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RETHINKING DURKHEIM'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT I: ON 'MARXISM' AND THE ANXIETY OF BEING MISUNDERSTOOD

JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER

Abstract In this paper I offer a new interpretation of the development of Durkheim's thought. Rather than linear progress, Durkheim's scientific career presented a distinctive circularity. Although always interested in a 'structural' theory, from the beginning of his work Durkheim sought a structural theory which would decisively differ from the materialist emphasis on coercion. In the first part of his career, however, Durkheim was unable to conceptualise such subjective structure in a satisfactory way. As a result, in his early writings between 1885 and 1893, Durkheim's theorising was incredibly unstable. Starting from an idealism he moved eventually to a materialism. *The Division of Labour* (1893) contains within itself all these unstable solutions, and even by the time of its publication Durkheim indicated an intense dissatisfaction with the result. Over the next three years he rewrote his theory in a fundamentally subjectivist way. Although throughout this period theoretical issues per se were uppermost in Durkheim's mind, so was the critical reception of his work. I examine the social and intellectual context of Durkheim's France, particularly a series of little known reviews of his first works, to establish this critical milieu, and I demonstrate how sensitive Durkheim was to these criticisms in this decisive period of theoretical change.

Readings of great theorists are geared to the times. Just as Marx has recently been decisively reinterpreted, so has Durkheim. On one thing most of Durkheim's readers, past and present, have always agreed: he, like Marx, emphasises social structure. Durkheim helped to create classical sociology because he located social forces outside of the individual actor. But at this point the serious theoretical problems only really begin. The problem for Durkheim, as for Marx, is what does structure mean? Of what are these limits composed? If structure exists, somehow, outside of the individual, can it act only in opposition to freedom? The problematics of Durkheim interpretation, then, are precisely the ones around which Marxist inquiry has also revolved. The fundamental question has always been how Durkheim stipulates the relation between determinism and free action. People keep reading Durkheim, and arguing about him, to find out whether the determinateness of social structures must involve the sacrifice of voluntary control and, conversely, whether the postulate of individual control can be purchased only at the price of denying the realities of external force. How generations have understood Durkheim has fundamentally shaped the pattern of their sociological discourse. The debates over Durkheim's work are, inevitably, arguments about the most basic directions of sociological thought.

Yet Durkheim has become the resource for such theorising in fundamentally different ways and at fundamentally different levels of analysis. Theorists have argued for and against the 'Durkheimian solution' in ways that, ironically, have eliminated properly theoretical analysis altogether. Merton (1967 : 59-60) and Stinchcombe (1968 : 25) insist that Durkheim's greatness lies in the power of his empirical generalisations, an insistence which would remove from our consideration of Durkheim the power of his theoretical reflection as such. The mirror image of this argument is that, far from being observational and scientific, Durkheim's work must be viewed as the immediate product of his social environment. For Zeitlin (1968 : 235) and Kagan (1938 : 243), if Durkheim's conception of social structure leads in one direction or another it is for ideological reasons, not for merely empirical ones.

The present essay insists, to the contrary, that Durkheim's understanding of the critical relation between individual and society cannot be reduced to either of these anti-theoretical extremes. It involves, rather, reference to *sui generis* analytical issues that are neither simply ideological nor completely empirical, issues that revolve around the 'problem of order' in a strictly delineated sense. This analytical problem of order has been seriously misunderstood in the recent history of sociological debate. In the first place, it has been falsely conflated with theoretical issues of a much more specific kind. For Coser (1960), Nizan (1932 : 191-192), Rex (1961 : 105-108) and Kagan (1938), 'order' means simply assumptions about the empirical frequency of conflict or equilibrium, and on these grounds they find Durkheim's insistence on a modicum of social stability to be seriously deficient. In Kagan's words, Durkheim 'is the anti-revolutionary par excellence in the sense he is profoundly attached to tradition' (1938 : 243). Yet those who defend Durkheim frequently make the same theoretical mistake. Nisbet (1965 : 28) claims that Durkheim's acceptance of social harmony and obedience constitutes 'a massive attack on the philosophical foundations of liberalism', and for this attack he applauds and embraces him. Following the same narrow definition of the order problem, but rejecting Nisbet's reading of where Durkheim stood in relation to it, Giddens (1972 : 41) claims that because of Durkheim's concern with change and historicity 'it can perfectly well be said that it the problem of order was not a problem for Durkheim at all' (cf. Giddens 1972a : 358-361). Much of this confusion, of course, can be traced back to Parsons' influential interpretation in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937 : 313, 346-347), for while Parsons sharply differentiated the concern with empirical stability from any necessary ideological orientation, he often linked Durkheim's analytical solution to the order problem - which Parsons himself did so much to illuminate - with Durkheim's perception of empirical equilibrium.

In terms of the present essay, the 'problem of order' involves two distinctive theoretical issues, each of which concerns the fundamental nature of social relationships. First, the order problem involves a decision about the random versus structured quality of human events, about whether the sources of individual aggression are individualistic, or collective and supra-individual. This question, which involves the sociological reformulation of the nominalism-realism debate, must be cross-cut by a second one: by assumptions about the nature of human action. Whether or not individuals act simply in an instrumentally efficient and purely calculating way or whether every act involves reference to a nonrational and ideal standard vitally affects the nature of the individual or collective order that a theorist describes. It is as a result of such decisions about the nature of action that individualistic order is portrayed as an 'exchange' (e.g. Homans 1961) or as 'symbolic interaction' (e.g. Blumer 1969) and that collective orders are described as external and coercive (e.g. Marx 1962 (1847)) or internal and voluntaristic (e.g. Parsons 1937).¹

It is the contention of the present essay that the conflict between Marxism and Durkheimian sociology revolves precisely around this latter issue. Various theorists, of course, have contended that this conflict does not exist, that Durkheim, like Marx, is a 'structuralist' who emphasises social organisation and external control. But the notion of 'structure', as I insisted above, is where sociological theory begins, not where it ends. The most critical issues in theoretical logic are lost if Durkheim's and Marx's common collectivism is taken to exhaust their theoretical relationship. While Marx and Durkheim agreed that social science must focus on supra-individual social structure, they disagreed profoundly about the nature of action upon which such structures are based.

This profound disagreement with the Marxist understanding of order was, at least, the position at which Durkheim arrived by the time of his fully mature theoretical work. What has not been understood is that on the way to this latter position, Durkheim seriously considered a variety of theoretical alternatives. Indeed, in the process of his early theoretical development he came, in his own view, precariously close to the position of Marx himself. It is on the nature of this early development, and on the rationales for Durkheim's changes in theoretical position, that this essay will focus. In so reconstructing the dialectic between Durkheim and the shadow of Marx, the following argument seeks to illuminate not just the central dilemmas of classical sociology, but those of contemporary thought as well. It will refer to some of the most basic controversies in contemporary studies of science and knowledge production in a more general sense.

Durkheim's Early Writings: Ideological Consistency and Theoretical Change

Durkheim came to maturity in the late 1870s and 1880s, in the crucible of the formation of the Third Republic in France. From the very beginning of his identification as a sociologist - which Mauss dates from 1881 - he linked his intellectual vocation to certain normative or ideological goals: first, French society must be changed so that it could become stable; second, this stability could be achieved only if there were justice, particularly justice in economic distribution; third, the increased state organisation necessary to create justice should never occur at the expense of individual freedom. Durkheim described these goals as socialism, but he insisted, to use contemporary terms, that this be socialism with a voluntaristic or human face. This ideological approach to order remained constant throughout the course of his life. The problem, for Durkheim, was the translation of these goals into a theoretical and empirical perspective. It is precisely here that the changes in Durkheim's sociology occurred.

From the beginning, Durkheim was convinced that the achievement of democratic socialism depended upon avoiding the kind of instrumental rationalistic theory of collective order that was proposed by the English utilitarians and by Marxist socialists. Such a reductionist and instrumental understanding of the issue, Durkheim believed, could describe the reformist state only as an external and coercive force vis-à-vis individual will (Durkheim 1975 : 379 (1888)). Quoting approvingly from Schaeffle, the German socialist of the chair, Durkheim (1886 : 77) insists that the concept of socialism 'could be unburdened of all contradictions' only if 'the fundamental principles of Marx's theory are renounced' (cf. Durkheim 1975 : 387 (1888)).²

Yet in the years between the publication of Durkheim's first essay reviews, in 1885, and the appearance of his first mature work, *The Division of Labour in Society*, in 1893, Durkheim proved unable to transform this general analytical conviction into a viable and precise theory. Although the full story of Durkheim's earliest writings cannot be recounted here, the fundamental lines of his frustrating early development can briefly be presented. In the eight-year period that defines Durkheim's early writings - a period that covers sixteen essays and two major monographs - one can discern an ambivalent yet nonetheless distinctive theoretical evolution away from his ideological goal of combining collective order with individual freedom. In the earliest of these writings, Durkheim emphasised the importance of 'sympathetic instincts' inherent in every human being. Since these natural sentiments led to associations, Durkheim (e.g. 1886 : 309) thought he had discovered a way that moral order could be social and individual at the same time. Yet eventually he rejected this solution as too precarious. Such independently motivated

individuals, he came to believe, would develop no sense of the social whole outside of their own selves. Even if they were enmeshed in society, they would not be conscious of any subjective connection (e.g. Durkheim 1885 : 453 and Durkheim 1978 : 114 (1885)). As an alternative to this vision, Durkheim considered the position that morality was in some way external to the individual and could, therefore, more powerfully control him. Yet even as he elaborated this new position, he worried about the status of the individual in such a scheme, and to resolve this worry he postulated that such a moral order could grow out of the individual action itself. Following Wundt, he portrayed the individual as permeable and 'anti-substantialist', so order could be internal and external at the same time (Durkheim 1887a : 127). Yet this flirtation with Wundt turned out to be brief, for, once again, Durkheim (1886 : 76) concluded that if individual volition were involved social order was bound to be unstable.³

Because he did not yet understand the process by which social order could be outside the isolated individual and still be subjective, or 'inside', at the same time, Durkheim was compelled at this early point to turn to the notion that order could be stable only if it were external in an ontological sense. He turned, in other words, back to an instrumental, quasi-materialist position. Even in his earlier work he had often evoked, in a hesitant and ambivalent way, a model of the actor as an adaptive and rationalising force (e.g. Durkheim 1886 : 60-69). This model now became explicit: the adaptive actor was endowed with egoistic motives and portrayed as responding primarily to external conditions. What has happened, ironically, is that Durkheim has retreated to the very instrumental position he had, at the very beginning of his career, so criticised in Marx. He has laid the groundwork for a vision of state and society as mechanical and coercive as what he has supposed to be Marx's own.

What is extraordinary is that Durkheim himself seemed to feel that exactly the opposite was true. In his opening lectures at Bordeaux in 1888 and 1889, during which he first developed this more instrumentalist perspective, and in his 1892 Latin dissertation when he first systematised it, Durkheim asserted that this instrumental transformation would, in fact, allow him finally to reconcile individual freedom and social order. The trick was his empirical focus on the division of labour. Like the classical economists whom he earlier criticised, at this point in his development Durkheim (1978 : 207 (1888)) believed that the division of labour was a device for reconciling free choice with the collective ordering of individual interests. With this new understanding of modern life, he announced in the preface to *The Division of Labour* (1964 : 37 1893), the 'apparent antinomy' between individual autonomy and social determinism had been resolved: social solidarity would be transformed in a manner beneficial to both individual and society, and this would occur

because of 'the steadily growing development of the division of labour'.⁴

In fact, of course, these hopes were illusory. Durkheim's earliest premonitions were correct. He could not maintain voluntarism if order was to be given a purely external and material caste. In Book I of *Division*, Durkheim (1864 : 127 (1893)) begins by eulogising labour division in an extremely individualistic way. 'It is in the nature of special tasks', he writes, 'to escape the action of the collective conscience'. The contract itself, according to this logic, becomes the prototypical form of cooperation and aggregation. Since 'society is made up of a system of differentiated parts which mutually complement each other' (Durkheim 1964 : 151 (1893), translation altered), it is only natural to assume that 'the involvement of one party results either from the involvement assumed by the other, or from some service already rendered by the latter' (Durkheim 1964 : 124 (1893), translation altered). But as Durkheim's argument develops, he sees very quickly through the individualistic quality of such reasoning. As he does so, he emphasises the non-contractual, supra-individual controls which are necessary if the freedom inherent in labour division is to be balanced by stability and collective control. In the course of the remainder of Book I, Durkheim vacillates between describing these collective elements as normative and nonrational or as state directed and instrumentally coercive. Durkheim's normative version of non-contractual social control is best known, and the notion of the diffusion of the collective conscience in modern society is certainly a significant point in Durkheim's fifth chapter (1964 : 147-173 1893). What is much less widely recognised, however, is that alongside this exposition of the normative dimension there also exists in Durkheim's First Book a strongly instrumentalist approach to social order. The restitutive law which creates the non-contractual regulation of contract is portrayed by Durkheim (1964 : 11 (1893)) as 'only a means' (*C'est seulement un moyen*), and he insists (1964 : 112 (1893)) that 'these prescriptions do not correspond to any sentiment in us'. Modern law becomes a purely rational and coercive vehicle, and the modern regulating state merely 'the essential cog in the machine' (Durkheim 1964 : 113 (1893)).

In the Second Book of *Division*, this instrumental perspective on collective order emerges with full force: labour division becomes the product not of free and rational choice or the normatively regulated pursuit of interest, but the result of 'the struggle for existence' - '*la lutte pour la vie*' (Durkheim 1964 : 226 (1893)) - a struggle that is itself determined by changes in ecological volume and density and, ultimately, by unequal control over scarce resources. By Book III, the results of this shifting theoretical logic are clear: Durkheim is forced to recognise, and eventually to give causal primacy to, unequal material conditions and to the purely coercive state. Because of the 'great inequality of the external conditions of the struggle *la lutte*' (Durkheim 1964 : 370,

n. 26 (1893)), the modern worker is subject to the 'forced division of labour', an order that operates with unstoppable mechanical force. If Durkheim had begun the *Division of Labour* with an empirical emphasis on individualism that belied his emerging - if somewhat anomalous - theoretical determinism, he had concluded it with an explanation of order that seemed emphatically to confirm it.

If one class of society is obliged, in order to live, to take any price for its services, while another can abstain from such action thanks to resources at its disposal which, however, are not necessarily due to any social superiority, the second has an unjust advantage over the first at law.
(Durkheim 1964 : 384 (1893))

Durkheim's Middle Period:

Dissatisfaction, Misinterpretation and Radical Revision

Despite the fact that Durkheim trumpeted the results of *Division of Labour* as demonstrating the empirical power of his new science, there is good reason to believe that, consciously or unconsciously, he felt enormous dissatisfaction with that he had wrought in his first great work. First, of course, there is the great discrepancy between his theoretical development in *Division of Labour* and the goals he had set out eight years before. He had started out to provide an alternative to the Marxian understanding of socialist industrial society; he had concluded, in the Third Book of *Division*, offering a model of capitalism that differed from Marx only in its inability to describe fully the class origins of the material inequality it described (see, e.g., O'Connor 1980).⁵ Second, there is evidence for this dissatisfaction in the ambiguous and contradictory quality of *Division* itself. If Durkheim had concluded with an instrumental and coercive understanding of modern social order, he had certainly given ample evidence elsewhere in the work, particularly in the individualistic and normative passages in Book I, that he still valued more voluntaristic understandings even if he could not successfully articulate them.

Still more powerful evidence of Durkheim's theoretical dissatisfaction can be found in two little-known essays that he published in 1893, in the very shadow of *The Division of Labour* itself. In the first, a review of Gaston Richard's *Essay sur l'origine de l'idée de droit*, Durkheim argues against the notion that the simple calculus of interest, structured by a powerful state, can teach humanity to follow a more just path. It is, he writes (1893a : 292), only 'completely interior sentiments' that can be relied on, for 'it is inside the conscience and not outside, it is in the sympathetic and altruistic disposition and not in the sentiments of interest that it is necessary to go look for the solution'. Later that year, in his 'Note sur la définition du socialisme', Durkheim makes this challenge to the latter Books of *Division* even more

forcefully. The problem of capitalism, he writes (1893b : 510), does *not* derive from its failure to provide 'material contiguity' - a central argument in *Division* Book III. Businesses may well have material relations with one another, 'acting and reacting' among themselves. Workers, too, may pursue their interests alongside of their fellows. The problem of industrial society, rather, arises because such material contiguities do not guarantee that the businesses or workers 'have ends which are common to them', that they actually form among themselves any 'moral community'. It is the moral community, he now insists, that must be the object of socialist change, not the redistribution and reorganisation that he had identified in *Division*. One must understand, he insists, that 'a revolution could not occur without a profound moral transformation', and that the famous 'social question' of Marxist socialism is not economic but moral.

These essays, in fact, presaged long-term shifts in Durkheim's theory of order, shifts that Durkheim himself (with a single brief exception to be discussed below) never admitted as having occurred at all. In the following year, in an essay that would become the first chapter of *Rules*, Durkheim (1938 (1895)) laid out an affective and normative understanding of the roots of social life that systematically called into question the instrumental theory of interaction, volume and density that informed *Division of Labour* Book II.⁶

Durkheim begins innocuously enough, claiming in his preface (1938 : lx (1895)) that he wishes only 'to expound the results of our work in applied sociology', yet in the very first paragraph he reveals that this is hardly the case. 'When I execute my contracts', Durkheim writes (1938 : 1 (1895)), 'I perform duties which ... conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively'. The social order which contracts represent, apparently, need not be based primarily on the external sanctions of state supported law. Durkheim proceeds in the following pages to define sociological facts in a startlingly subjective way. They are, he writes (1938 : 2 (1895)) 'ways of acting, thinking, and feeling', a phrase which he often reduces (1938 : 9 (1895)) to the shorthand 'beliefs and practices' (*les croyances et les pratiques*). Durkheim still insists that social facts be grounded in a sub-stratum, but he (1938 : 3 (1895)) now defines this organisational base as 'religious denominations, political, literary, and occupational associations'. The 'actions and reactions' which create social organisation - and which in *Division* Book II were ecological and economic - are here completely emotionalised. They refer to the 'special energy' that is created when individual consciences interact, and their product is 'collective sentiment' (Durkheim 1938 : 9 (1895)). Collective facts, Durkheim now insists, consist only of emotion which is more or less crystallized. In periods of pure association, this emotion is still close to the primordial 'liquid' form, and the significant collective facts are volatile

phenomena like 'transitory outbursts' and 'great movements of enthusiasm' (1938 : 4 1895). Eventually, however, emotion acquires a certain 'rigidity'; it develops 'a body, a tangible form' that is more sharply differentiated from the individual psyches which first produced it (1938 : 7 (1895)). Social order, in sum, is simply 'currents of opinion' more or less solidified, currents which reflect the state of the collective 'soul' or 'spirit' (*l'âme collective*) at different times (1938 : 8 (1895)).⁷

In his lectures on socialism in 1895-96, Durkheim used his new perspective to elaborate his remarks in the 1894 'Note' about socialism as a voluntary moral system. He now insists (1958 : 204 (1895-96)) that the crucial reforms suggested in Book III of *Division*, political reorganisation and economic redistribution, will be ineffective unless the 'state of our morality' is also reformed. The problem of order is posed here as one of renewed symbolic or moral authority.

What is needed if social order is to reign is that the mass of men be content with their lot. But what is needed for them to be content is not that they have more or less but that they be convinced that they have no right to more. And for this, it is absolutely essential that there be an authority whose superiority they acknowledge and which tells them what is right (1958 : 200 (1895-96)).

In *Suicide*, written the following year, this new insistence on solidarity and affectivity as the source of collective order is applied to a wide range of modern social institutions. If the object of *Suicide* is the social fact which Durkheim calls 'suicidogenic currents', the status of this supra-individual fact is the inverse of the economic or political 'facts' that Durkheim had early emphasised. Durkheim (1951 : 299 (1897)) defines suicidogenic currents as composed of a 'collective force of a definite amount of energy'. They reflect a social substratum which is itself composed of 'beliefs and practices' (1951 : 170 (1897)) and they form a society which Durkheim (1951 : 310 (1897)) describes as, in the last analysis, having a 'physical existence'.

In the same year that *Suicide* was written - indeed, by the time that monograph had appeared in print - Durkheim was embarked on a radically new, more explicitly spiritualised elaboration of this subjective mode of theorising. I will discuss this later development Part II of this essay. Before doing so, the extra-theoretical sources of Durkheim's intellectual shift must be closely examined, for it is only in this fuller context that the true ramifications of Durkheim's development can clearly be understood.

I have insisted on 'theoretical' dissatisfaction as the trigger to this upheaval in Durkheim's work. Indeed, no major social or personal event could have created such a rapid disavowal for the intellectual changes began almost simultaneously with the publication of *Division* itself. What I would

like to suggest, however, is that Durkheim's profound intellectual misgivings made him particularly sensitive to change in his social and cultural environment. France was changing in a way that could only have hastened the theoretical evolution that Durkheim was experiencing.

The early 1890s marked the renewal of Marxism in French society. This was stimulated in part by increased class conflict in the political and economic realms, as indicated, for example, by the election in 1893 of fifty socialists - by no means all of the Marxian variety - to the French parliament and by the great upsurge in strikes and worker protests that characterised this period.⁸ These social developments were certainly not primarily stimulated by Marxian ideology, but they constituted, nonetheless, important reasons for the growing attention that French intellectuals paid to Marxist theory.⁹ Leading journals like the *Revue de metaphysique et de moral* and the *Revue philosophique*, where Durkheim had published most of his important early work, now published on-going discussions of socialist theory and reviewed numerous works by Marx and Engels and their followers. The first exclusively sociological journal in France, the *Revue internationale de sociologie*, also devoted considerable space to articles on socialism and Marx, and in the first issue of the *Annales de l'institut international de sociologie*, historical materialism became the focus of a number of the authors. This new enthusiasm for Marxism spread even to Durkheim's inner circle. 'Some of the most brilliant among his own students', writes Durkheim's nephew and collaborator, Marcel Mauss, 'were converted to socialism, especially Marxism'. Mauss adds that 'in one social study circle some examined *Capital* as they elsewhere considered Spinoza (Durkheim 1958 : 2-3).

This contextual knowledge helps us to reconstruct - hypothetically, to be sure - Durkheim's predicament in the early 1890s. He had just concluded his first major work, a treatment which, evidently, he had already begun to regret and which he concluded he had better revise. Moreover, he was in the midst of the revival in popularity of a system of thought - Marxism - that seemed closely to resemble the one he had just publicly proclaimed, not only in its ideological commitment to socialism and science but, more importantly, in its analytical theory and its empirical analysis of modern society. One might imagine that Durkheim wished very badly to distinguish his new ideas from those of Marxism, without indicating, of course, that they differed in any way from those he had previously held. In Part II of this essay, in fact, we will see that this was precisely the course he took. First, however, we must examine Durkheim's situation in more detail, for we shall discover that Durkheim's 'predicament' was far from being purely an imagined one.

In the very midst of Durkheim's theoretical shift away from the instrumentalism of *Division*, he was confronted with what could only

have been an enormously frustrating realisation. His French audience viewed him as a confirmed materialist very much in the Marxist mode, if not a Marxist himself! Almost without exception, the reviews that Durkheim received in the four years following publication of *Division* presented his subsequent writing - as he himself had asked for it to be read - merely as the extension of that first work.¹⁰ The reviewers were in universal agreement, moreover, that *Division* had itself been one-sidedly materialist in its orientation. In the first and probably most important review, Brunschvicg and Halévy (1894) wrote that even if Durkheim refused to accept all the consequences of his position, the *Division of Labour* was, in the last analysis, 'mechanical and material' in its causal analysis. Reading *Division* into the later *Rules*, they argued (1894 : 565-567) in the face of Durkheim's very explicit theorising that his proposed method excluded all psychological elements from society. And in a series of concluding arguments that must have been especially grating to Durkheim, they offered suggestions that Durkheim had actually already taken up. Social laws, they write (1894 : 571), should be studied in terms of the spontaneous interaction of the individuals whose spirit gives them life. Only in this way could these so-called laws be seen for what they really are, namely, common ideas and sentiments.

The same perspective on Durkheim's sociology is expressed in the 1896 issue of the same review. Charles Andler finds the determinism and fatalism of Durkheim's sociological analysis to be antithetical to the democratic culture he is trying to create. In concluding, he accuses Durkheim of the 'Marxist error'.

The 'conditions of economic production' are an example where Durkheim's theory could no doubt be better applied than to society as a whole, without, however, still being completely relevant. Monsieur Durkheim generalizes the economic thingism (le choisisme) of Marx while making from it a thingism that is specifically sociological. In doing so, he generalizes the Marxist error (1896 : 252, n. 1).

And in a review published in Germany in 1897 by Paul Barth, a follower of Dilthey, Durkheim had evidence that this materialist misinterpretation had spread beyond the border of France alone. Barth's *Die Philosophie der Geschichte als Soziologie* discusses Durkheim's work in his chapter on 'The Economic Conception of History'. He attacks Durkheim for being, like Spencer, 'an almost superstitious worshipper of the contract' and he argues (Barth 1922 : 612 (1897)) that, in his early works at least, Durkheim views morality as a 'hindrance to economic progress' and as 'unfavourable to the autonomy of the individual'.

As if to confirm this materialist evaluation by his non-Marxist critics, Durkheim was hailed in 1895 by Sorel, the major Marxist intellectual in France, as a kindred spirit. In the lead article of the first issue of the Marxist journal, *Le Devenir*, Sorel (1895 : 16-17) applauds *Rules* for its anti-psychological emphasis on coercion and constraint. Neatly summing up the prevailing perspective on *Rules* as in complete continuity with *Division*, he notes (1895 : 1) that Durkheim had 'just brought together in a small volume of very modest style, what is essential to his doctrine'. As for the earlier *Division*, Sorel (1895 : 23) calls it an exposition of 'great beauty' and makes a direct parallel between it and the theory of Marx. 'With Durkheim', he writes, 'we are placed on the ground of real science, and we see the importance of struggle (*la lutte*)'. But Durkheim seems to hesitate, Sorel regretfully notes, before taking the final step toward a fully materialist history. In order to define the conditions of existence more specifically, 'he would have to place himself on the ground of Marxist philosophy' (1895 : 177). If Durkheim could borrow from Marxism the conception of classes, 'I would be the first', Sorel affirms (1895 : 180), 'to acclaim him my master', for he is the 'only French sociologist who possesses a sufficient philosophical preparation and well developed critical spirit to be able to perceive in historical change scientific laws and the material conditions of becoming'. Durkheim could only have read Sorel's essay with alarm.

Insofar as they referred to Durkheim's *Division of Labour*, these reviews must be read as fully legitimate criticisms of key elements of his work, and they must have brought home to Durkheim with unassailable force certain vital implications of his first theoretical work. As such, they could only have reinforced his growing conviction that radical theoretical renovation was necessary. The intensity of Durkheim's feelings on this issue are revealed, ironically perhaps, by the vehemence with which he rejected these critical claims. Durkheim protests too much: he never acknowledges even their partial validity. Indeed, he carried a bitter resentment against them throughout the rest of his life. In his Preface to the first edition of *Rules*, he (1938 : xxxiv (1895)) protests against 'what critics have called our positivism', objecting that although his method 'will perhaps be judged crude and will possibly be termed materialistic, it is actually nothing of the kind'. In 1896, he responded to Andler's review by writing to the editor that 'I regret absolutely the ideas that are attributed to me'. He insists Andler 'has been able to attribute them to me only by taking advantage of several isolated words, while I had myself taken greater care to put the reader on guard against such an abuse'. In a private letter the following year, which refers to the German review by Barth, he writes to his follower Céléstin Bouglé that he had 'never dreamt of saying that one could do sociology without any psychological background, or that sociology

is anything other than a form of psychology' (cited in Lukes 1971 : 234, n. 35).

Durkheim's frustration could only have been increased by the realisation that this critical response to his work failed completely to recognise the enormous changes that he himself had introduced in *Rules* - changes which were intended to circumvent the very errors of which he stood accused. But Durkheim himself had never acknowledged that a break existed, and his reviewers simply took him at his word: they saw in *Rules* only the formalisation of the method of *Division*. 'On the very points on which we had expressed ourselves most explicitly', Durkheim (1938 : xli (1895)) writes in exasperation in his Preface to the second edition of *Rules* in 1901, 'views were freely attributed to us which had nothing in common with our own; and opponents held that they were refuting us in refuting these mistaken ideas'. 'The critics', he wrote (1938 : liii (1895)), 'claimed that we are explaining social phenomena by constraint'. But this, he insists rather lamely, 'was far from our intention - in fact, it had never even occurred to us that it could have been so interpreted, so much is it contrary to our entire method'.

Such disingenuousness can be explained only if we understand the true quandary in which Durkheim found himself. He had realised, consciously or not, that the theory that informed so much of *Division* was a drastic mistake. Yet his positivist faith that objectivity would reveal the very consistency of social life, his intellectual pride in the integrity of his theorising, and perhaps also his lack of critical self-consciousness - all of these factors prevented Durkheim from acknowledging in the mid-1890s that he was, in fact, embarked upon a drastic theoretical revision. To his understandable but, nonetheless, illegitimate indignation, no one seemed aware of this fateful turn - neither his antagonistic critics nor his faithful students. If his new path were to be recognised - if his divergence from the theory of Marxian socialism were ever to be recognised for what it was - his innovation would have to be more asserted in a more emphatic and radical way.

Notes

¹ In so defining the 'problem of order' as concerned with instrumental-versus-nonrational action and with the problem of individualism-versus-collective structuration, I am following a long tradition of epistemological and ontological debate in social thought, a debate which for present purposes may be said to have begun with Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1965 (1845)) and the most important contemporary articulations of which have been presented by Parsons (1937) and Habermas (1973). The problem of action involves conflicts over idealism (e.g. purely normative action) and materialism (purely efficient, amoral action). The problem of individualism-versus-collectivism centres on the problem of whether order is simply negotiated by individual interaction or whether it has *sui generis*, emergent properties. For an important recent treatment of this latter problem in terms of the split between nominalist and realist tendencies in the Chicago school of sociology, see Lewis and Smith (1980). I have discussed these 'presuppositional' issues at much greater length in Alexander (1982a, 1985) and in Alexander and Giesen, forthcoming, but the above definition should be more than ample for the purposes of the present discussion.

- ² It is an undecided historical question whether or not Durkheim actually knew Marx's own work. Although there is some evidence that he did, he was surely responding more immediately to the mechanical Marxism of the German and French 'Marxists' of the First International. Whether his criticism, therefore, can be considered a valid response to Marx's original theory depends on what one considers the relation to be between Marx and his immediate followers. The present author feels Durkheim's understanding of Marx's work to be have been essentially correct, although this judgement is not relevant to the argument of the present essay, which concerns only Durkheim's *understanding* of Marx and Marxism. For an extensive comparison of Marx's actual theory with Durkheim's, see Alexander 1982c.
- ³ It is interesting to recall that Wundt also had a profound influence on the social behaviourism of George Herbert Mead. Mead took over the same 'anti-substantialist' understanding of the individual that so attracted Durkheim, and for the same reason: only with this conception could order be both collective and 'voluntary' at the same time. The subsequent misrepresentation of Mead's thought as a form of 'substantialist' individualism - by Blumer and others - has obscured this commonality between the two thinkers, as has the reading of Durkheim which concentrates only on such semi-materialist works as *The Division of Labour* (1964, 1893). Yet although Durkheim rejected Wundt's understanding in these early writings, he returned to it, in a more sophisticated way, in the later work I will discuss below.
- ⁴ The preceding analysis of the gradual but nonetheless distinctive shift from moral individualism to moral collectivism and, finally, to instrumental collectivism in the course of Durkheim's early writings suggests that earlier interpreters have been wrong to stress the internal consistency of this period and its continuity with the rest of Durkheim's work (e.g. Giddens 1970; Wallwork 1972 : 27-46; and Filloux 1977 : 23-34). Such an insistence on the continuity of Durkheim's early writings makes it virtually impossible to understand his emerging perspective on the importance of the division of labour and, even more importantly, his eventual dissatisfaction with this position.
- ⁵ The changing and contradictory nature of Durkheim's argument in *Division* has not been recognised by most of Durkheim's interpreters. In part, this has occurred because of an unfortunate tendency to defer to Durkheim's own perspective on the work's contents. In discussing Book II, for example, critics have accepted Durkheim's claim that he is measuring not simply demographic but also moral density. Pope (1973), for example, views Durkheim's emphasis on population expansion and exchange as simply another example of the 'social realist' approach to morality that dominates the entire work. This perspective, however, collapses the problem of individualist-versus- collectivist reasoning with the problem of action, failing to distinguish the radically different approaches to the 'social' which are possible even when a collectivist, social realist position is accepted. Though much more nuanced and generally more accurate than Pope's account, Lukes' (1972 : 154, 169) discussion similarly fails to distinguish the tremendous differences between moral and material density in Book II. In his discussion, Lukes (1972 : 168-72) too often simply reproduces the vagueness and the contradictory quality of the Durkheimian original. While he accuses Durkheim of technological determinism and of being inconclusive about the basic details of the social change he describes (1972 : 164), these charges are never systematically documented. One reason for this failure is Lukes' argument for the close continuity of *Division* with Durkheim's earlier writings. In fact, Lukes views the whole sequence of Durkheim's writings from 1885 to 1983 as clarification and specification rather than as having developed any new and contradictory theoretical logics. Filloux (1977 : 74-78) adopts much the same sanguine posture. Giddens has gone so far as to argue not only for the internal continuity of *Division* but for its centrality in Durkheim's corpus as a whole. The work provided, Giddens writes (1971 : 190), 'a definitive perspective upon the emergence of the modern form of society which Durkheim never abandoned and which constitutes the lasting ground of all his later works'.
- Even the critics who have emphasised discontinuity in *Division* have insisted that there exists within this work a developmental and logically coherent movement toward 'better theory'. Nisbet (1965 : 36-47), for example, argues that a normative perspective on social order gradually overshadows an earlier instrumental one. Earlier, Parsons (1937 : 308-324) had

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argued for much the same position, claiming that Book I, Chapter 7 - the chapter I have identified as a point where Durkheim turned toward a troublesome instrumentalism - represented the emergence of a more satisfactory normative perspective.

While Durkheim's French interpreters have been much more willing to recognise the economic and even Marxist elements of *Division* (e.g. Aimard 1962 : 217-18; Cuvillier 1948 : 83; Kagan 1938 : passim), they have, almost without exception, merely turned the English and American critics' error on its head: the instrumental perspective on order, they have argued, was consistent and continuous throughout Durkheim's 1893 work.

- ⁶ The essays that became *Rules* were first published in 1894 in the *Revue philosophique*.
- ⁷ 'L'âme' is translated as 'mind' throughout *Rules* - and in Durkheim's other work as well - but it seems more appropriate in the light of the emerging direction of Durkheim's theorising to translate it more literally as soul or spirit.
- ⁸ For an excellent discussion of this aspect of the French scene and its relation to new and more normative developments in Durkheim's work, see Tiryakian (1978 : 233-234).
- ⁹ This portrait of the impact of Marxian and socialist ideas on French intellectual circles draws upon Vogt (1976) and Llobera (1978), although I disagree substantially with the interpretations these authors give to the facts they report.
- ¹⁰ The sole exception that I have been able to locate to these negative reviews is an essay written by Paul Lapie (1895, particularly : 309-310), 'L'Année sociologique, 1894'. Lapie saw very clearly the subjective, normative basis that Durkheim gave to social facts in the essays which became *Rules*, and he applauded him for it. Later, as Director of Primary Education in France, Lapie introduced Durkheimian sociology into the required national curriculum. This movement toward subjectivity may have pleased Lapie because he shared Durkheim's opinion that scientifically-based Republic ethics were essential to the survival of French democracy.

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