is not observable or cannot be indicated empirically is not reality, i.e., is not phenomenal reality. He assumes that representations are also observable or can be indicated. That the subject matter of sociology is representations in no way precludes a scientific approach. As he said in *The Rules,* 'individual or collective representations can be studied scientifically, if they are studied objectively' (1895a/1901c:xii,n./t.1938b:xliv,n.2).

Against this position, that the reality of the sociologist is collective representations, there is also the apparent counter-evidence to be found in *The Rules*. So it was that Davy held that Durkheim saw reality as an integration of material facts with the purely ideal *(idéal)* fact (1920:104). This is very near what some anthropologists have termed culture (see, for example, Malinowski 1963:ch. 8). (Incidentally, Davy appeared to use the word *idée* rather than representation.) Everything turns on 'things', which are not just objects universally comprehended—not just physical vibrations—but have various physical qualities which initially call for some kind of system of meaning and selection, i.e., they have to be approached by representations. Durkheim never sees 'things in themselves' as if there is an absolute or universal knowledge of things (see chapter 3 here). When he talked about things in *The Rules,* the intention was methodological, not substantive. Thus, when he refers to things, he is really referring to the collective representations of things, as well as collective representations as values or abstract ideas.

One might be tempted to say that Durkheim introduced 'things' in order to demonstrate unequivocally that he was not an idealist in the sense that ideas and ideas alone constituted reality. Essential reality—to use Durkheim's notion—is, as we have said, for the professional philosopher to decide. Surely it is the case that Durkheim felt that no scientist could be a philosophical idealist and a scientist.

The fear of idolatry

So it is that, in Durkheim's view, collective representations stand at the heart of his concept of knowledge, be that knowledge related to the natural sciences

or to the human or social sciences. Such representations are the key to knowledge. Yet important though they are and reflecting reality, remarkably, Durkheim holds, they can change reality very slightly. And they do so because they themselves, in the course of time, can be taken to be reality itself. Those who accuse Durkheim, against his own judgment, of being an idealist may well read him in this way. Such a sliding from theory to practice, of moving from phenomenal to essential reality, or from one form of phenomenal reality to another, has a parallel in the Protestant—Catholic controversy of praying to saints, which is to be found in most iconoclastic controversies. The 'pure Catholic' doctrine is that a person prays to a saint for the saint to intercede to God, who may grant the request. The Protestant counters this by stating that in practice those who pray to the saint before an image, for a specific purpose, easily come to believe that the saint, not God, can effect the wish. The saint thus becomes a minor deity and so replaces God. Further, in another direction, the statue becomes the reality, not the saint it represents. Durkheim realized a similar fact in all symbolism. Symbols become more real than what they symbolize (see 1912a:328/t.1915d:229). Therefore, not surprisingly, representations can have a greater hold on people than what they represent: they can become more important than the reality (*ibid.*:295/206). Symbols—representations—become more 'real' than what is represented. Reality thus becomes non-reality through the process of symbolism. Or is this nothing more than playing around with words? Where is reality? What in fact happens through the process of symbolism is that one form of phenomenal reality takes over from another, or again, that phenomenal reality supersedes reality. Here representations are able to change reality.

Religion

Durkheim's ambiguous use of the concept of reality becomes all the more self-evident in his consideration of religion in *Les Formes élémentaires*. At one level we know from his life and writing that he discredits the reality acknowledged by most religious people that God or spirits have a real existence and that this may be, as in the case of Christians, the *summum bonum* of their lives. Durkheim cannot accept this since he rejects the notion of God or spirits as intellectually and 'scientifically' unacceptable. The truth-claims of religion are thus untenable. Nevertheless behind religion there exists a reality: religious phenomena do exist and exert force on people's lives. If religious phenomena were a sheer fabrication, such phenomena would not exist. They are real because they constitute a part of society—and, Durkheim was to say, the most important part of society. But wherein lies the reality of religion? Not what is commonly held to be the reality. It is the reality known to the scientist, in this case the sociologist. Hence once again we return to the role of the scientist who 'knows' against the 'layman' who stands in ignorance. The scientist seizes on particular representations within religion

most useful for his purpose of revealing the nature of religion and its role in society.

But that is not all. The sociologist is obliged to examine the content of religion, and when he does Durkheim gives an exalted role to it. He sees that it contains elements of reality which relate to the reality of society itself, that is, of course, excluding the reality of divine beings. Durkheim moves in two directions. First, he observes that religion accepts the reality of the human condition—the existence of suffering and evil, along with the many defects and imperfections of society. Religions do not close their eyes to these: they take life seriously. Here Durkheim praises religions for their acceptance of social reality.

However, what religion does to reality is to idealize it, that is, to remove it from reality. For example, religion projects 'the perfect society', where evils and imperfections are eliminated and absolute goodness prevails. In this process people and things are given properties they do not naturally possess. They are made sacred—a quality that is superadded to them. Religious actions associated with this idealization produce an upsurge of psychic forces, as is evident in effervescent assembly and certain rituals (see Pickering 1984).

To continue the focus on idealization, that is, as Durkheim says, 'substituting for the real world another different one' (1912a:603/t.1915d:421). To create an ideal society is a necessary part of society. Further, the ideal society or world 'does not stand outside the real society: it is part of it' (*ibid.*:604/ 422). Hence the representations reflecting an ideal world must of necessity be part of reality.

So it is then that, in contrasting representation and reality, we find that in the end, at least for the sociologist, they are all one—all is reality.

The difficulty in the Durkheimian approach is that pan-reality contains no means of distinguishing reality from non-reality. We return to an earlier point that Durkheim did for himself make the distinction. He rejected as false—non-reality—the existence of spiritual beings. So there must be some criterion for differentiating non-reality from reality, which is not evident when he is writing *qua* sociologist—unless of course we assume that what is real and not real depends on criteria established, or thought to be established, by science. These Durkheim never spells out in intellectual terms. But we turn in another direction.

La vie sérieuse

Durkheim has another notion of what is real. It is to be found in his concept of *la vie sérieuse* and his evaluation of art with which it is linked negatively (see Pickering 1984:277ff. and ch. 19). Here one moves from a theoretical to a practical mode.

For Durkheim life was earnest and not to be frittered away in meaningless activity. Though he was an agnostic, even an atheist, he admired many of the

social ideals or virtues of western religion. He was 'religious' in the sense that he took religion seriously and held that believers took religion similarly. He saw religion was the key to the understanding of society. Frequently he has been called a puritan, meaning he projected a serious mien, gave an extraordinarily large place to morality without a Calvinist foundation. But as we shall see, there were other parallels. It was not, however, that this outlook related only to his own person. It appeared in his judgment of certain aspects of society. Man needs of course, some amusement, relaxation, effervescence *(la vie légère),* but these of necessity are of short duration and are of secondary importance. Standing over mankind is always *la vie sérieuse.* This is associated with the necessities of existence and being a member of society, which has its strains and stresses, its sufferings and evils. These are real: they are part of *la vie sérieuse.* What is unreal is that which is trivial or imaginary. As he wrote in a condemnatory way on educational ideals, largely backed by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century:

> Any culture which is exclusively or essentially aesthetic contains within itself a germ of immorality, or at least of inferior morality. Indeed, art by definition moves in the realm of the unreal and the imaginary. Even when the subjects represented by the artist are borrowed from reality, it is not the reality which is the cause of their beauty.
>
> <div align="right">(1938a/1969f:239–40/t.1977a:207)</div>

A contrast made between the ethical and the aesthetical, not unknown among philosophers before Durkheim's time, from Plato to Kierkegaard, finds full acceptance in Durkheim. Hardly surprisingly, ethics stands superior and prior to aesthetics, since ethics is a necessary component of any society. It controls people's lives in a way that art does not for it stands at the periphery of society and does not have serious consequences for its members. 'To act morally is to do good to creatures of flesh and blood, to change some feature of reality' (*ibid.*:240/207).

   Two facets of art, which Durkheim finds reprehensible, are these. Art, though born of religion, and as standing as a valid part of ritual, is initially based on reality, and therefore takes man away from reality. Art seduces — 'we can only fully succumb to the aesthetic experience, if we lose sight of reality' *(ibid.).* The other observation is that art flourishes only where there are sufficient economic resources in a society. But more. 'All art is a luxury; aesthetic activity is not subordinated to any useful end; it is released for the sole pleasure of the release' (1911b/1924a:125/t.1953b:85).

   It is interesting that Durkheim awards a poor second place to aesthetics, mainly, though not entirely, in his lectures on education. The evidence for the contrast has mainly come so far from his lectures devoted to higher education. In *Moral Education,* which is a non-historical and more practical approach to

education, he is more expansive and systematic, as in the chapter 'Teaching Aesthetics and History'. Art—the *beaux-arts* art and literature —is seen to have a definite and positive place in education. It translates nature into idealistic states—it is an expression of the ideal—that is, something that cannot be enclosed within reality (1925a:307/t.1961a/268). A love of the arts takes one out of oneself and may produce a sense of devotion and sacrifice. It can therefore pave the way for moral education. On the other hand, however, 'the domain of art is not that of reality'. What beauty the artist produces is not identical to reality. The artist disregards 'laws of nature or history'. Further, there is a genuine 'antagonism between art and ethics' (*ibid.*:311/271). Art can be compared to a game: morality is life in earnest (*ibid.*:312, 313/273, 273). Thus, art is a leisure activity, and it is true we must all have leisure but 'we must use it worthily, as morally as possible' (*ibid.*:313/273). *La vie sérieuse* is centred on the obligation to work, i.e., on a moral foundation (*ibid.*:314/274). Ethics is made clearly apparent by a sense of the real. Here science is the eternal handmaid because it teaches mankind what is real. In brief, if art has a role to play in education that role is limited, for it 'does not contribute to the formation of the moral character (*ibid.*:314/274). And in Durkheim's eyes that is what education is all about. But here once again one sees the ambiguity of Durkheim, perhaps through some fear of what the arts may offer people in society. We have just mentioned Durkheim's reference to a negative role, certainly in schools, but as was noted earlier he does see that art can project ideals, and certain ideals are at the very heart of morality.

Conclusion

This chapter started out by asking what, for Durkheim, lies behind representations. What in fact do they represent? Durkheim's answer would seem to assert that what is behind representations is reality. All reality is representable and knowledge can only come from representations of reality. Man is in fact a representing creature.

But having stated that, is the reader one whit better off? To answer the question an attempt has been made to explore Durkheim's use of the word reality in his various works. He wanted to avoid all metaphysical connotation. Here he followed the contemporary standpoint of science which rejected all metaphysical ideas. But for Durkheim it is science that decides what is real. In this sense all phenomena are real. Whatsoever can be studied by science, and here he includes sociology, is real.

Scientism, as an uncritical worshipping of science, however, is not flawless. As against Durkheim, some philosophers would opt for a common-sense analysis of the world rather than a scientific one (Putnam 1988:2). But there is another point. Scientism apart, Durkheim cannot resist making religious and moral judgments which he would like to think are scientific, but which few scholars today would hold as such. In short, afraid of moral and social

relativism, he anchors himself to a position that would transcend relativism. In Durkheim's psyche there seems to be an innate fear of art, that unless controlled it is an enemy of a sound, stable, democratic society.

Notes

1 Ian Hacking in relatively recent times—and one imagines without any reference to Durkheim—develops the relation between representation and reality as a key to an approach to knowledge and particularly scientific knowledge (Hacking 1983:130ff.).
2 Once again Hacking's position on the question of reality is very close to that of Durkheim in this respect (Hacking 1983:145–60). He uses the words intervening and affect rather than force.

REPRESENTATION AND BELIEF

Durkheim's rationalism and
the Kantian tradition

Giovanni Paoletti

> Those who claim the freedom of individual sentiment against the uniform yoke of reason, will soon end up submitting to an external authority. On the contrary, it is reason that makes us free. The constraint it imposes is salutary.
>
> (Lévy-Bruhl 1894)

The theory of collective representations raises a number of problems, one of which is without any doubt the evaluation of their practical dimension. In Durkheimian texts, especially in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* representation owing to its collective nature, has no longer a speculative sense — 'its primary object is not to give men a representation of the *physical* world' (1912a:322/t.1915d:225; emphasis added).[1] It sometimes seems to include a necessary illusion, i.e., the very opposite of knowledge. At the same time, representations gain a practical value: 'the believer is someone who can do more'; collective representations allow the reproduction of society. In other words, it is the Kantian distinction between pure and practical reason that is revised. Representation, the traditional centre of the theory of knowledge, has now a more complex position.

This chapter aims to analyse such a position by linking Durkheim's sociology and the French neo-Kantian debate over the notion of belief. We shall thus cover a chronological span that extends conventionally from 1875 (with Renouvier) to 1912, when *The Elementary Forms* was published. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will refer to the theories of belief and knowledge of Renouvier and other philosophers, with particular attention to Ollé-Laprune and Brochard. In the second, the focus will be on Durkheim. The main hypothesis is that the neo-Kantian context allows one to understand some traits of Durkheim's theory of collective representations. The notion of belief is the key to the analysis. An attempt is made to explain the theory of collective representation as a theory of belief.[2]

I

Kant's philosophy is at the same time the horizon and the starting-point of Renouvier's theory of belief.

> Kant commented on his own work: *I should have abolished science to make way for faith…* As far as I know, however, he never stated the internal elements of that faith, leaving aside the objects to which it is applied. He never limited its range by means of a rigorous scientific method.
>
> (Renouvier 1875a, 2:13–14)

It is Renouvier's task, therefore, to bridge the gap in Kant's criticism by developing its premises in order to determine the domain of faith in relation to science. Renouvier refers mainly to the Introduction to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* published in 1787, which contains the above quotation, and to the third section of *Canon* entitled *Von Meinen, Wissen und Glauben*. Here Kant lists opinion, faith and science (knowledge, *Wissen*) in the genre of belief (*Fürwahrhalten*, literally, hold to be true). Opinion is a belief which is insufficient both subjectively and objectively. Faith is sufficient for the subject, but it is not sufficient for its object. Finally, in science the subject holds to be true what is also objectively true. However, we should keep in mind that the classification of the *Canon* refers to a limited field. Kant's chief aim is to draw a distinction between the domains of science and faith, where the first relates to the world of phenomena and the latter to the world of noumena. His classification therefore focuses on the species (science and faith) rather than on the genre (belief). Among the species, moral faith, or rational faith, has primacy over science (i.e., the primacy of practical reason), since it manages to reach the world of the things-in-themselves. Yet, *Fürwahrhalten* can be regarded as a genre of faith and science solely in the limited context of the *Canon;* elsewhere, science and rational faith are the proper and independent objects of the first two *Critiques.*

Renouvier rejects such a dualism in the distinction of the two spheres, and limits the real to the world of phenomena. His neo-criticism arises from his rejection of the concept of things-in-themselves, which is considered a metaphysical reminiscence. On the contrary, reality is made of phenomena, and the opposition subject—object is to be translated into the opposition representing—represented, within the realm of representation. Kant's philosophy is thus deeply modified; since the distinction between sensible world and intelligible world has crumbled, the distinction between pure reason and practical reason is also less clear, and consequently the whole theory of belief stated in the *Canon* loses its foundations. Therefore, Renouvier's theory of knowledge assumes a relativistic perspective; if phenomena with their connections are the only elements which exist, the domain of belief needs to

be enlarged. As soon as we go beyond the actual perception of the phenomenon, each connection between phenomena implies a statement to which the subject must assent, and in which the subject must believe. Yet, to extend the domain of belief does not necessarily mean to abolish science. In fact, the change from dualism to phenomenalism transforms the opposition between science and belief into interaction and reciprocal definition. This sort of 'scientific' belief, philosophically self-conscious, should allow the reconciliation of Kant's two antagonistic Reasons:

> After the recognition of the vanity of *pure reason* or absolute reason, it is necessary to introduce belief in science, by determining its meaning and its role in the new context, and to make belief itself scientific, by detaining the progress of faith from passing the limits of universality and reason.
>
> <div align="right">(Renouvier 1875a, 2:14)</div>

The theme of belief is present in Renouvier's philosophy from the time of his early works, probably as an effect of the influence of Jules Lequier and his reflections on Fichte.[3] However, in his *Essais de critique générale,* where he clearly shows his support for Kant's ideas, the theme of belief is thoroughly developed, investing the fields of both epistemology and psychology. He includes belief in science, which causes a turnaround of the traditional epistemological hierarchy belief/certainty. Furthermore, he refuses the sophistic criterion of evidence (Renouvier 1875a, 2:362) and therefore considers certainty as a mere human act, which is the result of intellect, passion and will. This inevitably leads to doubt:

> Certainty is not, and cannot be something absolute. On the contrary it is a human state and a human act, although this has been long forgotten… Strictly speaking, certainty does not exist, all that exist are certain men.
>
> <div align="right">(Renouvier 1875a, 1:366; also chapter 14)</div>

If we consider the human, relative and individual character of each truth, the state of consciousness of certainty does not always correspond to a real object of thought. Only belief can assure the existence of that object. It clears away the possibility that human activity could be pure phantasmagoria and the doubt that scepticism is surpassed by belief. Belief is a common act which belongs to ordinary life; it is the premise to every act of knowledge, will or passion. Certainty is therefore a 'sort of belief'. Renouvier's 'scientific' belief plays a crucial role in the process of knowledge and therefore becomes regular, natural and non-arbitrary.

Renouvier's belief has a much wider theoretical role than Kant's *Fürwahrhalten.* In the relation of continuity between belief and certainty (which is the ideal

objective of scientific statements), it is the first that represents the basis and the condition of possibility for the latter. Belief plays instead a critical role in its relation to faith, which is not included in the domain of conscience owing to its appeal to transcendence. This appeal is likely to make way for prejudices and the heteronomous authority of tradition. In contrast, natural belief, like Kant's rational faith, is accompanied by the free exercise of the will and the free contract of the institution of a non-clerical and ethical state (Renouvier 1875a, 2:188–208; also chapter 19).

Although the first edition of the *Essais* was published in the 1850s, Renouvier's ideas entered the spotlight of the French philosophical scene only with the advent of the Third Republic. The political and cultural climate of that period allowed his philosophy to become the context in which a whole generation of intellectuals started their thinking.

The review *La Critique philosophique,* founded by Renouvier and directed by him from 1872 to 1889, was the means which helped the diffusion of his ideas. The ideal cultural condition was created thanks to the new interest in Kant's philosophy, at first in Germany and then in France. Less prestigious universities such as Montpellier or Bordeaux, along with the Ecole Normale in Paris, became the main centres where the new criticism was developed, since the Sorbonne did not play a significant role in the debate. Ravaisson's discussion (1868:103ff.) and the interventions of Paul Janet (*Le Temps* 8 March 1876) and Nolen (1877) paved the way for the first systematic exposition of the new theory which began to be referred to as the *nouveau criticism* or the *criticisme français*. It appeared in an article by A.Beurier in the *Revue philosophique* of 1877 (Beurier 1877). The Ecole Normale welcomed Renouvier's ideas. Such a receptive attitude is obvious if we consider that the dualism between sensible world and intelligible world had been the main obstacle for the adoption of Kant's philosophy (Dauriac 1889:xxxii–xxxiii).

The spread of French criticism was accompanied by the theoretical fortune of the theme of belief. The development of the theory of belief appears uniform in the various authors whose ideas recall Renouvier's: this allows one to draw a general reference paradigm. The principle is represented by the psychological affirmation of conscience as a whole, which is the result of the unification of Kant's dualism. The tendency, which goes against intellectualism and the introspective method of spiritualistic psychology, is to emphasize the role of passion and the will in relation to the intellect. Three consequences result: (1) in the sphere of knowledge, certainty becomes a species of belief; (2) in the ethical sphere, a philosophy of freedom finds its basis in the moral value of the individual; (3) in the political sphere, an education of the will constitutes the pedagogical solution to the lack of popular participation in the power of the state, and to the collapse of social solidarity.

The thinkers whose ideas form this paradigm differ in their approaches. Lionel Dauriac's and François Pillon's could be defined as scholastic; Octave Hamelin's approach is more idealistic; Jules Payot introduces motifs taken from

Schopenhauer regarding a project of social reform; Claude Gayte and Charles Secrétan focus on a philosophy of religion. Then, we must mention also authors who discuss the same themes of the neo-criticism without fully adhering to it, such as Liard, Marion, or Boutroux himself.[4] The theories of Brochard and Ollé-Laprune deserve special attention.

Léon Ollé-Laprune (1839–98) published his most important work, *De la Certitude morale,* in 1880. At the time he had been a professor at the Ecole Normale for five years, and he remained there until his death. His theory on belief agrees with Renouvier's on various matters, as he explicitly admits. The main divergence refers to Renouvier's objection to Kant's arbitrary separation of the 'two reasons'. Ollé-Laprune attacks Renouvier in the same way, stating that he did understand that certainty has a relative character, and error depends also on moral responsibility, but in the end he overestimated the role of the will in belief, thus determining the total absence of any speculative element (1880:179). The risk is for relativism to turn into a sort of mysticism of the will, where the will is regarded as an uncontrollable and blind power.

Ollé-Laprune's object was to elaborate a steadier theory on the balance between the practical and the speculative components of belief. Such a balance should be the basis for a moral certainty safe from the extremes of scepticism and irrationalism. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* remained one of Ollé-Laprune's basic texts. In it Kant describes knowledge *(Wissen)* as an objectively valid belief which is based on experience and can be reached by everyone, and faith *(Glauben)* as a belief which is valid only for the believing subject, and lacks an objective basis sufficient to make it universal. Ollé-Laprune considers these definitions too sharp. He ascribes a total lack of objectivity to opinion rather than to belief or faith. The objective foundation of belief is known in an indirect, limited and imperfect way, but this does not mean that it is not known at all. This is what Kant himself recognizes in his *Critique of Practical Reason* where he admits that moral law is a fact which can be known because it proves its reality in the world of experience. So the difference between belief and knowledge is not about the sufficient or insufficient character of objectivity, but concerns the nature of the relation between those who know or believe and the object of their act. The relation is intrinsic in knowledge, where the object is completely understood by the subject, while it is extrinsic in belief, where the object partly (and only partly) eludes the subject's comprehension (1880:92ff.). Ollé-Laprune's operation, as Renouvier's, aims to re-establish a continuity between science and belief. But he differs from Renouvier in the fact that he does not reduce reason to freedom, but rather underlines the permanence of the speculative element in belief as well as in science. If belief retains its primacy over science, this is not because belief precedes it, but rather because it goes beyond it. Thanks to the objective component, the freedom that intervenes in the adhesion to truth is not arbitrary. The moral character of truth is imperative and obligatory for everyone, since everyone must believe in truth:

> A personal disposition is indispensable to reach truth, yet this does
> not make truth subjective: such a disposition is not only subjective
> but also obligatory. In this obligation takes place the wonderful
> alliance between the subjective element and the objective principle.
>
> (1880:13)

Victor Brochard (1848–1907) is known today mainly for his studies on the
history of philosophy. His theoretical reflections, which are deeply connected
with historiographical research, are mainly concerned with the way truth,
knowledge and belief are interrelated (see bibliography for related references).
In his main doctoral thesis, *De l'Erreur* (1879a), he states that the critical
philosophy of Renouvier and Boutroux introduces the sufficient elements
which can function as the foundations of a theory of error alternative to
'metaphysical dogmatism'.

According to Plato, Spinoza and Descartes the human spirit is capable of
deducing the essence of things-in-themselves directly. This implies that error
is a privation or absence of truth, in the same way that oblivion and ignorance
are the privation or absence of memory and science. Yet the universality and
endurance of error seem to suggest the opposite: the recognition of its factual
positive character implies the discovery of the role played by the subjective
forms of thought in the building of knowledge, and marks the advent of
critical philosophy. Brochard identifies the possibility of both truth and error
in the discontinuity between the apriori structure and the object of knowledge
(i.e., the empirical data): the mediation of forms impedes the direct and
univocal intuition of reality-in-itself, but their plurality and contingency do
not lead to the total absence of truth or to scepticism. It will be more correct
to refer to truths and errors as plurals, since the intervention of the forms
logically precedes both popular superstition and scientific certainties. Since
error is a consequence of the laws of representation themselves, its proper
place is not sensation or imagination; it is, more traditionally, judgment.
Judgment is possible only if what is stated is also 'held to be true'. To say it
in terms of the Stoic theory studied by Brochard, it is essential to have both
representation and the assent to it: the subject must believe in his own
statement. Brochard explains belief as the adherence to a synthesis formed
by consciousness; this represents the first step of every and each cognitive
process. Belief is constituted by an intellectual element, the idea, and a
voluntary element, decision or volition. The first can be regarded as the
reason of belief, since it denies its arbitrariness and impedes conscious belief
in the absurd. The latter constitutes the positive supplement of the forms
of thought with reference to reality, and the activity of the subject in the
process of knowing:

> Adhesion is the same whether it is applied to truth or error. It is not
> less natural, in one case than in the other. It appears as something

mobile, capable of adapting to the most divergent representations. It has its own autonomy. There is a need to recognise in idea and belief, within the realm of thought, a radical dualism made of heterogeneous elements. The individual no longer abdicates before the absolute. He posed himself as thought before the things-in-themselves; now he poses himself as freedom before his own intelligence.

<div align="right">(Brochard, 1879a:124)</div>

In Brochard's theory error can assume a positive meaning. Error allows one to discover what precedes and makes possible knowledge and truth itself: the free adherence to belief whose truth is relative, at least at the beginning. This is followed by a sort of 'epistemology of tolerance' based on the principle of plurality of truth (*ibid.*:200).[5] Being conscious of the presence of a subjective factor, involving will or belief, in every judgment which is held to be true, on the one hand prevents firm conviction from degenerating into fanatic dogmatism. On the other hand, it allows one to include discursive formations, other than from science (more precisely, religion and metaphysic, whose truth becomes a rational possibility), in the set of the 'multiple forms of truth' (*ibid.*:205–6). Such premises open the epistemological space necessary to conceive a text like Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

Brochard's theory presents a problem which will be faced also by Durkheim. In fact the concept of 'freedom of belief' appears to be contradictory. What does it mean to be free when one does not always believe in what one wants to? Brochard answers from an epistemological point of view: will intervenes at all times, but we are not always conscious of it. It is the case of involuntary error: the chemist who gives the customer poison instead of a medicine is not conscious of his action. Yet his will is involved, and therefore he is liable to punishment. As in perception of secondary qualities, the subjective component of sensation is objectivized in an external body; in belief the act of will tends to remain at the unconscious level. Therefore it is the unconscious character of volition that conveys the impression of an involuntary act. It follows that we should distinguish two different perspectives: the first refers to ordinary life where the need to reach reality ('the thing that really matters, and maybe the only one that matters') hides from the subject his active participation in belief; the second concerns philosophical observation which is able to analyse the constitutive elements of the act of belief (Brochard, 1884/1954:487).

II

The step from neo-Kantianism to sociology, and to Durkheim, may seem hazardous. It is also a relevant chronological jump since the theories on belief mentioned above were developed in the decade 1875–85. As far as

this analysis is concerned, the most relevant of Durkheim's texts is *The Elementary Forms* of 1912. How can this jump be justified? Is it possible to speak of an 'influence' of neo-Kantianism on Durkheim which remained latent for a long time and became evident only in the last years of his life? Some recent studies have fruitfully investigated Durkheim's philosophical background in relation to neo-Kantianism.[6] Nevertheless, we must clearly delineate the terms influence and neo-Kantianism in order to avoid vagueness and misunderstanding. If the term neo-Kantianism is used strictly to designate Renouvier and his school, it does not seem particularly relevant in relation to our topic (or to the history of philosophy). In fact Durkheim's references to Renouvier are too rare and general to allow one to speak of 'influence'. It is much more productive to consider French neo-Kantianism in a wider perspective, without reducing it to Renouvier. His contribution has a central role in the debate, but many of the authors involved in it developed their studies about Kant independently of Renouvier's (i.e., Boutroux and Ollé-Laprune), or discussed and developed Renouvier's ideas in a personal way, with different premises and conclusions (i.e., Brochard). However, all these authors share the same theme in their different approaches: the problem of the relation (and the critique of the separation) between belief and knowledge.

This is what connects them with Durkheim. To use his words: 'I began with philosophy and I tend to return to it, or better, the nature of the problems I had to face led me back to it.'[7] The identity of the problem—the relation between belief and knowledge—is the only meaning that is to be attributed to 'influence' in this study. The relevance in the link between neo-Kantianism and Durkheim must be demonstrated theoretically, but also some factual data must be considered. The central years of the debate on belief coincide with those of Durkheim's philosophical formation. He is the one who affirms that he studied Renouvier's theory in depth (Lukes 1973:54). During his years at the Ecole Normale he was Boutroux's pupil, and he could not have ignored Ollé-Laprune's *De la Certitude morale,* which was published in the same period. Should the Catholic matrix in Ollé-Laprune have discouraged him, his theory of belief was actually very similar to Renouvier's. It is certain, instead, that Durkheim came in contact with Brochard's *De l'Erreur* (Paoletti 1992). Besides, philosophical contributions to the problem of belief continued at least throughout the 1880s and 1890s: Brochard in 1887, Janet in 1888, Dauriac in 1889, Gourd in the *Revue philosophique* of 1891 and 1893, Lévy-Bruhl in 1894, Renouvier in 1895, Payot in 1896 and Vallet in 1905.

Another element that characterizes the evolution of this succession of interventions is the increasing interest in the theme shown in the field of human sciences. The genealogy proposed by Camille Bos (pseudonym of Marie Bœuf, 1870–1907) at the beginning of her *Psychologie de la croyance* (1901) appears thoroughly correct: the new psychological and sociological approaches

to the study of belief can be placed in the epistemological space opened by Kant's theories.[8] This is valid for Bos as well as for Durkheim, but it is only possibly pertinent to Le Bon and especially to Tarde, who is frequently cited by Bos.[9]

The notion of belief, in fact, has a significant theoretical function in Tarde's thought: from the article *La Croyance et le désir* (1880) to his main works *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890) and *La Logique sociale* (1895), up to the article of 1901, 'La Réalité sociale', in which he assumes a polemical attitude towards Durkheim. The theme, the chronology, and definitions such as those which describe belief and desire as 'the tracings(?) where the subject welcomes the raw materials of sensation' (Tarde 1880:8), could induce one to see a connection between Tarde and the neo-Kantian debate. In this case, however, the similarity is possible purely by analogy, and cannot be demonstrated on a theoretical basis. According to Tarde, belief and desire are but the raw materials, the quantitative and measurable elements of every psychological act. His position changes only slightly, in the passage from the experimental psychology of the first essay, to social psychology and his theory of imitation. Belief and desire are the objects of imitation, the raw materials that are transmitted through contagion from one individual to another: 'I believe in what the others believe, and I desire because the others desire.' In such a model of social interaction, representation (the conceiving and knowing element) is undoubtedly devalued. In the neo-Kantian paradigm, belief, far from being the object of conscience, is a form of knowledge and action. At the ethical level, the philosophy of belief introduces the problem of the relation between science and morality, which Renouvier resolves by introducing the concept of freedom of the will. It is therefore significant that Tarde, in the text where he critizes Durkheim, underlines the imitative and compulsory character of belief as opposed to the autonomy of the human being promoted by Kant and Renouvier (Tarde 1901:468–9).

In the chapter of *Suicide* where Durkheim discusses Tarde's theory of imitation, he critizes the presumed imitative and compulsory character of belief with all its ethical-political consequences. Durkheim opposes to this notion of belief a type of relation between individuals and collective beliefs that recalls the neo-Kantian frame:

> an intellectual operation intrudes between the representation and the execution of the act, consisting of a clear or unclear, rapid or slow awareness of the determining characteristic, whatever it may be. Our way of conforming to the morals or manners of our country has nothing in common, therefore, with the mechanical, ape-like repetition causing us to reproduce motions which we witness. Between the two ways of acting, is all the difference between reasonable, deliberating behaviour and automatic reflex. The former has motives even when not expressed as explicit judgements. The

latter has not; it results directly from the mere sight of an act, with no other mental intermediary.

(1897a:113/t.1951a:127–8)

The assent, though, is mediated by a deliberate intellectual operation: in fact, it is the same rational belief of Kant, Renouvier and Brochard applied to the problem of the relation between the individual and society. Therefore we should make a distinction in the field of developing sociology. If what Bos holds is true, Durkheim is one of those authors who made belief the 'great law of sociology', but the way he is involved is completely opposite to Tarde's: Durkheim follows the neo-Kantian tradition; Tarde does not.

The hypothesis of a significant link between the neo-Kantian debate on belief and Durkheim's sociology finds the most obvious objection at the lexical level. Durkheim does not systematically use the term belief, nor does he develop any explicit theoretical reflection on this theme. In our opinion, this does not mean that it is improper to speak of a theory of belief within Durkheim's thought. Although he does not use the term belief, it is possible to identify its synonym in the expression *représentations collectives*. There are good reasons to interpret Durkheim's theory of collective representation as a theory of belief.

The term collective representations seems to be Durkheim's coinage. The search for previous occurrences of it in other authors has not been successful. References to Hamelin, friend of Durkheim and author of *Essai sur les elements principaux de la représentation* (1907), are misleading in this respect. The theory of collective representations which characterizes Durkheim's sociology, at least since his programmatic essay (Durkheim 1898b), is connected to the 1895 turning-point, which took place after his reading of Robertson Smith, when he discovered the possibility of a sociological approach to religion. Yet, not even in Smith do we find a significant reflection on the concept of representation. The impression is that the theory of collective representations is a sort of ingenious creation imputable solely to Durkheim. If we look at the philosophical context of Durkheim's formative years, which dictates the themes of a debate that continues throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, it is impossible not to notice the importance of the notion of belief, and more precisely the relation between belief and knowledge—i.e., between belief and representation.

Do the terms used in Durkheim's texts authorize one to speak of a correlation of meaning between beliefs and collective representations? The texts written after the 1898 essay are to be taken into consideration, and particular attention should be paid to *The Elementary Forms,* and also to his lectures of 1913–14 on pragmatism. Yet, a comparison with a former text could be instructive. In the already mentioned pages of *Suicide* (1897a:112–13/ t.1951a:126–7), Durkheim introduces a model of the relation between the individual and society, which is the alternative to Tarde's concept of imitation.

The terms of the relation are thus described (my emphasis for the one corresponding to society): 'persons who cling to the *common opinion*', *'common practices or beliefs',* 'the respect we feel for *collective ways of acting and thinking*', 'to act through respect or fear of *opinion*'. Although the term collective representations does not appear, many of the characteristics do: the terms for society used in this passage could be replaced by 'collective representations' without altering the sense of Durkheim's statements. On reading *The Elementary Forms,* anyone would realize that Durkheim's discursive practice did not undergo major changes after the introduction of the term collective representations. In fact, Durkheim uses it in connection with, or alternates it with other expressions that were already present in, earlier works (common beliefs, collective beliefs, opinion, public opinion, etc.).

Two passages become particularly relevant to this analysis. In the first book of *The Elementary Forms* (Preliminary Questions) Durkheim says that beliefs are 'states of opinion, and consist in representations' (1912a:50). Then, at the end of his work he makes the following comments about the relation between collective representations and categories of thought:

> On the other hand, it is not at all true that concepts, even when constructed according to the rules of science, get their authority uniquely from their objective value. It is not enough that they be true to be believed. If they are not in harmony with *the other beliefs and opinions, or, in a word, with the mass of other collective représentations,* they will be denied.
>
> (1912a:625/t.1915d:438, my emphasis; see also 297–8)

It follows that beliefs consist of representations, and representations are collective only if, besides being true, they are in harmony with the other beliefs. Therefore beliefs and collective representations are reciprocally defining.

Instead of speaking of beliefs or collective beliefs, why did Durkheim speak of collective representations to designate something he considered an important development in his theory of society? The possible reasons are evident if we think about the context of the formulation. First, the 1898 essay contains innovative ideas compared to those stated in his previous works, such as social morphology in *The Division of Labor in Society*. The introduction of the new form was intended therefore to mark the change in the content. Furthermore, the main concern of the essay was to prove the autonomous and *sui generis* character of a social dimension of mental activity, and consequently of sociology. The term representation is the only one that can designate properly the whole of mental activity, whether it is individual or social. On the contrary, the term belief is more specific, at least in its ordinary use. Beliefs are a species of representations. At the same time, the new term

does not exclude the former expression. Beliefs and representations are deeply connected accordingly to neo-Kantian tradition.

Durkheim's theory of collective beliefs and representations agrees with the neo-Kantian tradition on at least three points. First, according to Brochard's *De l'Erreur,* metaphysical and religious constructions, just like rational concepts, result from the spiritual activity that finds its form in beliefs. This is the condition of intelligibility of this kind of construction. The apparent mystery of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* is thus disclosed. In fact, this text is constructed around two of the most heterogeneous themes: Australian Aborigines' totemism, and the central notions of reason (space, time, causality, power, totality, etc.). Renouvier, and later Brochard, state that belief, as the apriori form of every representational activity, provides the space where religious thought and scientific thought can be the objects of the same research. Durkheim's reflection on beliefs and collective representations has to face as problems the conditions of the possibility of both scientific and religious thought. Does this suggest a sort of irrationalism in his reflection? It might be so only if the admission that the objectivity of representations depends on their proper forms (which are not innate but are valid because they are historically determined and socially accepted) is felt as a concession to the irrational. Otherwise, the tendency is to give credence to Durkheim's words: 'the only [designation] we accept is that of *rationalist*' (1895a/1901c:vi–viii/t.1982a:33; Durkheim spoke of Renouvier as 'the greatest contemporary rationalist' (1955a:76)). In fact, the aim of *The Elementary Forms* is not to prove the religious—irrational and mystic—origin of the categories of reason, as much as it is to point out the objective foundations of religious and scientific representations. The conditions on which the objective validity of these beliefs (i.e., their being shared and inter-subjective, universal and necessary within a given society) is based coincide with the collective nature of their institution, whose impersonal, non-psychological, formal character is maintained (Durkheim 1912a:636).

The second point deals with the relation between theory and practice. Belief is a form shared by scientific and religious representations. One believes in perceptions, in concepts and in the gods. But *how* does one believe? We should never forget that belief is a synonym for collective representation. The problem of reciprocal definition arises again. What does it mean exactly that representations and beliefs are reciprocally defining? It is a means of reaffirming, in line with the neo-Kantians, the indissoluble connection between the speculative element and the practical elements. They can be distinguished but not separated. If collective representations are the object of belief and do not exist if they are not believed in, they imply not only an intellectual, but also an emotive and voluntary adherence to them. They must be true and 'held to be true'. Belief has a representative component which is speculative and cognitive. It is not an arbitrary instinct, it is an act mediated by representation (1897a:113).

Collective representation, which includes an element of belief, adds and at the same time takes away something from the common definition of a representation as a reflection of reality. It takes away something, because collective representation lacks transparency in its relation to experience. It can assume the persistence of prejudices, and endure a significant number of denials at the level of individual experience, without being even partly modified (as in Thomas Kuhn's paradigms) (1912a:393). It adds something, because it not only passively receives the sense data, but also organizes them into a coherent frame, which must function as a guide to conduct: the believer is not someone who sees or knows things that the non-believer ignores; he is someone who *can do more* (1913b/1975b, 2:23; see also 1912a:595, 635).

Let us recall the passage from *The Elementary Forms:* 'It is not enough that [the concepts] be true to be believed. If they are not in harmony with the other beliefs and opinions, or, in a word, with the mass of other collective representations, they will be denied' (1912a:625/t.1915d:438). There are two conditions or functions that describe belief or collective representations: (1) they must be true; (2) they must be 'in harmony with the other collective representations', i.e., they must be *socially* true. What we mean by the expression 'socially true' is stated at the beginning of *The Elementary Forms:* collective representations are 'founded in the nature of things', 'they hold to reality and express it', 'there are no religions which are false. All are true in their own fashion; all answer *(répondent),* though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence' (1912a:3/t.1915d:2–3). A collective representation must both 'correspond' (be true) and 'respond' (*répondre,* be socially true) to a given reality. The first condition stands for the speculative element; the second condition stands for what can be called the 'practical' element, which is intended to satisfy human needs. Collective representation is a 'rational belief': it has a strong active and practical validity and, at the same time, is conditioned by the aspiration to truth, which is typical of the speculative element.[10]

The third point is more strictly epistemological. What Ollé-Laprune says of beliefs can be applied to collective representations: 'a wonderful alliance between the subjective element and the objective principle' takes place in them. In the context of the epistemology of human sciences, it assumes a specific sense and refers to the classical problem of objectivization: how can the observing subjects objectively observe themselves? Durkheim's answer to this problem is too complex to be dealt with in this chapter. But the theory of collective representations is clearly a key to the answer. Collective representations have the peculiar feature of being the product of society and, at the same time, of representing it: society is the subject and the object of collective representations. This means that the two functions which define collective representations are deeply interconnected. Collective representations respond to the practical need to express and affirm society through their

speculative and objectifying function. They represent society and make it present; they make it known and bring it to existence. This is valid for every collective representation, and according to Durkheim there is no substantial difference between religious and scientific representations. Does this mean that they are equal? No, but the most evident difference—the verifiable character of scientific representation—can still be formulated in terms of this analysis. In scientific representations the two functions of collective representations are kept separate. Representations must be true in order to be held to be true. Their verifiability is easier because their objects belong to the external reality, nature, and therefore the objectifying operation appears less complicated. On the contrary, in religious representations the distinction between the two functions is not so clear, and is often impossible. In primitive religions both functions are present (beliefs are also cosmologies, representations of reality and of the universe) but one shades into the other with no clear division between them. Every representation tends to be 'contaminated' by symbolical meanings. By contrast, in our world, the speculative function is more and more confined to science. Religion tends to be reduced to the practical function, to morality (Comte's argument). The question arises if it is still possible to speak of collective representations in religious matters. When Durkheim speaks of the contemporary forms of the sacred, he refers to phenomena other than those of traditional religion (e.g., the faith in progress, or the cult of the individual).

How should the epistemological stature of sociology be evaluated in such a context? How should the sociologist approach collective representations? This is the question of the observation of beliefs, already discussed by Brochard. In order to study beliefs or collective representations, the sociologist seems forced to distance from them, abandon their logic, and stop believing. This 'pure' (neutral) perspective may be possible for religious representations. But is it still possible when we deal with the categories of thought to discover which for Durkheim are also collective representations? How can one deal scientifically with the conditions of science itself? The two functions of collective representations are methodological guidelines for the sociologist as well. The limits of traditional rationalism, which Durkheim intends to enlarge (1955a:172), presume to judge collective representations solely on the grounds of their speculative function (e.g., considering religion a mere illusion). The limit of irrationalism, on the contrary, is in presuming to abolish the speculative function and reducing beliefs to their practical function, which is given an absolute value and no rational foundations. The sociologist, instead, respects and takes into consideration both of the defining conditions of collective representations. The existence of an institution is enough to prove that the institution responds to a social need (i.e., it is *socially* true). Although, this does not imply the suspension of the question of speculative function, it is obvious for scientific representation, which must always be proved to be true or false. And it is valid also for non-scientific

representations: the sociologist can and must prove whether an institution is true or false, i.e., if it corresponds to the 'given conditions' of existence of the represented society. The answer is not predetermined. The sociologist can find out if the institution *was* adequate (and it must have been at least once, by definition), but has ceased to be so owing to social changes which have occurred in time. In this case, he can bring into play an element of critical rationalism against what exists and intervene in the natural course of things. The sociologist's epistemological position does not force him to accept passively all that exists, only because it exists. Again, it is the epistemological attitude that makes possible a text like *The Elementary Forms,* where Durkheim can study the categories of thought from a sociological point of view, since he does not see them only as the expression of a non-historical and abstractly speculative reason, and can also study the forms of religious life, because he can evaluate its hidden intelligible truth, which is neither illusory nor transcendent.

The theory of beliefs or collective representations introduces and justifies (developing one of Brochard's motifs) the difference between the two points of view. The philosopher-sociologist analyses what remains indistinct in ordinary life, the social relation and the natural illusion of beliefs, through the reconstruction of the interaction that makes them two aspects of the same reality. In the terms of the promise of happiness that motivates Durkheim's project, the external observation of contemporary societies does not determine the *abolition* of the pattern of beliefs that constitutes social aggregation, but can help to understand the modes of the crisis of solidarity that troubles these societies, and to find a solution. Durkheim's solution has no illusion about the limits of pure intellectual speculation. He discovers an antidote (with an optimism which was still possible at the beginning of the century) to the social anomie in the normative capacity of reasonable beliefs, i.e., collective representations understood through rational reflection.

In relation to the neo-Kantian tradition, Durkheim's reflection has introduced new elements. The sense of this operation is summarized in the appendix on certainty to one of his lectures on pragmatism. Here Durkheim praises the defenders of the theory of certainty based on the will, 'especially Renouvier', because they pointed out the practical nature of certainty. The necessary character of the true idea (which we can but believe in) remains unexplained: 'illusion or not, this belief is part of us'. Sociology does explain it, by connecting the authority of collective representations to the authority of society over the individuals. Durkheim sees this as a development of neo-Kantian philosophy rather than a criticism of it: 'In this matter we remain faithful to Kant's tradition' (1955a:202). The discovery of the social dimension of belief is not unimportant. It leads Durkheim to a vision of society which is far from the sort of neo-contractualism borne by Renouvier's theory of free and voluntary belief, and also from Tarde's ideas of social automation.

Durkheim concludes that beliefs and collective representations are the actual form of the relation of society to the individual. Finally, this urges us to mention another master who acted as a model for Durkheim's work: the historian Fustel de Coulanges (1830–89).

The model of social relations analysed in *La Cité antique* (described by Fustel as a 'history of a belief') justifies the efficacy of beliefs in the institution of society, through the movement of duplication, or alienation. In this process the object of belief is not recognized in its genesis and seems to face the believer from outside.[11] The complexity of belief resides in its being both an internal and an external link, which arises from the depths of the inner self 'at the bottom of every heart'. Such a link is the real dominating element, which is made even stronger by the fact that we have created it ourselves. When we come to explain the relation between the individual and society, the complexity of belief is what makes it superior to the specificity of interest, to the arbitrariness of the contract, and, at the opposite extreme, to the general character of a philosophical theory.

On the basis of Fustel's historiography, Durkheim further defines the participation of the empirical subject in collective representations. The immanent opposition of two *sui generis* realities, individual and society, demands a conciliation through a reciprocal renunciation: allusion or alienation, the model of social relations constituted by belief denies the possibility of regarding one of the two terms as absolute.[12] The object of belief (e.g., a god), which would not exist if not believed in, appears to be external to the believer, who is unable to recognize his or her activity owing to a factor of opacity. This inability, of course, refers to the structure of religious belief, in which to recognize the gods as a product of the human imagination is equivalent to not believing in them. On the contrary the sociologist is able to recognize his work. According to the theory of collective representations, the exercise of the speculative and cognitive function is the means to perform the practical and creative function of belief.

Lévy-Bruhl, in his article of 1894, suggests a general interpretation of the philosophical interest in belief. Although the problem has a very long history, Lévy-Bruhl starts from the end of the eighteenth century, with Jacobi and Kant. Then, belief 'becomes, in our century, the philosophical problem *par excellence*' (1894:416–17). This is proved by the thought of Renouvier, Boutroux and Secrétan. For Lévy-Bruhl, the origin of this phenomenon is to be found first of all in the doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, which from Descartes to Kant, to the Positivists, became part of the intellectual atmosphere of the time: 'All the doctrines affirm that human knowledge has limits which cannot be surpassed' (*ibid.*:422). Yet, to speak of the unknowable means that we know it already, at least in part, and this is the result of our unstoppable tendency to metaphysical speculation, involving the natural curiosity of the human mind. The theories of belief develop as a response to this need: they are 'doctrines of compensation' (*ibid.*:425). This is a typical

modern phenomenon. Ancient Greeks did not know it, since their philosophy was founded 'on a happy balance between spirit and nature' *(ibid.).* This is also the answer to the need for the foundation of an obligatory ethics, where the relativity of knowledge has compromised the possibility of a purely logical foundation. In conclusion, on the one hand, the theories of belief make us conscious of our ignorance when facing reality in its complexity:

> What do we actually know about the nature of movement, of life, of society, and of thought itself? All this surpasses us infinitely, and when we try to reduce it to a system we replace the ever mysterious reality with a system of intelligible symbols convenient to us.
>
> <div align="right">(<i>ibid.:</i>435)</div>

On the other hand, they risk limiting reason in favour of sentiment, and while they seem to affirm the maximum freedom they are actually submitting man to a blind and exterior authority. 'On the contrary, it is reason that makes us free. The constraint *(contrainte)* it imposes is salutary' (*ibid.:*440).

Can Lévy-Bruhl's interpretation be applied to Durkheim and to his theory of belief and collective representations? First of all, the relativity of knowledge is a postulate accepted by Durkheim. He extends it also to the categories of thought, which are historical and social in nature. Besides, Durkheim affirms the complexity of the real, a complementary postulate accepted by Lévy-Bruhl. The words, which are a product of the age, are almost identical: 'The real is inexhaustible, not only as a whole, but also in each one of its constituent parts' (Durkheim 1955a:185). Society is 'that fleeting reality which the human mind will perhaps never grasp completely' (1895a/ 1901c:46/t.1982a:83). Can we say also that Durkheim's sociology (through its theory of belief) responds to a natural and metaphysical need for the absolute? He clearly does not underestimate this need and comprehends that it is typical of the human and social world and cannot be separated from life itself. Society must live and act. Doubt (i.e., relativity of knowledge) cannot stop us. 'Society cannot wait for its problems to be solved scientifically' (1955a:184). Society has to make a decision and needs an idea or a representation to guide such a decision. These are collective representations. In this sense they compensate for the limitations of science. Yet, to enlarge rationalism does not mean to abandon it. As we well know, for Durkheim the representative element of belief is as indispensable as its voluntary element. Sociology puts stress on the representative element, explains it and strengthens it: for Durkheim too, the necessity of reason makes us free. We can say that in his sociology, and more specifically in *The Elementary Forms,* he attempts to replace non-historical and divine reason with a historical, social and empirical reason (1912a:20). This sociological reason is still Kantian in the sense we tried to point out. It is not by coincidence that the closing lines of *The Elementary Forms* are about Kant and repeat one

of the leitmotifs of the debate on belief: speculative reason and practical reason are 'two aspects of the same faculty' (*ibid.*:635). Of course, the attempt to rationalize the absolute is often accompanied by the feeling of its own precariousness and difficulty: Durkheim lacks the 'happy balance between spirit and nature' which was typical of the ancients. We can ask ourselves whether such a feeling of incompleteness is not essential in the definition of modern rationalism.

Notes

1 Quotations from *The Elementary Forms* are generally taken from Swain's translation, in which I have made a number of necessary changes.

2 This chapter is the development of a previous article (Paoletti 1994). See also, on this subject, Stedman Jones (1998). Special thanks are extended to Valentina Lessi who translated this text into English.

3 See Lequier (1865/1985), especially pp. 47–67. Lequier refers to Fichte's *Vocation of Man*. Renouvier was Lequier's friend and the editor of his works. Lequier was drowned and perhaps committed suicide at the age of 48 in 1862.

4 See bibliography for references of the authors mentioned in this paragraph.

5 See Brochard (1884:488). 'The actual conclusion of the theory of belief is a great lesson of tolerance.' All the quotations from Brochard are from Brochard 1954.

6 See Stedman Jones (1995) on Durkheim's epistemology and Watts Miller (1996) on his moral theories.

7 This is what Durkheim wrote about his relation to philosophy in a letter to G.Davy on 13 September 1911 (Davy 1960).

8 *Psychologie de la croyance* was originally published in the form of articles in the *Revue philosophique*. It received Bergson's appreciation (Bergson 1902).

9 Le Bon's position does not appear to be particularly relevant. It restates substantially, in a rather simplistic way, the logic of the absolute separation of believing and knowing. The only difference is that Le Bon is more interested in the irrational and automatic dimension of the phenomena of suggestive propagation of beliefs in the crowd (see for example, Le Bon 1911:1–10).

10 We can find a correspondent to this distinction in Brochard when he distinguishes the intellectual and the voluntary element in belief (see above, p. 123, with reference to the words 'According to Plato…').

11 Referring to the factor on which depends the passage from the natural state to society, Fustel states: 'It is a belief. Nothing has a greater power on the soul. A belief is a product of our spirit, but we are not free to alter it whenever we like. It is our creation, but we do not know it. It is human, and we believe it is god. It is the effect of our force, and it is stronger than us. It is in us; it does not leave us; it continually speaks to us. If it tells us to obey, we obey; if it establishes duties, we submit to them. Man does have the power to tame nature, but he is subject of his own thought' (1864:149; see also Héran 1986).

12 Durkheim (1912a:299, 330–2, 338–9, 599).

MEANING AND REPRESENTATION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Warren Schmaus

In the social sciences, the meanings of social facts should be kept distinct from their representations, especially from what has been called their collective representations, whether these are understood as mental or as public representations. The social sciences could in fact dispense entirely with the notion of collective representations, without loss of explanatory power. There may be a role for representations in sociological and anthropological explanations, but these will be individual mental representations, not collective representations. Individual members of the same society could share the concepts, moral rules and other beliefs that hold a society together and yet represent these cultural items to themselves in different ways. The meanings of these concepts, rules and beliefs have to do with their social functions, not their representations. I will illustrate and defend this thesis through a functional reinterpretation of Durkheimian sociology of knowledge. Specifically, I will argue that by identifying such basic categories of thought as causality, space and time with their social functions rather than their collective representations, it becomes easier to explain the possibility of interpreting other cultures.

The functionalist approach to the meaning of social facts that I advocate derives by way of analogy from psychological functionalism. It does not derive from Malinowski's anthropological functionalism or include any hypotheses about the functional unity of a society or culture.[1] In order to try to avoid confusion with older sociological functionalisms, I will use the term *social* functionalism as a name for my views. Psychological functionalism defines types of mental states in terms of their relationships to other mental states, sensory inputs and behavioural outputs. It emphasizes that the same type of psychological or mental state can be realized in many different kinds of brain states. Similarly, my social functionalism emphasizes that the same type of social fact can be realized in many different kinds of psychological

states. It defines the meanings of social and cultural facts in terms of their functional relationships to other social facts, environmental conditions and types of actions.

Durkheim originally conceived collective representations as a type of mental entity shared by the members of a society. He included among a culture's collective representations not only its religious and moral ideas but its categories of causality, substance, space and time. For instance, Durkheim and Marcel Mauss identified the Zuñi category of space with the collective representation of the division of space into seven regions named for the seven clans in their tribe (Durkheim 1903a(i)). On my account, it is not necessary for the Zuñi all to have the same type of mental representation in order for them to understand this division of space. It is sufficient that they be able to participate in social functions that require their being able to specify and agree upon locations. Similarly, to say that the Chinese traditionally conceived time as cycles of yin and yang is not to say that all the members of this society must have the same representation of time. The meaning of the division of the year into periods of yin and yang has to do with such things as the organization of agricultural and domestic labour (Granet 1922). Also, although social life depends on moral rules that assume that people are causally responsible for their actions, it is not necessary that everyone in the same society represent the concept of causality to themselves in the same way. What is important, however, is that they are able to agree on assignments of moral responsibility.

I do not mean to suggest that all social scientists continue to use the term collective representation in Durkheim's sense, or even that there is a univocal meaning of collective representation in the social sciences, for indeed there is not. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), for instance, regarded collective representations as explicit, public representations such as myths, cosmologies, ritual statements, symbols, concrete images, artifacts or gestures (e.g., 1929:124). In what follows, I will indicate the problems encountered by Durkheim's mentalist notion of collective representations and then briefly argue that subsequent reinterpretations of collective as public representations only generate their own problems. Next, I will explain my analogy between social and psychological functionalism. Then I will show how my functionalist account of the categories avoids the problems of interpretation that arise from the identification of the categories with their collective representations. Finally, I will suggest a way to avoid the usual pitfalls of functionalism, in which benefits of some social or cultural item to some social group or other are too readily identified as the functions of these items.

Durkheim's legacy

Durkheim founded a sociological tradition that identified social facts with their collective representations. He conceived collective and individual

representations as two types of mental entities, providing the subject matter of sociology and psychology respectively. As entities, collective representations were supposed to give rise to social forces that were causally responsible for social facts. As mental representations or ideas, their contents provided the meanings of general terms for classes of social facts. For Durkheim, all general ideas and concepts are collective representations (1912a:618–20/ t.1915d:481–3/t.1995c:434–6; 1914a:331). Individual representations are particular ideas derived from sensations. Collective representations are formed by the *fusion* of individual representations during periods of collective effervescence.[2]

In identifying the meanings of concepts with collective representations, Durkheim appears to have thought that words refer to their meanings as some sort of entity, much as a proper name refers to a person or place. To be sure, in his early philosophy lectures he did make the traditional philosophical distinction between the extension of a term, or the class of things to which it refers, and its meaning or 'comprehension,' or the characteristics shared by all the individuals that belong to this class. Nevertheless, he identified the comprehension of a general term with a mental representation of these characteristics and thus with an entity (1996a:209–10).[3] Durkheim assumed that when members of the same society shared moral or other general concepts, they all had mental states with the same representational content. This assumption struck even Durkheim as wildly implausible for modern, complex, highly differentiated societies. As I have argued elsewhere (Schmaus 1994), he was thus motivated to turn his attention to the study of collective representations in so-called primitive societies, in which he thought that people, owing to their limited range of experience, had the most similar ideas.

Durkheim's study of collective representations in primitive societies, at least in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912a), had two goals. His more immediate goal was to investigate the origins and functions of religious representations. His more long-range goal was to establish a sociological theory of the categories of the understanding. According to Kant, these categories underlie the very structure of language and also organize our perceptions of the world, thus making experience possible. For example, Kant thought that the category of substance and the notion of the subject of a sentence were two different functions of the same underlying concept. This concept made it possible to perceive the world as consisting of substances that are permanent in time.

Social anthropologists often credit *The Elementary Forms* with having established that the categories of the understanding vary with social causes. However, Durkheim's arguments do not fully warrant this conclusion. First of all, in spite of his explicit warnings in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895a) about distinguishing causal from functional explanations, he sometimes combined them in *The Elementary Forms,* as we shall see below in

our discussion of his account of the category of causality. Second, Durkheim's argument for the social origin of the categories trades on his identification of the categories with their collective representations. For example, he identified the categories of space and time with the ways in which a culture represents space and time, including its ways of measuring time and dividing space into regions or directions. Evidence for the social and cultural variability of these systems of measurement and division is then taken as evidence for the social and cultural character of the categories of space and time themselves.[4] Similarly, evidence of the cultural variability of taxonomic systems is taken to show that the category of genus itself is a cultural construct. In defence of Durkheim, one might argue that if the representations of space, time and genus are cultural, then the categories must be as well, as these are abstracted from their representations. This objection, however, begs the question in assuming that in fact the categories are formed by abstraction from experience instead of making experience possible in the first place.

Nevertheless, the notion that collective representations and hence the categories vary with social causes gave rise to the notion that members of different societies perceive the world through different 'conceptual frameworks'. The framework metaphor originated with Durkheim and Mauss (1903a(i):399/t.1963b:8; 1912a:13, 208–9/t.1915d:22, 171–2/t.1995c:10, 147–8). Mauss drew the implication that the historical and sociological study of the categories would inspire a conceptual relativist philosophy, although Durkheim himself did not endorse relativism (Mauss 1924/ 1950:310/ t.1979:33). Conceptual relativism is the thesis that concepts vary from culture to culture, in such a way that each language community has its own set of concepts, and that there are no universal standards that transcend language communities by which such concepts may be judged. This thesis has been thought to hold for our most fundamental categories such as time and causality as well as for mere taxonomic categories such as fish or vegetable, both of which a Durkheimian regards as collective representations.

Kant had thought that the categories of the understanding underlie the structure of language and experience. Assimilating taxonomic categories to Kantian categories, some anthropologists have thought that classificatory concepts structure the language and experience of particular cultures in much the same way. In more recent years, this thesis has come to be known as 'the cultural construction of reality'. As Edmund Leach explains it in a passage that contains a number of other surprising assumptions as well:

> I postulate that the physical and social environment of a young child is perceived as a continuum. It does not contain any intrinsically separate 'things'. The child, in due course, is taught to impose upon this environment a kind of discriminating grid which serves to distinguish the world as being composed of a large number of

separate things, each labelled with a name. This world is a representation of our language categories, not vice versa. Because my mother tongue is English, it seems self-evident that *bushes* and *trees* are different kinds of things. I would not think this unless I had been taught that it was the case…. Each individual has to learn to construct his own environment in this way.

(Leach 1964:34–5)

Passages similar to the one I have just quoted can also be found in the writings of Max Gluckman, David Schneider and Gary Witherspoon.[5] Obviously there were other sources for some of their views, such as the hypothesis of linguistic determinism of Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir. Nevertheless, the identification of categories with collective representations and the resulting failure to separate fundamental categories from classificatory concepts left anthropologists more receptive to such hypotheses. Mary Douglas, for instance, explicitly links Sapir's thought with Durkheim's (1970:20).

The theory of the cultural construction of reality calls into question the very possibility of the interpretation of other cultures. This problem was thrown into relief by Thomas S.Kuhn, who claimed to be inspired by Whorf's views on language and world view (1970:vi). According to Kuhn, major scientific achievements, which he called 'paradigms', entail conceptual networks through which scientists view the world (*ibid.:*102). Scientists who belong to different paradigm-governed communities inhabit different, even incommensurable worlds, seeing different things when they look in the same direction, and thus will experience communication breakdowns (*ibid.:*149–50). Kuhn himself drew an analogy between scientific and language or cultural communities in a way that would suggest that there are similar problems of incommensurability in interpreting other cultures (*ibid.:*202).

More recently, however, anthropologists have begun to question linguistic determinism and the cultural construction of reality. Brent Berlin and Paul Kay (1969), for instance, report a high degree of consensus across languages and cultures regarding typical examples of colour terms and suggest that colour perception is physiologically based. Whereas anthropologists at one time emphasized the differences among cultural systems of classification, more recent work in ethnobiology has revealed that, at least at the lowest taxonomic levels, there is a great deal of uniformity across cultures.[6] Also, psychologists like John Tooby and Leda Cosmides (1989) and Christopher Hallpike (1979) have criticized the assumptions made by cultural constructivists about learning, perception and other cognitive processes. As they indicate, cultural constructivists typically assume that a human being comes into the world a blank slate and passively acquires a set of ready-made categories from her culture, assumptions that have no basis in experimental psychology.

Of course, not all anthropologists have followed the Durkheimian tradition of locating culture in the mind. Many identify collective representations with explicit myths, ritual behaviour, artifacts and other public representations. Such public expressions of one's culture, however, far from defining social facts, are among the very social facts that need to be interpreted. Clifford Geertz drives this point home with the distinction between 'thin' and 'thick' descriptions. He discusses the example of distinguishing mere twitches of the eye from winks, parodies of winks, practice winks and fake winks. All share the same thin description of a rapid contraction of the eyelid. What separates them is thick descriptions of their meanings in some public, social context (1973:6–7). A thick description is a construction imposed on a social action by an anthropologist and not necessarily the meaning that it has for the agent herself. The most important issue for appraising such an interpretation, he says, is how well it sorts things into kinds, how well, for example, it sorts 'real winks from mimicked ones'. For Geertz, one sorting appears to be better than another just to the extent that it brings us into closer 'touch with the lives of strangers' (1973:15–16). Presumably, then, he does not think that we can impose any arbitrary interpretation on a culture: there are real world constraints on the way we sort cultural items. However, Geertz offers the reader no clue as to how we know when an interpretation has sorted actions into real and not just fictional kinds, or indeed what separates social actions into real kinds if it is not the meanings they have for their agents. Perhaps, then, a functionalist approach to the meaning of social facts will at least provide us with a heuristic device for sorting actions into kinds, a device that depends on their meaning neither for their agents nor for their ethnographic interpreter.

Social and psychological functionalism

The functionalist approach to meaning in the social sciences that I am advocating derives by way of analogy from psychological functionalism.[7] As I mentioned above, psychological functionalism does not identify mental states with brain states. Nor does it try to reduce them to behaviour alone. Instead, it defines them in terms of their relationships to other mental states, sensory inputs and behavioural outputs. Similarly, my social functionalism does not identify types of social facts with types of representations, whether mental or public. Instead, it defines types of social facts in terms of their relationships to other social facts, environmental inputs and behavioural outputs. Two facts are of the same type when they bear the same such relationships.

Psychological functionalism allows for multiple physical instantiations of the same type of mental state, defined in terms of its psychological function. Whether a group of mental phenomena constitutes a type of mental state is determined by whether some psychological generalization holds true of them.

On the other hand, whether some group of neural phenomena constitutes a type of brain state is determined by whether some neurophysiological generalization holds true of them. Even if every individual mental state is an individual brain state, there is no reason to believe that the laws of psychology and neurophysiology will divide these states into the same classes. Two people who share the same type of mental state, defined in terms of its psychological function, do not thereby share the same type of brain state. Indeed, even the same individual at different times may be in the same psychological state without necessarily being in the same brain state.

The earliest functionalist theories in the philosophy of mind tended to explain the multiple instantiability thesis through analogies with computers and other machines (e.g., Putnam 1967; Block and Fodor 1972). Two computers can be performing the same function, say, finding the square root of sixteen, regardless of any electromechanical differences there may be between them. Of course, the multiple instantiability of functions does not depend on this machine analogy. A commonplace example is that the fins of a fish, the flippers of a seal and the wings of a penguin all have the same function.

A common objection to this machine functionalism was that, in defining types of mental states purely in terms of their functional relations, it would allow computers and other devices as well as minds to have mental states (e.g., Block 1978). This objection, I think, rests on an equivocation regarding the notion of function. When we talk about the functional relationships among mental states, we are using 'function' in the sense we invoke when we explain the existence and structure of something in terms of the purpose it serves. In living organisms, not all the causal relations a structure has are functional relations, but only those where the effect somehow feeds back to maintain the organism and thus the structure in existence. We may try to write a program that represents all the functional relationships among our mental states, but the relationship between one step in the program and another would be functional, strictly speaking, only in the mathematical sense of the term. When we run the program on a computer, these mathematical relationships are physically realized as causal relationships among machine states. We only ascribe purposes to computers that they do not really have. Thus, it would be entirely out of place to provide a functional explanation, in the psychological or biological sense, of the state of a computer. It is difficult to see how a mind and a computer could then be said to be in the same type of state if we cannot explain that state in the same way for each.

We can then generalize the multiple instantiability thesis to include the relationship between social facts or institutions and their psychological realizations. It is often said that members of a society must 'share' moral rules, religious beliefs and other concepts, and that these shared 'representations' serve the function of holding society together. However,

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there is no reason to believe that two people who are bound to the same society by sharing the same concepts are thereby in the same kind of psychological state or have the same kind of mental representation. There can be multiple psychological realizations of the same social fact, even when types of both psychological states and social facts are functionally defined. Psychological functions are distinct from social functions.

One might argue that the term collective representation should be understood merely as the name for a class of individual representations that correspond to the same social fact or have the same social origin. Thus understood, however, collective representation becomes a redundant term for social fact. There is no reason to believe that the individual representations that form such a class will share any characteristics other than that they belong to this class. Even if every social fact existed only in the mental states of individual members of society, there would be no reason to think that the laws of sociology divide those states into the same classes that the laws of psychology do.[8] It is not only the case that the same type of social fact could be realized in different kinds of mental states as defined by the laws of psychology. Also, the same type of mental state can instantiate different types of social facts, just as the same type of brain state may instantiate different psychological states in different individuals. There is a many-to-many relationship between types of social facts and types of mental states, just as there is between types of mental states and types of brain states. Hence, the notion of a collective representation understood as a class of mental states corresponding to a social fact would play no role in psychological explanations and at best a redundant role in sociological explanations. There appears then to be little reason for the social sciences to invoke the notion of collective representations, when these are understood as shared mental states.

Dan Sperber might object that in allowing for identities only between token social facts and token psychological states, and not between types of each, my social functionalism undermines the possibility of naturalizing the social sciences. As he sees it, laws or generalizations in the social sciences must be about types, not tokens (1996:6). Hence, he opts for a 'materialist' ontology of mental representations, which he regards as 'brain states described in functional terms,' and the causal chains that connect them (1996:26–7). In reply, I would argue that there is no reason that functional types at one level of explanation must be the same as those at another. If there were any merit to Sperber's objection, it would seem to have to be valid all the way down. That is, there could then be no generalizations about organs, tissues, cells, cell organelles and so on unless they could be expressed in terms of the natural kinds of physics, which is absurd, as functional kinds do not even exist at that level. Furthermore, Sperber's approach presents an obstacle to cross-cultural interpretation. For Sperber, one's mental representation is of the same type as another person's only if it belongs to the same causal chain. Presumably, when an ethnographer encounters an entirely new culture, none

of the representations in that culture will then belong to the same causal chains as the ethnographer's. This would then lead to a radical conceptual relativism, in which the ethnographer would be unable to say that that culture had any representations of the same type as hers, including any representations of causality, time, permanent substance, space or place, and so on.

The multiple instantiability thesis still holds if we reinterpret collective representations as public representations or behaviour.[9] That is, the same type of social fact, functionally defined, may have more than one sort of public representation. Also, the same actions, words and symbols may have different meanings in different social contexts. There are multiple behavioural correlates for any meaning and the same observable behaviour can have many different meanings.

Social functionalism has advantages over behaviourism in so far as it provides a way of articulating the contextual meaning of behaviour by bringing out its systematic relationships with other social facts. To identify the presence of a moral norm with the expression of indignation at its violation, as behaviourist sociologists are wont to do, is much too crude. Even putting aside the problem of the presence of moral rules when they are not being violated, sociological behaviourism fails to distinguish moral rules properly so-called from other kinds of norms. Concert-goers may express indignation at the performance of a new work of music and sports fans may be outraged by an umpire's call. I do not wish to deny that there may be some similarities among these kinds of situations. Nevertheless, they are different and behaviourism fails to bring out these differences. It is not even clear that behaviourism allows one to distinguish indignation from other sorts of anger. The very terms 'indignation' and 'outrage' carry the connotation that there are reasons for the expression of anger connected with the violation of norms, rules or expectations, whether these be moral, artistic, epistemic or athletic. The mere observing of anger will not indicate whether there are such reasons. Much anger has nothing to do with the violation of norms, rules or expectations.

To distinguish indignation from anger and to distinguish the different forms indignation may take, we must appeal to the meanings of these expressions of emotion. Of course, their meanings for the individual social actors who express these emotions may include their conscious awareness of their mental representations of these meanings. However, the meaning of the action for the individual may not be the same as its social functional meaning. Furthermore, even if it is the same, this social functional meaning may be represented in more than one way. For instance, there is no reason to assume that all the social actors expressing indignation at the violation of a norm will all represent this norm to themselves in the same way.

One may think that what I am arguing for is merely a functionalist reinterpretation of the notion of collective representations and that I am

overstating my case by claiming that the social sciences may dispense with collective representations entirely. I want to resist this interpretation of what I am doing. If the meaning of a social fact is just a node in a network of functional relationships among social facts, why should we consider it a representation at all? What does this node represent? How does it represent? To whom does it represent? I do not see answers to such questions as readily forthcoming and I see no reason to trouble ourselves with them or to hold out for answers to them.

It may help to recall that, for Durkheim, collective representations were states of the collective consciousness. Because it opened him up to the group mind interpretation and objection, Durkheim dropped the term collective *conscience* midway through his career and left the question of to whom collective representations are present an open question. This question continues to go unanswered by many contemporary social scientists, who postulate collective representations in order to give rational interpretations of what would otherwise appear to be irrational behaviour. As Pascal Boyer explains, these collective representations 'do not describe thoughts that occur to actual people; they describe thoughts that people might entertain, in the anthropologist's view, if they wanted to make sense of what they actually do and say' (1994:51). Why then call these notions collective representations? I do not mean to deny that a social scientist may represent to herself a network of functional relationships, but this would be an individual and not a *collective* representation.

Durkheim also regarded collective representations as giving rise to social forces. A committed follower of Durkheim might then think that by eliminating collective representations, I undermine the possibility of sociological explanation and indeed sociology's very status as a science. In reply, I would admit to doing away with social forces and say 'good riddance to bad rubbish'. Doing away with social forces does not undermine sociology. It is not the case that each science depends for its existence on having its own forces. After all, psychologists no longer speak of psychic forces and biologists no longer speak of vital forces. The appeal to forces is not necessary for scientific explanation in any event, but rather appears to have more to do with a common-sense notion of causality.

Functionalism and the sociology of knowledge

The sociology of knowledge may be the social science that stands most in need of a functionalist reinterpretation. As we saw above, Durkheim's identification of the categories of the understanding with collective representations is an important source of conceptual relativist and cultural constructivist thought. It suggests that it might be impossible for members of one culture to understand another culture with different collective representations since the two cultures would then have different categories.

A culture that had completely different categories from ours would not even string words together to form sentences as we do and thus it would be hopeless to attempt to interpret what they say.

To identify the meanings of the categories with their social functions, on the other hand, would allow us to explain how communication with and interpretation of other cultures is possible. According to the functionalist notion of a category, different societies may have evolved different concepts to fulfil various social functions. All concepts that serve the same kind of function will be considered as belonging to the same category. For the interpretation of other cultures to be possible, it would not even be necessary that they all have all of the same categories. To make sense of another society's myths, expressed beliefs, moral rules and so forth, it suffices that we can see how the categories they presuppose fulfil certain social functions. Nevertheless, the functional approach may reveal a great deal of commonality in the categories assumed in different cultures.

At this point I can imagine someone raising the objection that, in asserting that different concepts may all fall under the same category, I am smuggling the notion of collective representation back in, only under a new name, viz., concept. In reply, I would emphasize that a concept is like the prepositional content of a sentence. Just as many different sentences can express the same content, there can be many ways to represent the same concept.

I will illustrate the functionalist notion of a category by way of a specific example: the category of causality and its relations to moral and legal rules. Human society as we know it would not be possible without such rules. Animal societies may have other means of exercising social control and keeping the group together, but human societies do it through rules. To have rules, people must be held accountable for their actions, but that assumes that in some sense they are the cause of their actions. Hence, all societies must have some concept or other of causality. Some may object that humans do it through sanctions or the threat of sanctions. Sanctions, however, are applied as the result of the violation of a rule. Also, even the threat of sanctions is not always immediately present and in their absence most people nevertheless continue to follow the rules. Of course, many of these rules may be only implicitly understood and not carefully articulated in a legal or moral code. Nevertheless it would not be possible to have even implicit moral rules without some notion of responsibility.

Durkheim, in fact, argued that our concept of a causal relation originated from our notion of moral obligation. For Durkheim, a causal relation is a necessary relation. He held that the notion of a necessary relation derived from the obligation of members of society to participate in religious rites. In certain rites exemplified by indigenous Australians, for instance, one imitates a certain species of plant or animal at an appropriate time of year in order to make it reproduce and flourish. Society imposes the obligation

to imitate this species because a social interest is at stake. To obligate the members of a society to imitate an animal or plant so that it will reproduce is to presume that performing the rite necessarily leads to the flourishing of the species that is being imitated. If society allowed people to doubt this causal relationship, Durkheim argued, it could not compel them to perform the rite (1912a:524ff./t.1915d:409ff./t.1995c:370ff.). To be sure, in this example Durkheim may have been less than clear about whether he was providing an account of the causal origins or the function of the concept of causality. However, I think we can separate out a functional account that would include the premise that society cannot obligate someone to do something without some concept of causality.

Similarly, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl described a notion of participation that plays the functional role of causality in so-called primitive societies. In accordance with this notion of participation, people are held responsible for all sorts of things for which we would not blame them. For example, according to Lévy-Bruhl, for the primitive there is no such thing as an accidental death or death by disease and other natural causes. All death is due to witchcraft. Witchcraft assumes a notion of participation, according to which one is supposed to be able to harm one's intended victim through actions taken against his or her bodily fluids, hair, nails, footsteps, image, articles of clothing, utensils, etc. because all these things 'participate' in the victim. People who perform such witchcraft may be held responsible for the death of their victims (Lévy-Bruhl 1910:321ff./t.1926:276ff.; 1922:20ff./t.1923 in 1978:37ff.; 1927/t.1928:114ff.). Although we may not hold people to account for murder through witchcraft, nevertheless the relation of the notion of participation to moral responsibility allows us to recognize participation as a causal concept. Boyer, however, questions whether different cultures actually do have different concepts of causation and asserts that 'people do not plow their fields…in terms of "participation"' (1994:129). To the extent that he is right, however, this fact merely shows that there may be more than one concept of causality operating even in one and the same so-called primitive society, a point that Lévy-Bruhl would have readily conceded.[10]

That these various peoples cited by Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl may have been mistaken about these particular causal relationships is beside the point. The point of these examples is that the category of causality is necessary for imposing moral obligations. By interpreting the category of causality in terms of its social functional role, I do not mean to suggest that the concept of causality is the same for all societies. My notion of causality, for instance, has nothing to do with morally culpable death caused by witchcraft or with any obligation to imitate totemic species. Many in our society may conceive causality as a statistical rather than a necessary relationship between cause and effect. There may even be functional explanations of the cultural differences among concepts of causality that appeal to the specific roles these

concepts play in each society. Nevertheless, it is their functional relationships to moral rules that bring various concepts under the category of causality and thus that allow for the cross-cultural interpretation of concepts like participation as causal concepts.

Of course, a society may impose obligations on its members that may not be necessary for its continued survival. This concession, however, does not stand in the way of providing a functional account of the category of causality. The category of causality may be presupposed by superfluous rules as well as those rules necessary for the maintenance of the society in question. However, the society is better off having these extra rules than having no concept of causality and thus no rules at all. The persistence of societies depends on moral rules and thus the category of causality helps to maintain the society.

Indeed, even for someone to think that he or she is not obligated to perform a rite because it does not work or to deny responsibility for witchcraft would involve a negative use of the category of causality. The notion of working suggests that we may want to generalize our functional account of the category of causality to include its relations to rules of technique and hygiene as well as moral rules. In fact, Lévy-Bruhl suggested that in non-literate societies, it may be difficult to distinguish purely technical procedures from moral rules. For example, he described how, in making an axe, the primitive must first propitiate certain spirits before cutting down the tree from which he will obtain the wood for the handle (1927/t.1928:26).

One might object that by generalizing Durkheim's functional account of causality to include its role in technical and other rules, we are no longer able to distinguish moral from other sorts of rules. If it does not help us draw such a basic distinction, then how can we argue that social functionalism is a better approach to interpreting cultures than, say, sociological behaviourism? In reply, I would point out that I am not proposing a simple identity between causal concepts on the one hand and moral and technical rules on the other. The whole point of the functionalist approach to the meaning of social facts is that it refuses to stipulate a single criterion for something like the presence of a moral rule. What distinguishes moral rules from rules of hygiene and technical rules is the entire set of relationships they bear to conditions in the natural and social environment, cultural artifacts, diet, ritual practices, customs, beliefs, concepts, categories and so on.

My functional account of the category of causality should be understood not merely as some sort of transcendental argument regarding the necessary conditions for social life or for its interpretation. Rather, it can also be read as reasoning to an empirically testable hypothesis. Questions as to which categories are functional and which not and what social functions they serve are topics for empirical investigation. One way to test the claim that the category of causality has the function of holding society together by making moral and other rules possible is to see whether in fact the category is

universal, that is, whether in fact all societies have some concept or other of causality. In testing this claim, as Boyer (1994:112) points out, we must be careful not to rely solely on ethnographic accounts of the myths, cosmologies and religious beliefs of various cultures. Typically, mythologies deliberately violate people's intuitive expectations about events and their causes.[11] The concepts that people in various societies actually have, Boyer argues, should be elicited through the same kind of cognitive psychological experiments that we would use to investigate how people in our own society think.[12] Such experiments could also be used to determine whether certain categories are even universal within our own society, or whether they are lacking in certain pathological cases in which individuals have difficulty with social relationships.

Some may object that experimental subjects, finding the cognitive science testing situation highly artificial, will provide responses that do not reflect their true thinking (e.g. Holy and Stuchlik 1983:ch. 4). Subjects from non-Western societies especially tend to give either the answers that they think are expected of them or those that will quickly bring to a close discussions of topics they are not interested in pursuing. This problem, however, strikes me as a technical and methodological difficulty rather than an insuperable barrier for this programme of research. Cross-cultural cognitive experiments may need to be more carefully designed. Experiments that involve questions that elicit yes or no responses, the analysis of syllogisms, or sorting tasks in which the subjects are given vague directions, are probably inadequate for revealing people's categories. Perhaps experiments that ask subjects to reason through certain practical problems may be more appropriate.

Furthermore, the results of cognitive experiments could be controlled by investigations into whether there are corresponding syntactic categories in the language of the culture in question. Like Kant, Durkheim recognized that such categories of the understanding as substance and causality represented applications of syntactic categories to experience.[13] For instance, he said, reason compels us to relate phenomena to something else, but does not say what that something is. Experience intervenes and provides the concrete representation of the idea of substance. Similarly, reason provides only the idea of a necessary antecedent of a phenomenon. That which is exactly a cause, he argued, only internal experience can show us (Durkheim 1996a:138–9). Thus various concepts may be recognized as expressions of the same syntactic category. Durkheim, of course, in distinguishing syntactic categories from categories of the understanding, identified the latter with mental representations. We can say instead simply that a causal concept is one that assumes a relationship of antecedent and consequent or that a concept of substance is one that assumes a relationship of subject and predicate. Of course, from the facts that the syntactic categories make language possible and that language makes human social life possible, it does not follow that all of the syntactic categories have social functions. Gender in modern

European languages is a notable counter-example. Hence, the analysis of languages alone could not reveal the social functions of the categories but must be pursued in conjunction with cross-cultural studies of cognition.

Comparative studies with animals may also shed light on the social functions of the categories. For instance, Konrad Lorenz (1941) studied ways in which animals represent causal and spatial relationships. One could investigate additional categories, such as temporal relationships, and whether there are any significant differences between social and non-social animals with respect to their categories.

Objections to functionalism

Of course, even if a category could be shown to be universal among all social beings, such evidence would not suffice to establish that it had a social function. We need some way to distinguish genuine functional accounts from cases in which it would merely appear that having a certain concept benefits society. The fact that the adoption of some concept would promote some useful end can explain neither what brought it about in the first place nor what maintains it in existence.

As Jon Elster explains, to avoid what he calls the functionalist fallacy, there must be some explanatory mechanism that shows some connection between serving an end and being maintained in existence (Elster 1984:32; 1989a:147; 1989b:123). Without such a mechanism, functional explanations are untestable. In the life sciences, natural selection provides such a mechanism. Functional explanations in sociology, however, typically lack such a mechanism, according to Elster. He also raises two objections to the use of natural selection feedback mechanisms in functional accounts of social norms. First, he argues that 'Selection processes work too slowly to produce behavior that is optimally adapted to a rapidly changing environment' (1989b:81). However, this objection is vague because it never specifies just how rapidly selection processes would have to work, how the rate of change is to be measured, or exactly what is the environment to which social norms must be adapted. His second objection states that 'The norms of the strong are not as a rule taken over by the weak, nor do the weak always disappear in competition with the strong' (*ibid.*:148). In addition to its rather vague notions of weak and strong, Elster's objection also seems to assume a rather antique survival-of-the-fittest interpretation of natural selection.[14]

A more serious problem, at least for my programme, may be that natural selection feedback mechanisms invoked by functional accounts of the categories may involve mental states or representations in the minds of individual members of society. For example, I have been arguing that one of the functions of the category of causality is to make moral rules possible. In order for the individual members of society to follow these rules, they must be able to represent the concept of causality to themselves. What this

objection shows, however, is that individual mental representations may play a role in mediating functional explanations of the categories. It in no way establishes a role for collective representations. Natural selection may favour an ability to represent causal concepts without selecting for any particular causal concept or for members of a social group to represent this concept in the same way.

Conclusion

In conclusion: the meanings of social facts should be understood in terms of their functional relationships with other social facts, environmental conditions and behavioural outputs. These meanings should not be identified with collective representations. Allowing for the instantiation of social facts in multiple types of psychological states, social functionalism dispenses with the notion of collective mental representations. Social functionalism also relates the meanings of social facts to behaviour without reducing them to behaviour. Individual mental representations, however, may still play a role in explaining the relationship between the individual and society, in mediating functional explanations, and in explaining individual actions.

Towards the end of his career, Lévy-Bruhl regretted the fact that he, like the Durkheimians, had identified social facts with collective mental representations. In one of his posthumously published notebooks, dated June/ August 1938, in a passage that deserves more attention from social scientists, he said:

> The idea of representations, sorts of entities that are separated or at least always separable for which it is necessary to find a satisfactory means for the mind to reconnect (say a word about Gestalt psychology) forms a part of a whole of superannuated psychological and logical conceptions, evidently proceeding from the associationist school and its English and French predecessors of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries. Their way of posing problems does not resist a more exact knowledge of the facts, and more often they troubled themselves only with pseudo-problems.
>
> (1949:78/t.1975:61)

Notes

1 Malinowski included among the 'axioms' of functionalism the claim that a culture is 'a system of objects, activities, and attitudes in which every part exists as a means to an end' (1939:150). Talcott Parsons cites Malinowski as an important influence on the development of structural-functionalist theory in sociology (1945:22; 1971:826). Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism is perhaps less extreme than Malinowski's. Like Durkheim (1895a/1901c:112–13/t.1938b:91/ t.1982a:120), he did not appear to insist that every element of a culture has a function. He made

it clear that the idea of the functional unity of a society is only a hypothesis (Radcliffe-Brown 1935:181).

2 Durkheim introduced the notion of fusion in 1893 in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893b/1902b:67/t.1933b:99/t.1984a:55) and continued to use it in such later works as *The Elementary Forms,* where it is linked to the notion of collective effervescence (1912a:329, 339, 629/t.1915d:262, 269, 489/t.1995c:231, 238, 441–2; cf. 1913b:84, 99; 1919b/1970a:311).

3 See chapter 2 in this volume.

4 Strictly speaking, of course, space and time are not categories for Kant, but forms of intuition required by the other categories for their application to experience. For a more detailed critique of Durkheim's sociological theory of the categories, see Schmaus (1997).

5 Max Gluckman, for instance, spoke of 'what the French sociologists call collective representations' forming a person's thoughts and feelings (1949–50:75) in the following way:

> From infancy, every individual is moulded by the culture of the society into which it is born. All human beings see, but we know, for example, that how they see shapes and colours is to some extent determined by this process of moulding. More than this, their ability to describe their perceptions depends on the categories contained in their respective languages.
>
> (Gluckman 1949–50:73–4)

Consider also the following passages from Schneider and Witherspoon:

> The world at large, nature, the facts of life, whatever they may be, are always parts of man's perception of them as that perception is formulated through his culture. The world at large is not, indeed, it cannot be, independent of the way in which his culture formulates his vision of what he is seeing. There are only cultural constructions of reality, and these cultural constructions of realities are decisive in what is perceived, what is experienced, what is understood…. Meaning is thus not simply attributed to reality. Reality is itself constructed by the beliefs, understandings, and comprehensions entailed in cultural meanings.
>
> (Schneider 1976:204)

> Culture exists on the conceptual level, and consists of a set of concepts, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about the universe of action and being. Cultural concepts do not just (or even necessarily) identify what exists in the objective world; cultural systems, in one sense, create the world. Reality itself is culturally defined, and cultural constructs partition this reality into numerous categories.
>
> (Witherspoon 1971:110)

6 For a review of this literature, see D'Andrade (1995:92ff.).

7 The contemporary discussion of functionalism in the philosophy of mind began with Putnam (1967). Good collections that include this and other important papers on functionalism are Block (1980) and Lycan (1990).

8 To be sure, there have been thinkers like Auguste Comte who have held that psychology collapses entirely into sociology. But it is one thing to say this and

another to show it. The same can be said for those who claim that sociology reduces to psychology.

9 In order to justify my going on at length about what should be obvious to everyone by now, allow me to quote from a recent email posting from Mary Douglas, who would still appeal to behavioural criteria for the presence of a collective representation:

> I don't have to wonder if some idea is a collective representation or just something that someone thought about yesterday. The acid test is the reaction of outrage signifying the sacred has been imperiled; if you can see that happening, and it [is] usually pretty brutal, you are safe in saying you have recognized the sacred, what ever it is. Without that tie up, I remain very skeptical when social psychologists write about collective representations. With it, a whole different set of questions arise to be studied.
>
> (Durkheim-l@postoffice.cso.uiuc.edu, October 8, 1996)

10 Lévy-Bruhl made it clear that, although the concept of participation may govern the primitives' thinking about the unseen world of mystic powers, with regard to their practical affairs, such as obtaining food, they think as we do, using the same sort of causal relations (1922:517/1978:442–3).

11 For additional critiques of the assumption that the analysis of myths and cosmological ideas sheds light on how people think, see Bloch (1977:290), Cole and Scribner (1974:143), and Jahoda (1982:219).

12 Boyer (1994:291–2) has in mind the sort of work done by Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, which investigates how human beings reason about social exchange (Cosmides 1989; Cosmides and Tooby 1989). There is in fact a considerable literature on cultural differences in basic concepts. For reviews of this literature, see Cole and Scribner (1974), Harris and Heelas (1979), and Jahoda (1982). See Hallpike (1979) for an example of someone who uses Piaget's theory of stages of conceptual development to explain these cultural differences.

13 I do not mean to suggest that either Kant or Durkheim had the contemporary linguist's notion of syntax.

14 Elster uses as his examples first Greece and Rome and then China and the barbarians, in which the norms of the conquered were adopted by the conquerors. These examples are highly equivocal. Elster appears to equate strength with either military conquest or winning at economic competition. However, that the norms of the conquered were adopted by the conquerors may attest to the strength of the norms, if not the strength of the armies of the people who followed those norms. Not all social norms are directed at success in battle or the marketplace. James Bohman (1991) and Harold Kincaid (1990) provide additional reasons not to take Elster's objections seriously.

COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS AS SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

David Bloor

Introduction

Representation is a familiar theme in both philosophy and psychology. Within such a tradition of work our ideas, thoughts and words are said to stand for or represent the objects and processes in our environment. In this sense, representations are without doubt individual *possessions*. Typically they are also seen as individual *achievements*. They are the products of psychological and cognitive processes, originating within the mind or brain of the individual. So representation is understood *individualistically*.

By contrast, Durkheim's account of representation was developed on the basis of a systematic rejection of individualistic assumptions. He said that the psychologist 'who restricts himself to the ego cannot emerge to find the non-ego. Collective life is not born from individual life, but it is, on the contrary, the second which is born of the first' (1893b/1902b/t.1933b:279).

For Durkheim the full capacity to represent originates not in the individual but in social processes: it comes from outside the individual and devolves onto the individual. Since individualism is still so widely taken for granted, Durkheim's contribution to a social, and non-individualistic, account of representation assumes a special interest.

Two kinds of representation

I said Durkheim's central claim was about our full capacity to represent. Why the qualifying word full here? The point is that Durkheim brought two different things under the label of representation. One of these he called 'individual representation'. Individual representations are the sensations, images and dispositions generated in our minds by the stimulation of our sense organs. For Durkheim these are merely subjective phenomena and, taken on their own, cannot do justice to the process of representation. Something more is needed. For example, representations typically involve concepts, and concepts, insisted Durkheim, are not just more or less elaborate sensations.

They are not just 'groups of similar images', and furthermore they 'are always common to a plurality of men' (1914a/t.1960c:330, 327).

Durkheim was surely right. If we use the word representation to refer to such things as, say, the Bohr theory of the atom (how Bohr and his fellow physicists represented the atom), or how geologists currently understand the origin of the continents (how their theories represent the movement of the continents), or to the way the international money markets want high unemployment because of their fear of inflation (how they represent this connection to themselves), then we are dealing with a different order of phenomena. We have moved from the subjective to the relatively objective. Physicists, geologists, market traders, and so on, confront the world, not as isolated individuals, but as members of a more or less specialized community of knowers and actors. For Durkheim such a community was a *sui generis* reality, where the 'representations which express it have a wholly different content from purely individual ones' (1912a/t.1915d:16). We have therefore moved from Durkheim's individual representations to his collective representations.

Group-minds and public opinion

For Durkheim a culture was made up of collective representations in the same way as the individual mind was made up of sensations, images, feelings and dispositions (1898b). But if individual representations exist within the individual mind, where do collective representations reside? Do they exist within a collective mind? Can the idea of collective representations make sense without postulating a 'group-mind'? Given that Durkheim located collective representations in something he called a collective *conscience,* these fears seem well grounded. Nevertheless he vigorously rejected such imputations, saying that he would never deal in such unscientific ideas. Sympathetic commentators today accept this, while admitting the terminology invites misunderstanding.

If Durkheim was not postulating group-minds, what was the reality to which he intended to draw our attention? One suggestion is to equate the collective *conscience* with so-called public opinion. Collective representations then become nothing more than the typifications and stereotypes of public opinion. The 'public opinion' interpretation was given in Alpert's standard monograph, *Emile Durkheim and his Sociology* (1939). As a variant Alpert also introduced another term, institution, saying that Durkheim's students and followers, such as Mauss, sometimes identified collective representations with institutions. Alpert went on to quote Cooley, to suggest that the notions of institution and public opinion are very similar, so the two readings were taken to amount to the same thing (*ibid.*:160–1).

Demystifying collective representations in this way is all to the good and gives us helpful signposts for following Durkheim's thinking. Nevertheless it

does not solve all our problems. We may feel more at home with talk about public opinion than we do with the daunting terminology of collective *conscience* and collective representations, but is it really any more clear? What is a 'public', and how can 'it' have opinions? I can have an opinion, but can a 'public' have one? Cooley, surely correctly, said that public opinion is not a 'mere aggregate of separate judgements, but an organisation, a co-operative product of communication and reciprocal influence' (Alpert 1939:160). But still the question remains: what sort of thing is this 'product'? The same applies to the appeal to institutions. An institution, Cooley said, 'is simply a definite phrase of the public mind, not differing in its ultimate nature from public opinion' (quoted in Alpert 1939:161). Is the concept of public mind really better than Durkheim's original collective *conscience*? We are in danger of replacing one set of vague words by another and mistaking familiarity for logical clarification.

As well as its vagueness, this reading of Durkheim as it stands does nothing to illuminate more specific problems. Steven Lukes points out that the idea of a collective representation looks disturbingly ambiguous. Sometimes, says Lukes, a collective representation is said to be collective because of the mode of thinking and perceiving in question; and sometimes because of the thing which is thought or perceived. Durkheim never seemed to make up his mind whether a collective representation is a special kind of representation in virtue of the *subject* which has the representation, or in virtue of the *object* which is represented (cf. Lukes 1973:7). These problems are not addressed by merely transposing the concept of collective representation into the terminology of public opinion.

In order to solve the problem of vagueness, as well as these more specific difficulties, we need to adopt a new strategy. We must put forward a model of how collective representations work. If we are to follow Alpert's hint and think of collective representations as institutions, we need a deeper understanding of institutions. We must not simply make a gesture towards examples: we must expose the principles at work.

Institutions

I shall use an account developed by Barnes (1983). This may be called the self-referential model because institutions are said to be systems characterized by a process of self-reference. This is the essential mechanism making them what they are. Three examples should serve to convey the basic idea. For instance, the status of 'leader' is created by the person concerned being treated as, seen as, and spoken of, as the 'leader'. Similarly a 'currency' is a currency in virtue of being accepted as, and used as, the currency. Again, a person possesses certain 'rights' in virtue of their being accorded these rights, and because they are treated as possessing them. In general, and at the most basic level, persons whom others did not believe possessed a right would not, in

fact, have that right. Their possession of it is created by their being perceived to possess it. These examples are surely typical. They show us that institutions are realities created by references to those realities themselves, where 'reference' is to be taken broadly to include not just verbalizations, but all intentional performances.

Now we must ask: what reality is it towards which all these performances are directed? If people act as they do because they know, believe, assume, think or suppose that X is the leader, what is the reality they know, believe, assume, think or suppose? The answer is that it is a reality composed of the corresponding acting, knowing, believing, assuming, thinking and supposing engaged in by everyone else. Leadership is a reality, but not a reality independent of all the individual performance informed by that idea itself. Indeed, it is a reality constituted by these very performances. There is no object at which the performances are directed that is independent of the performances themselves. Exactly the same line of enquiry, with exactly the same result, can be pursued for the other cases. We create something as a currency by treating it as a currency, but what are we treating it as? We are treating it as something which is treated in precisely this way by everyone else (or a sufficient number of others). In regarding someone as having a right, what is the reality to which we are thereby orienting ourselves? It is the reality of everyone else (or a sufficient number of other people) similarly so orienting themselves. For each of these acts in turn, that is each of the acts that make up what everyone else is doing, the same analysis applies. In each of the examples, all the referring, thinking and orienting is part of a practice which is constituted by these very acts of referring, thinking and orienting. The object of all these intentional acts, the acts which constitute the practice, is just the practice itself. Thus, taken as a whole, the practices in question are self-referring, hence the name 'the self-referential model'.

The claim is that Durkheim's collective representations are indeed institutions, but institutions understood in terms of the self-referential model. Thus when he said: 'The representations which form the network of social life arise from the relations between the individuals thus combined', he is to be understood in terms of this model (1898b/t.1953b:24). Representations, in the self-referential model, do indeed form the network of social life. Social life is a network of criss-crossing references to the roles and statuses that make it up. Shared representations, such as money, leadership, rights, are themselves the currency of interaction. They are not only created and sustained by these interactions they are, in a large measure, constitutive of them. Now each person's appeal to these representations, each use of these ideas, is itself one of the 'parts' which go to make up the 'whole' of the institution. But we cannot simply think of these parts as preformed constituents of the whole. On the self-referential model, we can equally well say that the parts only have the identity they do because of the whole. Only within this context can the acts of reference be taken to have the meaning

they do. We can therefore use the model to make sense of claims such as the following, when Durkheim said:

> a great number of our mental states including some of the most important ones, are of social origin. In this case, then, it is the whole that, in a large measure, produces the part; consequently, it is impossible to attempt to explain the whole without explaining the part—without explaining, at least, the part as a result of the whole.
>
> <div align="right">(1914a/t.1960c:325)</div>

The mental states in question, the ones of social origin, might be ones which utilize a symbol for an institution or, say, a social status. They are the mental states which employ collective representations and derive their meaning and content from this collective currency. If individual representations are internal to the user, because sensations and images and dispositions are states of the body or mind, then collective representations must count as external. They come from outside the individual user and symbolize, or depend on, processes taking place in the social totality. Durkheim's descriptions of wholes and parts, in mutual interdependence, are an acknowledgement of the very processes brought into prominence by the self-referential model.

Some of the previously noted obscurities about collective representations now fall into place. We can see why Durkheim's account appears to be ambiguous. Lukes rightly drew attention to the equivocation over what was the subject and what the object of a collective representation. This equivocation is hardly surprising because, if the self-referential model is right, the subject and the object of the acts of reference constituting an institution are, when taken together, one and the same thing. In our examples of institutions there is no distinction between the 'discourse', in the broadest sense, to be found within the institution, and the object of that discourse. The thing talked about, and the talk itself, are one and the same. If Durkheim had explicitly seized the self-referential model—which he had not—he could have been explicit about this, and explained that the 'ambiguity' was no ambiguity at all, but a feature of the self-referential reality under discussion.

External reference

How do these ideas apply to concepts that refer to or represent objects in the non-social environment? If we are to follow Durkheim, we must think of all concepts as collective representations but, so far, the self-referential model of institutions seems to address only the character of a group's self-understanding, rather than its understanding of the natural world. The self-referential model is not, however, limited to representations of social facts. Here is the first step to generalizing the account.

Think of the process of ostensive definition in which a concept learner is introduced to a group's classificatory practices by some authority, teacher or competent language user. The teacher points to objects, names them, and the learner eventually picks up the accepted use. The individual's sense of similarity is shaped and structured until it fits that of the local culture and conforms to the local conventions. Notice that in learning how to use a word, and in acquiring a shared concept, the learner is doing two things at the same time: learning something about the world and learning something about the society. The information on the social dimension concerns the currency by which members of the group organize their interactions with the world. That interaction is not merely the sum of many independent interactions, but a truly collective exercise. To participate in it involves knowing the way in which behaviour is to be co-ordinated, and the basis on which to co-operate and produce the collective good called 'culture'. The basis of the co-ordination and co-operation is shared meaning. To know the meaning of a symbol is to know the right way to use it, and the rightness of the way is a standard sustained by the users. The way it is maintained is through its acknowledgment as the standard through all its uses, employments and citings—in other words, through all the mechanisms identified in the self-referential model.

An alternative way to state this point, and to connect it directly with the idea of an institution, is by reference to rules. It is sometimes said that to learn the meaning of a word is to learn the rule for its use. If we now add that rules are institutions, and analyse institutions in the sense of the self-referring model, we reach the desired conclusion. We have embedded reference to objects—objects in the non-social world—into processes of a social, self-referential kind. I shall return to these themes, but first let me address some potential problems with the position developed so far.

Testing the interpretation

In commenting on a work on the materialist theory of history, Durkheim said that he agreed with the idea that social life cannot be explained 'by the conception of it held by those who participate in it'. He went on to say: 'in order for collective representations to become intelligible, they must truly spring from something and, since they cannot constitute a circle closed in upon itself, the source from which they derive must be found outside them'. That outside source he identified with the substratum of members of society 'as they are socially combined' (1897e/t.1982a:171).

This passage seems to contradict the idea that collective representations should be identified with institutions or, at least, with institutions conceived as self-referring systems. The self-referential model implies that social life exists in the way it does precisely because of the actor's own conception of it. The phenomenon of leadership is, to a great degree, made up of the

participants' ideas about leadership and who possesses it. Similarly money is constituted by members' ideas about money, and rights exist because people think and act in terms of rights. Is not this an attempt to explain social life by the conceptions of its participants—the very thing Durkheim denied?

The contradiction is more apparent than real, because there is a difference between claims about what *constitutes* social life and claims about what *explains* it. The difference is evident when the explanation concerns origins, for example, the origin of an institution. The emphasis in Durkheim's passage is on the problem of how certain practices arose. He is not saying social reality cannot be constituted by the ideas of its members; he is saying it cannot be explained by the members' own ideas about society. For example, it is one thing to say that a right is constituted by ideas about rights, but quite another to say the institution of a right can be explained by the members' self-understanding. (The proponents of a system of rights might believe they were handed down by the gods.) It is the latter proposition about explanation that Durkheim was rightly denying, while it is the former proposition about constitution that is asserted in the self-referential model. There is no real contradiction here, and so no impediment to the reading I am proposing.

There are, however, genuine explanatory problems with the self-referential model—and these concern precisely the question of origins, that is, questions of the sort Durkheim tended to emphasize. The difficulty is this: the self-referential model characterizes a structure but it does not say how that structure might have been created. Indeed, given the character of the structure, in which everything depends on everything else, it can be difficult to imagine how it could be set in motion. Barnes gives this problem a name: he calls it the problem of priming. How is the system 'primed' or set in motion? He also formulates a condition of adequacy that any solution must satisfy. The stimulus or cause, which primes the system, must come from outside the system itself. If it did not come from outside, the explanation would indeed be question-begging and circular. Significantly, this condition of adequacy was just what Durkheim was insisting on in the passages discussed above, so this reinforces my previous conclusion.

The problem of the origins of institutions takes us to the heart of Durkheim's account of collective representations and the institutional reading of that position. Representations with genuine conceptual content, so the argument goes, must be grounded in institutions; but are not institutions themselves created through fully intentional processes of reference and representation? Is not that the whole point of the self-referential model? If so, the account of representation attributed to Durkheim portrays him as arguing in a circle. So once again we are led to the question of origins. Only if the origin of an institution, as a self-referring system, can be grounded in non-intentional processes can it be held to be the basis of intentionality. I shall now address this problem.

The problem of priming

I am going to use an idea put forward by Haugeland which can be read as a simple story about the origin or preconditions of social life (Haugeland 1990). Haugeland asks us to imagine 'a community of versatile and interactive creatures not otherwise specified except that they are conformists' (*ibid.:*404). (I shall assume these 'creatures' are people, and that Haugeland is telling us about certain human instincts.) Conformity means two things: first, a tendency to *imitate* what others do; and second, a tendency to *sanction*. When others do not conform they are negatively sanctioned, and they are reinforced and rewarded when they do. We are to think of these tendencies as spontaneous and automatic. Conformists do not decide, choose or wish to conform. Nor do they engage in negative or positive reinforcement as a result of policy or strategy. These things just happen, naturally and unbidden, in rather the way our involuntary body-language or facial expressions operate.

Given their disposition to conformity, the members of an interacting group will gradually become more and more similar. They will shape one another's behavioural dispositions, and the dispositions which they come to share will have an interesting status and causal history. After a while their presence within each of the individual members of the group will derive from their prevalence in the group as a whole, that is, from their being available to act as the base-line for the tendency to conform. As Haugeland puts it:

> The community-wide classes of similar dispositions that coalesce under the force of conformism can be called 'norms' —and not just collections or kinds—precisely because they themselves set the standard for that very censoriousness by which they were generated and maintained.
>
> (*ibid.:*405)

The process of positive feedback creates something which Haugeland describes, I think correctly, as having 'a *de facto* normative force' *(ibid.).*

We have here an instinctive prototype for the self-referential processes lying at the heart of every institution. Here is a mechanism by which collective representations, as institutions, can be grounded in something which is non-intentional and non-conceptual. The pattern of behavioural dispositions provides the framework into which verbal utterances and other intentional performances can be fitted. It provides, what nothing else could provide, a content for the signals which are sent back-and-forth within the matrix of an already socially shaped activity. The *de facto* norm, once it is in place, is a structure which the participants can gradually transpose onto the verbal plane, until they are labelling, citing, invoking and referring in the manner described

by the self-referential model. This means we now have an in-principle solution to the problem of priming.

Notice how a group of conformists would operate in the course of ostensive learning. The gradual convergence of their behavioural dispositions would apply equally to those dispositions which inform their classificatory activity, and their tendency to apply words and labels to objects in the material environment. It would also apply to their tendency to perform routine operations, such as counting, generating number sequences, and following simple arithmetical procedures. These processes would settle into some local equilibrium and then, themselves, become available as objects of reference. They would become institutions which could be invoked as sanctioning became more sophisticated and explicit. The practices could ground explicitly formulated rules, and provide the basis of 'blind', non-interpretational steps upon which all rule-following finally depends.

It is now appropriate to draw together what can be said about the respective roles of individual and collective representations. This can be done by reference to Durkheim's ideas about the duality of human nature.

The duality of human nature

There is a long-standing theological tradition which sees a duality in human nature and identifies its two parts as the body and the soul. Durkheim thought that so venerable a tradition could not be a mere error. Indeed, for him, it is a methodological postulate that 'a human institution cannot rest upon an error and a lie' (1912a/t.1915d:2). The duality, he said, is genuine: it lies in the tension between our nature as biological individuals, and our nature as members of a society. This dualism runs right through our moral, and even our cognitive lives: hence the need to distinguish two kinds of representation. In each of us there are 'two classes of states of consciousness that differ from each other in origin and nature, and in the ends towards which they aim' (1914a/t.1960c:337). One of these states is made up of individual representations, the other of collective representations, or, more properly, of individualizations of collective representations.

Individual representations inherit all the unstable characteristics of personal and psychological phenomena. They are fluid and continuous and lack clear boundaries. Left to itself, our sense of the resemblances between things would produce divergent and fluctuating classificatory tendencies. Only with the utilization of collective representations can we attain clarity, objectivity and stability.

While there is much that is contentious in this, there is a core of profound truth. As long as we have nothing but our individual, psychological faculties to rely on, we have no objective standard of right and wrong that is applicable to our individual representations and their employment. There is no real 'normativity' in play. Suppose we see an object that seems to belong

to a familiar kind. We recognize it and respond accordingly. Did we recognize rightly? That depends on what the image, trace, disposition, or whatever mediated our response, was supposed to 'mean'. Only in the light of that 'meaning' can the response be said to have gone rightly or wrongly, and yet—for the isolated individual—that meaning is something which has not yet been specified. Whatever seems right is right because there is no other standard.

For Durkheim, in cognition as in morality, there is only one place those standards can come from, namely, society. The standards or rules for the use of a sign are to be thought of as themselves things with the character of institutions. They are created in the course of all the moment-by-moment references to 'the meaning' of the sign, all the appeals to it, the challenges made in the name it, the uses and behaviour which are said to routinely express it, and the implications which are said to be drawn from it. When our individual states have become a party to interactions of this character then they have ceased to be merely individual representations. They have become components of collective representations and have become veritable institutions.

Acknowledgment

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