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Emile Durkheim And The Categories Of The Understanding

Barbara Patricia Hostetler

ÉMILE DURKHEIM
AND THE CATEGORIES OF THE UNDERSTANDING

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Émile Durkheim attempts to demonstrate the social character of the categories of the understanding--concepts such as space, time, causation, etc. The present study is devoted to clarification of this account of the categories. It is proposed that Durkheim's account of the relation between the categories and society may be understood more clearly by interpreting his categorial formulation as one concerned with the origin of the categories, not in an absolute, but in a relative sense of "origin." To show that this is the case, the proposition "the categories are social in origin" is subjected to linguistic philosophical analysis. A partial explanation of the interest in absolute origins which one does find in Elementary Forms is provided by indicating the influence upon Durkheim's thought of evolutionism and his views of causation and definition.

It is also suggested that Durkheim's actual categorial claim is set forth in the statement "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements" rather than in the proposition "the categories are social in origin." The suggestion is made that "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements" is an hypothesis which is empirically testable in fact, whereas "the categories are social in origin," if interpreted in an absolute sense of "origin," is empirically

testable only in principle.

The question of whether this categorial formulation is a theory of categories is answered negatively: it was not intended as a theory but as an hypothesis, and it does not satisfy the conditions which a theory of categories must meet. It is thus a less extensive categorial claim than is commonly supposed. Whether it amounts to a theory of knowledge is answered affirmatively. In addition to its status as an epistemological contribution, certain ideas emphasized in it--consensus, variation in conceptual frameworks from one society to another, the learning of categorial relations as a social process, and concepts as tools--are shown to be apposite to several areas of study other than epistemology, including social anthropology, semantics, philosophy of science, and philosophy of language.

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This Quotation is a Most Obvious Contradiction in terms

CHAPTER I

APPROACH TO A PROBLEM

> Error is never so difficult to be destroyed as when it has its roots in language.
> --Jeremy Bentham

Toward the end of his career, Émile Durkheim developed an interest in epistemological matters. The result was a theory concerning the origin of the categories of the understanding. In its mature formulation, it appears in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.[1] Durkheim considered this a "renovated" theory of knowledge.[2] Initially, it had been formulated nine years earlier in the Durkheim-Mauss monograph, Primitive Classification.[3]

Of the many facets of Durkheim's work, subsequent theorists have given this theory least attention of all. It is not the purpose of this study to speculate about why this should be the case. Rather, I wish to suggest that Durkheim's epistemic theory deserves both more attention and attention of a different sort than it has received.

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[1]Émile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965). Originally published as Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie ("Travaux de l'Année Sociologique") (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1912), this work appeared three years later in English translation (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd.; New York: Macmillan). All page references are to the Free Press edition.

[2]Ibid., p. 32.

[3]Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, Primitive Classification, ed. and trans. by Rodney Needham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). Originally published in 1903.

In other words, there is more in it than meets the eye. The precise nature of this different sort of attention and the reasons that justify it are provided in the present chapter.

A number of different approaches might be used in a study that aims to further our understanding of the theory in question. To settle upon an approach is an obvious necessity, and to have singled out one approach is not to disallow the legitimacy of alternative approaches. However, the tack one takes must be that most suited to one's purpose.

My purpose is to show that among commentators on this aspect of Durkheim's work, there is a prevalent if unacknowledged tendency to be somewhat unclear as to just what it is Durkheim has actually done. This unclarity has led to some questionable assumptions. The criticisms advanced and the conclusions drawn are, naturally, based upon these assumptions. The sort of commentary that results may then obscure our view of the very theory with which it deals. I am suggesting that it is possible to get clearer about what Durkheim is up to, and that Durkheim himself gives clues that make such clarification possible. This is neither a matter of reading-in nor of reading-out. Ultimately, it is a question of whether one is warranted in criticizing a theory which has not been as clearly comprehended as it might have been.

In the present chapter, I shall (1) briefly sketch Durkheim's theory of the origin of the categories as it is commonly understood, (2) show what others have made of it, and (3) indicate what I want to make of it. The disparity between

(2) and (3) will be posited as adequate justification for a critical analysis of this theory, examination of a sort which, so far as I know, has not been undertaken.

Durkheim's Theory of Categories as Commonly Understood

Durkheim states that since Aristotle, the categories of the understanding have included such concepts as those of "time, space, class, number, cause, substance, personality, etc."[4] He defines them as "a certain number of essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life and lie at the root of all our judgements."[5]

Not content with either the apriorist, empiricist, or psychological accounts, Durkheim postulates a social origin for the categories. The logical formulation of this argument may be given as follows:[6]

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[4] Elementary Forms, pp. 21-22.

[5] Ibid., p. 21. They are "like the framework of the intelligence." (Ibid., p. 22)

[6] Ibid., p. 22. Durkheim first wrote extensively of "representations" in 1898. He speaks of them as "an order of phenomena...distinguishable by certain characteristics from all other natural phenomena," and as both "causes" and "caused." (Vide: "Individual and Collective Representations," in Sociology and Philosophy, trans. by D. F. Pocock (Glencoe: Free Press, 1953), p. 4.) In his Rules (1895), he uses the term to refer to "our ideas of physical things" when he says that "our ideas (réprésentations) of physical things are derived from these things themselves and express them more or less exactly...." (Vide: The Rules of Sociological Method, 8th ed., ed. by George E. G. Catlin, trans. by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 23.) In Elementary Forms, he seems to equate the word with 'symbol' or 'symbolization' when he says that representations "stand for" or "express."

Religious representations are collective
(social) representations.
The categories are found in, and are products
of, religious representations.

The categories are social in origin.

The remainder of the Elementary Forms is largely an effort to substantiate this argument empirically by applying the comparative method to ethnographic data from various primitive societies. In consequence, it is held that the categories are reflections of social institutions, that they express things of a social nature. For example, the category of "class" is modelled upon the human group, that of "time" upon "the rhythm of social life," that of "space" upon "the territory occupied by the society," and "sufficient force" upon "the collective force."[7]

What is the relation of the categories to knowledge? Conceptualization or thought relies upon the ability to classify.[8] The categories are universal modes of classifying. And, of course, knowledge is impossible without conceptual thought. In this perhaps oversimplified manner, it is possible to understand the common interpretation of Durkheim's theory of the categories as an attempted "sociological theory of knowledge."

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[7] Ibid., p. 488.

[8] All thinking involves classification, and every classification involves judgments. (Vide: Stephan Körner, Categorial Frameworks (Library of Philosophy and Logic) (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 1) Cf. Durkheim's remark, supra, p. 3, n. 5.

In order to show that the theory merits more attention than it has received, the following section indicates what others have made of it.

Appraisals of Durkheim's Theory

An arresting variety of questions may be asked with regard to this facet of Durkheim's work. Some, of course, are rather more basic than others. Has he developed a tenable theory of the social origins of the categories? Is it empirically testable? Does this categorial theory amount to a theory of knowledge? (That there are other questions which we are warranted in considering even more basic is a matter dealt with in the final section of this chapter.)

Of those who have given attention to this endeavor, interest has been most widespread and liveliest among British social anthropologists. An awkwardly small number of sociologists have given consideration to this theory. And, as Robert Nisbet has observed, "Durkheim's efforts to explain the 'categories'...have had little effect upon epistemology--where they have never been taken very seriously...."[9]

For the sake of convenience, all commentary may be divided into "pro," "con," and "salvage," in accordance with the tenor of the differing evaluations. Discussion of what has been made of this theory is here carried out along these lines. These distinctions are not intended to be mutually exclusive; much overlapping occurs.

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[9]Robert A. Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 97.

The "Pro"

Most commentary, whether predominantly negative or positive, endorses at least in part and to some extent either Durkheim's methodology or what he has to say. Almost no one has committed himself to unequivocal acceptance like that expressed by Irving Zeitlin:

> Durkheim argues quite cogently that the most fundamental categories of thought are ultimately derived from the conditions of men's social existence; the cognitive structure of men's minds is determined by the structure of their society.[10]

Zeitlin does share in an unfortunate tendency to assert that such-and-such is the case without offering any substantiation whatsoever for the assertion.[11]

For the most part, what is considered praiseworthy in Durkheim's attempt to reformulate a theory of knowledge emerges in commentary of the "salvage" sort.

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[10]Irving M. Zeitlin, Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 277.

[11]This is not to be taken as implying that authors of survey texts are expected to present detailed argument for each comment made. Nonetheless, an assertion remains an assertion. And unless what is thus stated is empirically true or self-evident, and particularly if the assertion has to do with as controversial a matter as the theory we are discussing, it does not seem unreasonable to expect something by way of substantiation, or at least allusion to the fact that the assertion has been subject to debate. As a scholarly vice, this is deplorable on at least two counts: uncritical readers are easily misled into accepting a statement as true simply because it is there before them, and the more critical are left to conjecture as to the reasoning behind the assertion.

The "Con"

Criticism is wide-ranging in variation, emphasis, and degree of intensity and thoroughness. Here, we are on interesting ground.

Perhaps best-known of the harsher critics is Émile Benôit-Smullyan, who writes: "the...most daring of Durkheim's speculative flights is a sociologistic explanation of the categories of thought and the forms of intuition."[12] To enumerate all of his criticisms would require considerable space, so discussion is restricted to some of those which, he holds, may be made from the views of empiricism and apriorism.

From the point of view of empiricism, Benôit-Smullyan writes, "extension, duration, etc., are real properties of the physical world, not something created by the social mind." It is absurd to suppose, as Benôit-Smullyan does, that Durkheim is saying that society creates extension, duration, or any of the other properties in the physical world. This critic fails to distinguish extension and duration as they exist in the physical world from the concepts of extension and duration that men have. Benôit-Smullyan objects, too, to the idea that "society imposes categories of space and time on individuals in order that they may meet at a given time and place and otherwise co-operate," claiming that "if the world were not

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[12] Émile Benôit-Smullyan, "The Sociologism of Émile Durkheim and His School," in An Introduction to the History of Sociology, ed. by Harry Elmer Barnes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 517. Note his use of the Kantian phrase 'forms of intuition.'

already spatial and temporal, there could not be any problem of 'meeting'." This misses the necessity for the distinction I have already indicated; men need the concepts of space and time in order to make their way about. To suppose otherwise would be analogous to assuming it sufficient for an individual that the culture into which he is born have a language and that he himself need not learn to use that language.

The apriorist, this critic claims, can counter Durkheim's theory by pointing out that

> the meaning of time would be quite incommunicable to one who initially lacked all sense of time.... Society may influence the conventional methods of dividing or describing space and time, but it could not give us the fundamental forms of intuition. The same may be said for such categories as cause, substance, etc.[13]

Here Benôit-Smullyan obscures at least three important points: (1) if the individual came wired with a "sense of time," there would be no point in communicating to him "the meaning of time;" and that we do engage in the latter process is nicely demonstrated, for example, in Ludwig Wittgenstein's examples of ways in which children actually do learn about time;[14] (2) the apriorist claim assumes the existence of "fundamental forms of intuition," the necessity of which is exactly what Durkheim is calling into question; and (3) Durkheim does not

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[13] Ibid., pp. 533-534, n. 67.

[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), BrB, I, 51, 53.

deny certain abilities to the mind,[15] but rather denies that the categories are "fixed in any definite form."[16] Thus, we find in the Durkheimian thesis the same conclusion Popper had reached when he wrote that Kantian "intuition" is "largely the product of our cultural development and of our efforts in discursive thinking."[17]

Two critics, Charles Elmer Gehlke and William Ray Dennes, find equally disturbing what they take this theory to imply about the individual mind. Gehlke claims that as a result of his adherence to the mind-stuff theory,[18] Durkheim sees the categories as "a content of the mind, not as a capacity of mind...."[19] While the categories assuredly do not have to do with mental capacity, I disagree that Durkheim sees them as a mental "content." They are representations or symbolic

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[15]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 32. One of the claims made for his theory of knowledge is that "it leaves the reason its specific power."

[16]Ibid., p. 28. "They are made, unmade and remade incessantly; they change with places and times."

[17]K. R. Popper, "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject," in Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, III (Proceedings of the Third International Congress for Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, Amsterdam, 1967), ed. by B. Van Rootselaar and J. F. Staal (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1968), p. 359.

[18]This theory emphasizes the constitution rather than the genesis of the mind.

[19]Charles Elmer Gehlke, "Émile Durkheim's Contributions to Sociological Theory," in Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, LXIII (1915), pp. 52-53.

constructs. In Durkheim's words, they "appear as priceless instruments of thought which the human groups have laboriously forged through the centuries and where they have accumulated the best of their intellectual capital."[20] Durkheim compares the categories to "tools," saying that "there is a close relationship between the ideas of tool, category, and institution."[21] Nor is it possible to agree with Gehlke that for Durkheim "the social mind is all the mind that exists," the individual having "become only a body."[22] This is the sort of error that results from failing to recognize metaphor --in this case, Durkheim's conscience collective--as metaphor.[23]

Dennes charges that Durkheim's theory of the origin of the categories "depends upon his ambiguous conception of mind." If 'mind' is taken as man's "system of cognitive faculties," Dennes considers it "ridiculous to say that the categories of the mind are in any sense transferences from social organization." And if 'mind' is "a mere aggregation of representations

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[20]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 32. (Italics mine)

[21]Ibid., n. 24. Gellner has observed that concepts and beliefs, in a sense, are institutions because they provide a fairly permanent frame independent of any one individual, within which individual conduct occurs; in another sense, they are correlates of all social institutions. (Vide: Ernest Gellner, "Concepts and Society," in Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis, ed. by Dorothy Emmet and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 115.)

[22]Gehlke, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

[23]I follow Bohannan in viewing this as mere metaphor. (Vide: Paul Bohannan, "Conscience Collective and Culture," in Essays on Sociology and Philosophy by Émile Durkheim et al, ed. by Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 82.)

or ideas, there is sense in supposing that the first ideas of time may have been of periodicity of primitive religious rites," but this would have no "bearing upon either epistemology or...the nature...of the categories of the mind."[24] What appears to mislead Dennes is indicated in his use of the phrase 'categories of the mind' as (presumably) equivalent to 'categories of the understanding.' Dennes' phrase does encourage one to think of the categories as attributes of something called "mind," but this is not how Durkheim views them; as pointed out above, they are conceptual instruments, categories of thought, tools used in mental activity. There is nothing odd about considering them thus. Nor is it relevant which of the two constructions of 'mind' was actually assumed by Durkheim.

Gehlke does raise a question that seems both sensible and important: is the theory of the categories empirically testable? Gehlke maintains that it is not, that Durkheim's "system of classification has all the virtues of a good classification except a basis in ascertained fact."[25]

It is interesting to juxtapose against this criticism of Gehlke's that of Lévy-Bruhl. The latter agrees with the classifications indicated in the earlier Durkheim-Mauss study,

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[24]William Ray Dennes, The Method and Presuppositions of Group Psychology (University of California Publications in Philosophy, 6) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1924), p. 39.

[25]Gehlke, op. cit., pp. 104, 138. The two classificatory criteria usually recognized are (1) a single, unambiguous way of classifying that is consistently used, and (2) an exhaustive logical universe of discourse.

adding that "in many undeveloped peoples--in Australia, in West Africa..., among the North American Indians, in China, etc., ...all natural objects...are arranged...in the same classes as the members of the social groups, and if the latter are divided into so many totems, so, too, are the trees, rivers, stars, etc."[26] But while corroborating the existence of such arrangements, Lévy-Bruhl differs in his interpretation, regarding them as only "resembling...in appearance, our logical classifications." A people whose mentality is "prelogical" is not capable of developing a proper classification.[27]

Difficulties inherent in the treatment given symbolic classification in both Primitive Classification and Elementary Forms have been pointed up by anthropologists.[28] In most instances, these are intimately connected with methodological criticisms. So far as the latter are concerned, opinions range from Kroeber's objection that neither Durkheim nor Mauss had ever done field work[29] to Evans-Pritchard's quite charitable

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[26]Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, How Natives Think, tr. by Lilian A. Clare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 110. Originally published in 1910 as Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures, translated into English in 1926.

[27]Ibid., p. 111. Cf. Elementary Forms, p. 487.

[28]In his introduction to the English edition of Primitive Classification, Needham identifies classification as "the prime and fundamental concern of social anthropologists." (Vide: Durkheim and Mauss, op. cit., p. viii)

[29]For a counter to this charge, see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, "French Sociology," in Twentieth Century Sociology, ed. by Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert E. Moore (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 521.

declaration that "no field study of totemism has excelled Durkheim's analysis."[30]

Rodney Needham has produced a comprehensive list of methodological objections to the earlier work. This study, he says, includes cases in which there is "a simple lack of correspondence between form of society and form of classification...," even "different forms of classification...found with identical types of social organization, and similar forms with different types of societies."[31] The authors, he continues, fail to "subject their thesis to test by concomitant variation," and when their evidence reveals anomalies, there is an attempt to explain them away by positing that a contradiction is a survival, the original form of which "must" once have existed.[32] As for evidence, sometimes none is given or what is given is contrary to their argument.[33]

Needham has also pointed to questionable logical moves Durkheim and Mauss make, in particular their use of argument

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[30] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Introduction," in Robert Hertz, Death and the Right Hand, trans. by Rodney and Claudia Needham (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), p. 24. Evans-Pritchard also states that "Durkheim and his pupils used the comparative method with as much skill and rigour as it is capable of." (Ibid., p. 14)

[31] Durkheim and Mauss, op. cit., pp. xv-xvi.

[32] Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

[33] Ibid., p. xix.

by petitio principii.[34] The same fallacy, one may note, occurs in the argument for the theory of the social origins of the categories as set forth in Elementary Forms (supra, 3).

Evans-Pritchard considers such criticisms as Needham has advanced "grave objections." Once all exceptions are registered and accounted for, he says, little remains of the theories that is more than "plausible guesses of so general and vague a character that they are of little scientific value, all the more so in that nobody knows what to do with them, since they can neither be proved nor disproved in final analysis."[35]

Ethnologists have advanced many other criticisms either of Durkheim's theory directly or that might be applicable to it.[36] In order to judge their validity, one would need to assess the reliability of the ethnographic data on which they are based. In mentioning some of these criticisms, I have simply tried to show the seriousness with which Durkheim's religious and epistemological endeavors are taken by many British social anthropologists, as well as register some of their objections.

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[34] Ibid., p. xiv. This is the fallacy of assuming in the premiss(es) what is asserted in the conclusion; since the premiss(es) begs the question, this is a circular argument.

[35] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 75-76.

[36] For example, see: Victor Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual;" Edmund Leach, "Telstar and the Aborigines of La pensée sauvage;" Peter Worsley, "Groote Eylandt Totemism and Le Totémisme aujourd'hui (Emmet and MacIntyre, op. cit.); Worsley, "Emile Durkheim's Theory of Knowledge," Sociological Review, n. 5, 4 (1956).

Finally, although I shall return in Chapters II and III to the sort of criticism he makes, mention should be made of Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer observes that "we might ask whether the categories which Durkheim seeks to derive from social reality are not rather the conditions of this reality."[37] He questions whether Durkheim has ascertained correctly the direction of the religious imprint.[38]

Now I shall briefly mention what seems the dominant attitude among sociologists towards Durkheim's theory of knowledge.

"Salvage"

'Well, no, Durkheim didn't pull off a sociological theory of knowledge, but he did contribute to the sociology of knowledge.' This resolution of the problem of what to make of Durkheim's epistemic theory has led many sociologists of knowledge to accord him privileged status as either an "immediate antecedent"[39] or as unequivocal contributor.[40]

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[37]Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. II, Mythical Thought, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 193.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Kurt H. Wolff, "The Sociology of Knowledge and Sociological Theory," in Symposium on Sociological Theory, ed. by Llewellyn Gross (Evanston: Row, Peterson and Co., 1959), p. 568.

[40]Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, rev. enl. ed. (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), p. 473. Other sociologists of knowledge deny both claims.

Gerard DeGré partially embraces this resolution when he treats Durkheim's theory as a contribution to the sociology of knowledge. However, he also wants to say that as a "sociological theory of knowledge," Durkheim's formulation effects the intended rapprochement. He argues for an epistemological contribution solely on the grounds that Durkheim demonstrates the "necessity," i.e., authority, of the categories as being of a moral, rather than a logical, sort.[41] He holds that Durkheim has thus done "justice to the thesis of the universality of the forms of knowledge without putting them in a transcendent 'world of ideas'."[42]

Merton disagrees with DeGré and speaks of "Durkheim's dubious epistemology."[43] Its "most serious shortcoming," he states, stems from its author's "uncritical acceptance of a naive theory of correspondence" according to which the categories are held to "reflect" certain features of the group organization.[44] Merton alludes to what he seems to consider a further weakness in the theory when he writes that Durkheim's analysis "is intended to account not for the particular categorical system in a society but for the existence of a system common to the society."[45] He concludes that "we need not

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[41]Gerard DeGré, Society and Ideology: An Inquiry into the Sociology of Knowledge (New York: Columbia University Bookstore, 1943), pp. 80-81.

[42]Ibid., p. 84.

[43]Merton, op. cit.

[44]Ibid., p. 480. (Italics Merton's)

[45]Ibid., p. 484.

indulge in the traditional exaltation of the categories as things set apart and foreknown, to note that Durkheim was dealing not with them but with conventional divisions of time and space."[46]

What Merton makes of this theory is interesting but also open to question. However, it has the merit of being a cogent and explicit statement of what seems to be the standard position among sociological theorists.

Summation

Assessments of Émile Durkheim's theory of the social origin of the categories have been overwhelmingly negative. Most critics have held that the theory is untenable on logical, methodological, and/or scientific grounds, in short, that it fails to demonstrate the social origin of these general concepts. And nowhere in the literature have I found a statement unequivocally asserting that it amounts to a theory of knowledge.[47] (For the conditions that must be satisfied by a theory of knowledge, see infra. p. 98, n. 206.) Nisbet succinctly sums up the situation when he says: "it would be folly to pretend that /Durkheim's/ views here have gained the

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[46] Ibid., p. 473.

[47] Zeitlin's conclusion may perhaps be interpreted in this way, but he does not state this explicitly. DeGré's suggestion that the theory provides "epistemological clues" can hardly be taken to mean that he construes it as an actual theory of knowledge either; the markedly cautious way in which he speaks of it as a "sociological theory of knowledge" may be a clue as to the extent to which he commits himself to endorsing it as a meaty epistemological contribution.

kind of acceptance won by other aspects of his thought."[48] But, he adds, "they nonetheless deserve mention."[49] They do indeed "deserve mention," but as I shall endeavor to point out in the following section, they deserve more than that.

What May be Made of Durkheim's Theory

Have the most fundamental questions regarding this theory been answered? It may be suggested that they have not yet been asked. For example, "What does the proposition 'the categories are social in origin' mean?," and "Is this really Durkheim's epistemic claim?" Assuredly, there are appraisals of his theory and from these have issued verdicts. However, it is a truism that in order to accept any theoretical critic's conclusions, we must be justified in believing at least that the theory criticized has been clearly understood. I should like to suggest that this condition has not been met.

The responsibility for this deficiency in interpretation cannot be attributed solely to Durkheim's readers, for his style has about it a deceptive clarity. Yet, here and there, he provides clues which call into question the assumption that he is doing quite what he has been taken to be doing. These clues are sometimes tucked away in footnotes where he qualifies important points made in the main body of the text; occasionally, they are encountered in the text itself.

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[48] Nisbet, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

[49] Ibid., p. 97.

Chapter II is devoted to the misinterpretation of Durkheim's epistemic claim. Using a linguistic approach, I shall analyze the proposition "the categories are social in origin," since this is the conclusion commonly taken to be his claim. Through analysis of the word "origin" and other expressions used in talking of the relation between the categories and society, two issues are clarified. First, there is the issue of whether the author's claim is to be construed in the sense of absolute or relative origin. Second, there is the need for clarifying the character of the relation posited between the categories and society.

This analysis reveals Durkheim's tendency to be interested in absolute origins, origins in the sense of "absolute beginnings" or first-causes. Yet, my position is that this is not the sense of origin in which the proposition "the categories are social in origin" is to be understood. Therefore, I include a partial explanation of this tendency by discussing the influences of evolutionism and Durkheim's own views of causation and definition upon his thinking.

Continuation of the analysis provides substantiation of my claim that the proposition in question has been misinterpreted, that when Durkheim speaks of the relation between the categories and society he is speaking of origin in a relative sense. This affects the meaning of his claim, the extensiveness of that claim, and some of the criticism that has been levelled at his categorial endeavor. It is my contention that a stronger categorial claim has been attributed

to the author than he was making.

A reinterpretation is given in Chapter III. In contrast to the commonly held interpretation, which is in principle empirically testable, this reinterpretation emerges as empirically testable in fact. Its backbone is social consensus.

Also considered in this chapter are some implications of this reinterpretation, including implications for criticism. Answers are proposed for the two standard questions posed with regard to Durkheim's epistemic endeavor, viz., "Is it a theory of categories?" and "Is it a theory of knowledge?" The former query is answered negatively, the latter affirmatively. In addition, I make the suggestion that as a theory of knowledge, what he has given us is in fact empirically testable.

Chapter IV is the "Conclusion" of the present study. In it are indicated the ways in which Durkheim's epistemic treatment contributes to ethnology, linguistics, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and epistemology.

One sociologist of knowledge has written that "the social scientist must avoid one pitfall more than any other: to divide in thought what is undivided in life."[50] The principle of Occam's Razor is equally feasible, mutatis mutandis, when applied to dividing in criticism what is not divided in theory. I suggest that there is no reason to assume a difference between any given category and the conventional conceptualization of that category. Most critics have wanted to differen-

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[50]Werner Stark, The Fundamental Forms of Social Thought (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 234.

tiate the two; this has enabled them to point out "problems" in Durkheim's theory. But hypostatization of the categories is questionable practice at best and, unfortunately, does not seem to be confined to apriorist critics.

The present study proceeds on the basis of a handful of assumptions. None is grounded in ad hominem considerations. One of these assumptions has to do with the necessity for getting clear about what we are doing and what others have done before us.

Another assumption is that the vigor of any academic discipline is endangered by reluctance to engage in self-criticism. This is related to, but is not derived from, Popper's thesis that in science "we can learn from our mistakes."[51] If, as one Durkheimian scholar has remarked, this is analogous to an army that "marches on its belly,"[52] it is at least preferable to sitting in one's corner clutching a bagful of conclusions incontrovertibly labeled "Truth." The dangers to scientific progress are indeed, as Popper maintains, "lack of imagination, misplaced faith in formalization and precision, authoritarianism in some form or other."[53]

In addition, there seems little to be gained from dis-

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[51]Karl R. Popper, Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge (New York: Basic Books, 1962), p. vii.

[52]Harry Alpert, Émile Durkheim and His Sociology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 14.

[53]Karl R. Popper, "Truth, Rationality, and the Growth of Scientific Knowledge," in Popper, op. cit., p. 216.

carding an entire theory because the evidence originally offered in its support turns out to do an inadequate job of buttressing that theory. In the end we may find that, in the words of J. L. Austin, "the baby has somehow been spirited down the waste-pipe." There is sometimes something to be gained from reinterpretation and reevaluation, and even perhaps from acknowledged conjecture. And it is hoped that this study provides a fresh perspective from which to regard Durkheim's epistemological endeavor.

CHAPTER II

TOWARD A REINTERPRETATION

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words....
>
> --Ludwig Wittgenstein

I have already referred to the proposition "the categories are social in origin" as the key to both misinterpretation and reinterpretation of Durkheim's view of these concepts. Our first task then is to discover what this proposition means. In order to do this, I shall subject the statement to analysis of a linguistic sort. This will indicate the pivotal function of the word "origin" for our knowing how to take Durkheim's theory[54] of the categories, as well as clarify the meaning of the word as he uses it.

Approach

Linguistic analysis is not a customary approach to the understanding of theories in the social sciences. Consequently, curiosity may be evoked regarding the appropriateness of its application in this domain. However, neither curiosity nor lack of precedent need occasion opprobrium. The view so commonly encountered among non-philosophers that "philosophy" is synonymous with speculative "metaphysics," although unfortu-

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[54] I shall continue to use the term "theory" in this connection, not because finding the mot juste is difficult, but because I have not yet shown that the word is inappropriate for referring to this formulation.

nate, is nonetheless corrigible. There are several areas of philosophy, including philosophy of science, areas of epistemology, and philosophy of language, in which an empirical overlap is shared with the social sciences. That linguistic philosophy as an orientation is empirically compatible with sociological theory will become apparent in the following discussion of my approach and should be even more evident once this analysis is completed. What follows is not digressive but quite important, for it constitutes both explanation and defense of my predominantly Wittgensteinian approach.

Most of the words in our language,[55] apart from proper names and sentential conjunctions,[56] such as "and," "nor," "or," and "if...then...," are without a single meaning. As they stand alone, most words have no single meaning. They have meaning only because of the way in which they are used in a particular context, a peculiarity variously characterized as their "open texture"[57] or as their "porousness" or

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[55] By "our language" I mean the everyday, ordinary language of any peoples, as opposed to artificial or formalized languages such as those of logic or mathematics.

[56] In grammar sensu stricto, sentential conjunctions make possible the formation of compound sentences from simpler sentences. It is the business of sentential calculus or propositional calculus to establish the usage of such terms. (Vide: Alfred Tarski, Introduction to Logic and the Methodology of Deductive Sciences (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[57] Friedrich Waismann, "Verifiability," in Logic and Language (First and Second Series), ed. by Antony Flew (New York: Viking, 1964), pp. 125-126.

"elasticity."[58] For this insight into the workings of language, we are indebted to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein asserts that "for a large number of cases--though not for all--in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[59] From this emerged his dictum: "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use."[60]

Now, it is essential to the Wittgensteinian view that the use (and hence the meaning) of words, and of sentences as well, is viewed as "an activity...or form of life."[61] By "form of life," he intends to call attention to the circumstances and behavior associated with our use of language. Note that circumstances and behavior are both social elements which, on this view, contribute to the contexts in which words are used and therefore to their meanings.

For example, it does not make sense to ask "What does the word 'culture' mean?" The word may be used in a number

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[58]Ernst Konrad Specht, The Foundations of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy, tr. by D. E. Walford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 131, n. 43.

[59]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), I, 43. (Italics Wittgenstein's)

[60]Quoted in: John Wisdom, "Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1934-1937," in Paradox and Discovery (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 87.

[61]Wittgenstein, op. cit., I, 23.

of different contexts and hence has a number of meanings. There is no one meaning that is the meaning of the term. The culture of 5th century Greece is in no way comparable to an oyster culture, and neither is equivalent to the level of culture of one whose peas are on his knife.

Assuming that a word has one single meaning is analogous to assuming that there is one proper description of an action. Let us suppose that we see a man pumping water. Someone asks "what is he doing?" or "what is the description of his action?" It may easily be supposed that there is one description of what this gentleman is doing which is the description of his actions. The question seems to demand this sort of answer. However, this does not turn out to be the case. As Miss Anscombe says, the proper answer is: "any description of what is going on, with him as subject, which is in fact true. E.g., he is earning wages, he is supporting a family, he is wearing away his shoe-soles, he is making a disturbance in the air...."[62]

I wish to point to evidence of the empirical character of the linguistic approach as justification for the compatibility of this approach and the subject it treats here.

First, there is the obvious fact that language is a social phenomenon. Then the perhaps not-so-obvious inference may be made that clarifying the meanings of the words we use

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[62] G. E. M. Anscombe, Intention (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 37.

by the ways in which we use them might be viewed as following, in a sense, Durkheim's own methodological dictum that social facts are to be explained in terms of other social facts. Second, linguistic analysis as here applied deals only with what actually is the case, not with what is logically possible. Third, this sort of analysis is empirically verifiable; we have only to see in what context a word is used in order to see what sort of job the word is doing. And (pace Carnap, Hempel, Nagel, et al) ordinary language is repeatedly subjected to testing. Durkheim himself holds that between scientific concepts and the concepts of ordinary language, differences are only those of "degree."

> The great majority of the concepts which we use are not methodically constituted; we get them from language, that is to say, from common experience, without submitting them to any criticism....A collective representation presents guarantees of objectivity by the fact that it is collective: for it is not without sufficient reason that it has been able to generalize and maintain itself with persistence. If it were out of accord with the nature of things /i.e., reality/, it would never have been able to acquire an extended and prolonged empire over intellects. At bottom, the confidence inspired by scientific concepts is due to the fact that they can be methodically controlled. 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. Therefore, it could not be wholly inadequate for its subject.[63]

Linguistic analysis differentiates "use" and "usage." As I approach this, the issue with respect to Durkheim's meaning of the word "origin" in the proposition at issue is

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[63]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 486. (Italics mine)

its use. Usage, on the other hand, refers to the way(s) a word is customarily used in everyday language and is based upon consensus.

The great role of consensus in the formation and employment of language is a leitmotif running through both Durkheim's work and that of Wittgenstein and his successors.[64] This is illustrated in the observation of one Wittgensteinian that while it is possible to have "mis-use," there is no such thing as "mis-usage."[65] Another view common to Durkheim and Wittgenstein is of concepts as instruments or tools. As we have said, the former characterizes categories as "instruments of thought" and as "tools," observing that "there is a close relationship between the ideas of tool, category, and institution." Wittgenstein freely uses the tool-analogy in the Philosophical Investigations and there writes that "language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments."[66] Of fundamental significance is simply the pronounced interest both men have in language and in the avoidance of ambiguity in its use. The same source of what Wittgenstein calls

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[64]This holds throughout the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, but perhaps nowhere is it more exhileratingly revealed than in his Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics and his last notes On Certainty.

[65]Gilbert Ryle, "Ordinary Language," Philosophical Review, 62 (1953), p. 174.

[66]Wittgenstein, op. cit., I, 569.

"philosophical mental cramp" is identified in Elementary Forms when Durkheim says that the "great trouble we have in understanding each other...is because we all use the same words without giving them the same meaning."[67]

And so we see some of the commonalities between Durkheim and the originator of the version of linguistic analysis which I shall use. But this is really only felicitous and not essential to the explanation and defense of my approach; a bit more will be said of it at a later point.

I trust that the foregoing discussion has set at ease any reader who may have questioned the appropriateness of the Wittgensteinian approach on empirical grounds.

The advantages of such an approach are several. They include the following: (1) one needn't guess at the sense a word has in a given context; therefore, interpretation is stripped of the biases so easily smuggled in by guesswork, which does allow a dangerous measure of interpolation of one's own desiderata; (2) one need not necessarily be concerned with the usage of the particular language at the particular time at which it was used; (3) however, one may be alerted to one's own tendency to construe terms in earlier literature in accordance with their current usage in one's own language; (4) one may use synonymy (in the sense of intersubstitutability-without-loss-of-meaning) in pointing out other

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[67]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 484.

expressions used to do the same job as that done by the term being analyzed; and (5) this technique is equally useful in clarifying meanings of words used by writers whose views of how language functions differ from that presupposed by this approach itself.[68] The proof, of course, is still in the pudding. So it is to this pudding that we now turn.

Analysis

What is problematic about the statement "the categories are social in origin" is not what is meant by "the categories." This has been shown in the preceding chapter by giving examples of categories and indicating the purposes they serve. The source of confusion lies in what is predicated of the categories, that is, that they are "social in origin." Taken alone, this expression might mean any number of things. The major reason for this is the inexactness of the word "origin." Just as it makes no sense to ask "what is the meaning of the word 'culture'?," it gets us nowhere to ask "what is the meaning of the word 'origin'?" Instead, we must see how the word is used in a particular context, i.e., ascertain what job it is being used to do.

For example, suppose we say "y is the origin of x." Shorn of its context, this tells us little more than that

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[68]This is shown clearly and without fanfare in Wittgenstein's own resolution of Augustine's puzzlement over the measurement of time. (Vide: Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), BlB, p. 26.

there is some sort of connection between y and x; the nature of this connection is inexplicit. The point is to find out what job the word "origin" is performing. Then we shall be able to understand what the word means in this proposition and what the nature of the connection it stands for is.

The difficulties in simply guessing what a general term like "origin" means have been mentioned in Chapter I. To illustrate these somewhat more clearly, let us think of some of the ways in which "origin" might be being used in the proposition "y is the origin of x." (1) It might be used to show that the ultimate, absolute beginning of x is y; thus, there are those who say "God is the origin of all life" or "Abiogenesis is the origin of all life." (2) It might be used to connote a point of initiation without any implication about cause; in this case, the synonym "inception" would do the task equally well.[69] When one speaks of "the inception of a disease," one is talking about the point at which the disease began, but there is no implication concerning the cause of the disease. (3) "Origin" also might be used to identify y as the area, sphere, or group in which x had originated or from which it had derived; here, "provenance" or

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[69]When I speak of a synonym, I mean a word that is intersubstitutable without loss of meaning. The synonyms mentioned, together with their connotations, are taken from the "origin" entry in Websters Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam, 1966).

"provenience" would serve as synonymous terms. In this sense, one might say "the origin of morality is in society" or "Hurricane Hildegaard had its origin in the Caribbean."

From the foregoing, it is clear how gummed-up things might get were we to be misled by the simple syntax of the statement "y is the origin of x" into assuming that its meaning is as perspicuous as it appears prima facie to be. This is what John Wisdom has called "the misleading feature which nearly all philosophical statements have--a non-verbal air."[70] The sagacity of this observation is not confined to philosophical declarations. Durkheim saw this as clearly as anyone. That he did is evident in his having anticipated just such a problem in meaning.

At the outset of Elementary Forms, the author tells us how he is and is not using the term "origin."

> If by origin we are to understand the very first beginning, the question has nothing scientific about it, and should be resolutely discarded. There was no given moment when religion began to exist, and there is consequently no need of finding a means of transporting ourselves hither in thought. Like every human institution, religion did not commence anywhere.[71]

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[70]John Wisdom, "Philosophical Perplexity," in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), pp. 40-41.

[71]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 20.

In a footnote, he continues:

> We give a wholly relative sense to this word "origins"--just as to the word "primitive." By it we do not mean an absolute beginning, but the most simple social condition that is actually known or that beyond which we cannot go at present. When we speak of the origins or of the commencement of religious history or thought, it is in this sense that our statements should be understood.[72]

Durkheim wants to "find a means of discerning the ever-present causes upon which the most essential forms of religious thought and practice depend...." He is "trying to get as close as possible to the origins of these causes."[73]

From this it is quite clear how he intends the word "origin" to be understood. It is to be used, not in an absolute historical sense, but in order to denote those social conditions from which the phenomenon in question is derived. In other words, in "y is the origin of x," "origin" would be being used in the third of the senses indicated above, not in the first. Its purpose would be "to identify y as the area, sphere, or group...from which x had derived."

Now, perhaps a question might arise at this point. Since Durkheim states how he intends this word to be taken, why introduce the earlier discussion of "origin"? At the risk of spurring a horse already on the verge of breaking into at least a fast trot, I repeat that misinterpretation of the postulate we are discussing is responsible to a very large

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[72] Ibid., p. 20, n. 3.

[73] Ibid., p. 20.

extent for not understanding what Durkheim's epistemic endeavor amounts to; my discussion was also intended to demonstrate the elasticity of the word "origin" and to shed additional light upon how we may better comprehend the meaning of this term and others like it. Moreover, I have hoped to provide a guideline for differentiating appropriate from inappropriate criticism. And by calling attention to different meanings and to the notion of intersubstitutability-without-loss-of-meaning, we have at least a small-scale map to which to refer when we remember that an author may state one intention and stray from it later. This is not to say that Durkheim does this. But it is a not uncommon process by which one claim easily becomes the means of smuggling in other claims, without the Jolly Roger's having been hoisted at all.

Durkheim's interest in providing information on just how certain terms are used is one of the more sound scholarly aspects of a study which has not been noted for the prevalence of such qualities. Early on, in connection with applying the term "primitive" to religions, societies, and men, he states that "undoubtedly, the expression lacks precision, but that is hardly evitable, and besides, when we have taken pains to fix the meaning, it is not inconvenient."[74]

However, like Anscombe's man at the water-pump, Durkheim is doing a number of things here besides the most obvious, that is, besides showing an appreciation for the subtleties

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[74] Ibid., p. 13, n. 1.

of linguistic nuance. For example, we may note that the two words whose meanings he is most intent on making plain are "origin" and "primitive." This is interesting because each term was associated with a position to which Durkheim was opposed. The word "primitive" was associated with Lévy-Bruhl, with whom Durkheim and his colleagues were sharply at variance over the intellectual ability of "primitive" man. "Origin" was connected with attempts to account for the a priori conditions presupposed in experience by resorting to "divine reason" upon which individual reason was said to depend; with regard to this position, Durkheim holds that thinking of "origin" sensu stricto can only lead to a chimerical preoccupation, one that "has nothing scientific about it."

Moreover, it seems that Durkheim is not only calling our attention to the distinction between empirical science (and the conditions which an investigation must meet in order to be empirical) and the domain of transcendental metaphysics, but to the thick line demarcating the two. This is a line across which the sort of Kantian criticisms we have seen advanced by Benôit-Smullyan and Cassirer cannot pass. Problems are dealt with in a different manner in the two realms, and the validity of the claims in empirical science can only be ascertained by admissable methods of empirical testing. Provided Durkheim's epistemic postulations do indeed lie solidly within the domain of empirical science and are empirically testable, this would seem to constitute an adequate defense against criticism based upon considerations having no

applicability to this realm. Such criticisms, in this instance, would carry no more thrust than would an attempt to assess a vocalist's breathing technique by using logical rules of inference.

Now, we have seen that Durkheim wishes the word "origin" to be understood in a particular sense. A few conjectures have been made concerning some of his reasons for so patiently drawing semantic boundaries for the term. Why then cannot we settle back and accept what he has told us? Why does a problem remain?

In having clarified how he proposes to use "origin," he has indeed told us more about "the origin of x is y." The relation between the two terms[75] is clarified to a certain extent by saying that what he has in mind is not an absolute beginning but certain social conditions. All right, let us assume that y is the provenance within which x arises. This is but one step in elaborating the character of the relation that obtains between x and y. That character needs to be made much more explicit. And our theorist is not blind to this need; indeed, making the character of this relation as explicit as seemed feasible is precisely what Elementary Forms is all about. However, this is where the problem of interpreting "the categories are social in origin" becomes more serious. This is evident in some of the criticism, inter alia, Merton's charge of naïve correspondence. Its complexity is visible in

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[75] "Terms" is used here in a logical sense to refer to "x" and "y."

the "Contents" to Elementary Forms. For here we may note considerable variation in the expressions used to characterize the relation between x and y. These copulas afford an initial opportunity to discover whether it looks as though the author adheres to his intended use of the word "origin." Variation may be no more than stylistic. Nonetheless, some of the expressions may encourage ambiguity in interpretation.

In the "Contents," "origin" appears to be used consistently in the author's intended sense, i.e., to refer to certain "social conditions." He uses "genesis" once, when he mentions "the role of society in the genesis of logical thought."[76] It is not clear whether this is meant in the "wholly relative" sense in which he uses "origin" or in the sense of "absolute beginning"; however, as the remainder of this study will show, there is no reason to assume that "genesis" is being used in the latter sense.

The relation between x and y is variously characterized in the "Contents" as "reflecting," serving as a "model for," as having "contributed to forming," being "at the foundation of," as the "birth of," and as "expressing" and "corresponding to." It is possible to construe all of these terms so that they are compatible with the author's use of the word "origin." But it is also the case that some at least might be taken in

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[76]It should be noted that throughout this work, Durkheim uses "logical" not in its strictly philosophical sense, but as synonymous with "conceptual." Concepts that are logical sensu stricto are identified specifically in nearly all cases, e.g., "the idea of contradiction."

other ways; e.g., if the "birth of" x is in y, or if y is "the foundation of" x, these might suggest origin in a different sense, perhaps in the sense of absolute beginning. Moreover, from Merton's contention that Durkheim holds a naïve theory of correspondence, it seems clear that he at least has construed "reflects," "expresses," and "corresponds to" in the sense of "exact copy" rather than in another sense in which these copulas might just as properly be understood, i.e., as connoting nothing more than resemblance.

From this, two issues emerge with which we need to deal. One is whether or not Durkheim does slip at any point and begin to speak of origin in an absolute, genetic sense. If so, his claim for the origin of the categories may be in jeopardy. (This possibility is suggested by the expressions "genesis," "birth," and "foundation.") The second issue has to do with how rigorously x "expresses" or "corresponds to" y. This issue is particularly important in interpreting what is meant by the phrase "social in origin" because it brings into question the exact character of the relation posited between x and y; moreover, it is significant inasmuch as it has bearing on the strength of Durkheim's categorial claim. And, as I have said, I consider that strength to have been overestimated in the literature.

"Origin": Relative or Absolute

The task of determining whether or not Durkheim adheres to a "wholly relative" sense of "origin" would be simpler had

his work not been so influenced by certain personal interests. Exegesis is difficult when what an author says and the way he says it are sometimes affected by zealous moral, political, and social attitudes so that polemicism rubs shoulders indiscriminately with substantive content. At one moment, we find statements made that pertain to a phenomenon regardless of social context or temporal considerations, at the next moment things are predicated of the same phenomenon that clearly refer only to a certain society or a society where a given set of social conditions prevails. It is not always easy to distinguish the two.

To show what I mean by this, Durkheim asserts at the outset that "the first systems of representations with which men have pictured to themselves the world are themselves of religious origins."[77] This would seem a generalization not intended to apply only to the primitive societies from which he draws his data. This is immediately followed by the assertion that philosophy and the sciences "were born of religion."[78] And since his primitive societies had neither philosophy nor science, this assertion has no application to

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[77] Ibid., p. 21.

[78] Ibid. It is unclear whether he is speaking of philosophy and the sciences per se or whether this is an elliptical statement about the conceptual thought required for such endeavors. In his "Conclusion," he writes: "the fundamental categories of thought, and consequently of science, are of religious origin.... Nearly all the great social institutions have been born in religion." (p. 466)

them whatsoever. This exemplifies a seductive Durkheimian manoeuvre which tends to obscure differences between claims made only for certain primitive societies and claims with wider application. Only in his "Conclusion" does he qualify such statements. It is important that he does and interesting that he does not do so more emphatically.

> If, in our studies of these very humble societies, we have really succeeded in discovering some of the elements out of which the most fundamental religious notions are made up, there is no reason for not extending the most general results of our searches to other religions....If among certain peoples the ideas of sacredness, the soul and God are to be explained sociologically, it should be presumed scientifically that, in principle, the same explanation is valid for all the peoples among whom these ideas are found with the same essential characteristics.[79]

The important point here is that if in one instance a given set of social conditions y is the provenance of a particular phenomenon x, then the claim is merely that x arises from social conditions that meet the criteria for being y, not, for example, from social conditions other than y. This would appear to be a relatively straightforward hypothesis.[80] It stands in sharp contrast to the earlier-mentioned assertion that the first symbolic systems men used to picture themselves and the world were religious in origin.[81]

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[79] Ibid., pp. 462-463. (Italics mine)

[80] I use the term "hypothesis" cautiously at this stage. We have yet to determine whether this would qualify as an empirical hypothesis.

[81] Supra, p. 39.

Let us take another example. "The category of class," Durkheim writes, "was at first indistinct from the concept of the human group."[82] Where? Among the peoples from whom his data are drawn or for humanity in general? Durkheim holds that the concept of the human group temporally preceded the category of class. But temporal precedence is equally presupposed in provenance and in absolute beginning. Priority in time then is not an adequate clue to discovery of whether Durkheim is talking about absolute or relative origin. There is a clue in his discussion of the totemic cosmological system and the idea of class, however.

He mentions "the way in which the idea of kind or class was formed in humanity." Quite apart from the fact that the idea of "kind" is not at all equivalent to the category of "class,"[83] it does seem that "formed in humanity" is a reference to genetic beginning. "Systematic classifications," he continues, "are the first we meet with in history, and we have just seen that they are modelled upon the social organization, or rather that they have taken the forms of society as their framework.[84] He continues:

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[82] Ibid., p. 488.

[83] This confusion is a major one, with the author often speaking of mere groupings as though they were actual classes.

[84] What, one wonders, would a non-systematic classification be like. The act of classifying is systematic by definition. It makes sense to speak of random grouping but not of random classification.

> It is the phratries which have served as classes, and the clans as species. It is because men were organized that they have been able to organize things, for in classifying these latter, they limited themselves to giving them places in the groups they formed themselves. And if these different classes of things are not merely put next to each other, but are arranged according to a unified plan, it is because the social groups with which they commingle themselves are unified and, through their union, form an organic whole, the tribe. The unity of these first logical systems merely reproduces the unity of the society. Thus we have occasion for verifying the proposition which we laid down at the commencement of this work, and for assuring ourselves that the fundamental notions of the intellect, the essential categories of thought, may be the product of social factors. The above-mentioned facts show clearly that this is the case with the very notion of category itself.[85]

This passage is part of a treatment of certain primitive societies, so that we might expect the things it asserts or suggests to be confined to these societies. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Here, as throughout this work, we have a mixed bag of statements about absolute origins and relative origins.

As far as expressions such as "at the foundation of" and "at their birth" are concerned, these are used in such a way as to be compatible with "origin" in a relative sense. For example, in his "Introduction," the author speaks of "the rhythm of social life" as being "at the foundation of the category of time inasmuch as it is merely more marked and apparent" than the rhythms of either individual life or the universe. He claims that "some at least" of these category-

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[85] Ibid., pp. 169-170. (Italics mine)

concepts "are caught at their very birth."[86] Both expressions seem amenable to interpretation in line with "origin" in the relative sense.

The conclusion one reaches then is that Durkheim is consistent in his use of "origin" and synonymous expressions. The sense of uneasiness that we feel about absolute-vs.-relative origin arises from his periodically generalizing what he takes to be true of a phenomenon in primitive societies to be historically true of that phenomenon per se. This sort of generalization is misleading. I shall now offer some suggestions that account, at least in part, for this tendency. Then I shall present evidence upon which to base my claim that Durkheim does not actually intend to propose that the categories are social in origin in any absolute sense.

The Apparent Absolute: A Partial Explanation. We have now identified an apparent inconsistency in Durkheim's treatment of the categories. Given both the significance of the notion of origin for understanding Durkheim's theory and the seeming shift between absolute and relative origin, it seems advisable not simply to grant this shift real rather than apparent status and not to attribute it merely to slipshod scholarship. It is possible to suggest a number of contributory factors, apart from the most obvious--Durkheim's own moral,

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[86] Ibid., p. 33, n. 23.

political, and social commitments.[87] I have chosen several which clearly affect his epistemic interest and are closely connected with it. They include the influence of evolutionism, his idea of causation, and his essentialistic approach to definition.

(1) Evolutionism. The object of the evolutionary procedure, with regard to existing types, is to

> discover the genetic affinities /of these types/ whereby they pass into one another in response to changes of conditions. The important thing here to discover is what is fundamental and what accidental, and again, what is permanent and what modifiable.[88]

Provided this can be done, it is assumed that the types that would be found under more primitive conditions than those known may be inferred.

The evolutionary doctrine involves retrodictive inference, whether applied biologically, chemically, or culturally. As Melvin Calvin has pointed out,

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[87] Ibid., p. 475. "We are going through a stage of transition, and moral mediocrity...the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born. This state of incertitude and confused agitation cannot last forever."

[88] Morris Ginsberg, "The Concept of Evolution in Society," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, n.s., XXXI (1930-31), pp. 202-203.

> It was recognized by Darwin that the basic notions of evolution he formulated were, in fact, continuous, not only through the appearance of living organisms and their variety, but extending back through the stage of history into the period which preceded the existence of living organisms on the surface of the earth.[89]

That Darwin "left the quest of the Origin of Life uncanvassed" was intentional and in keeping with the characteristic conservatism regarding the degree of knowledge at his time of the nature of molecules. A concern for absolute origins, however, is implicit in the doctrine of evolution; this is also revealed in the search for earlier types which Ginsberg mentions, and is even more apparent in the programs being carried out by abiogeneticists who have determined the molecular structures from which life first originated and have created some of these structures under laboratory conditions simulating those on primitive earth.[90]

The influence of evolutionism upon Durkheim's sociology as a whole is widely recognized, despite varying opinions about

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[89]Melvin Calvin, "Chemical Evolution," in Evolutionary Biology, ed. by Theodosius Dobzhansky, Max K. Hecht, and William C. Steere, I (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), pp. 1-2.

[90]For a survey of these endeavors, see: Paul D. Thompson, Abiogenesis: From Molecules to Cells (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969).

the degree ot its influence.[91] Nothing original is to be gained by regurgitation or rehash. Therefore, this discussion will be confined to evolutionism as related to our own issue of origins.

Durkheim was influenced to a certain extent by the discovery of unicellular organisms and incorporated this element in part into his methodology. He reasoned that since life in these organisms is "reduced to its essential traits," explanation of the relations between the constituent elements of religion would also be more apparent among the simpler religions.[92]

Classical cultural evolutionists[93] did not simply share

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[91]See, for example: G. Duncan Mitchell, A Hundred Years of Sociology (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), Chapters III-VI. "Durkheim," Mitchell remarks, "did not abandon evolutionary sociology; on the contrary it was his original aim to establish the laws of social evolution." (p. 72) Lowie says that "though classed as an 'evolutionist,' Durkheim at least in theory revolted against the idea of unilinear evolution, which he deprecated as over-simplified; there is not one species of society, but a number of qualitatively distinct types.... Durkheim certainly does explain in a parallelist fashion resemblances among remote peoples as symptoms of a definite stage (symptomatiques d'un état social)." (Vide: Robert H. Lowie, The History of Ethnological Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1937), p. 201.)

[92]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 19.

[93]Among these men were: J. F. McLennan, Sir Henry Maine, Lewis Henry Morgan, E. B. Tylor, James G. Frazer, and Adolph Bastian. (Unless otherwise noted, information concerning this ethnological school is taken from notes on lectures given by Professor Harry Basehart to a class in the history of anthropological theory at the University of New Mexico during spring term, 1970.)

a common set of basic assumptions. There was considerable variation as well. Quite conversant with the work of this school, Durkheim also shared some of its general assumptions and made use of certain of its protagonists' specific concepts.

That he shared their general view that there is constant change toward perfection in man is evidenced, for example, in his observation that societies evolve and in doing so develop more complex thought.[94] And, like the cultural evolutionists, he used the comparative method to discern this process.[95]

The presupposition of the psychic unity of man is another tenet held in common, as is Tylor's idea of "diffusion." Diffusion is usually held to be "fatal to the notion of an unvarying order of stages."[96] Durkheim, however, does use the notion of diffusion for a slightly different purpose, viz., in juxtaposition with the common traits neighboring groups have. Predictably, he emphasizes the latter. "Even supposing that each tribe elaborated...notion(s) independently, they must necessarily have tended to confound themselves with each other."[97] The assumption reflected in the phrase "must

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[94] Ibid., pp. 495-496.

[95] Ginsberg observes that the comparative method and explanation in genetic terms are not necessarily related, although the former may reveal genetic affinities. (Ginsberg, op. cit., pp. 205-206)

[96] Ibid., p. 207. Diffusion, this author states, is "just an agent of evolution."

[97] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 474. The point at which he was aiming was that in certain cases a "universalistic" tendency thereby results.

necessarily have..." is quite suspect and presumes a knowledge which no evidence seems to warrant of the reactions of tribal societies in contact.

This is closely allied to the way our theorist uses the concept of "survivals," a notion developed by Bastian in order to interpret cultural phenomena so as to be consistent with an evolutionary sequence. It is most unfortunate that Durkheim did not utilize the notion of survivals more as Tylor did. The latter stressed the necessity of distinguishing between correlations and their causes, thereby drawing attention to the difference between real and apparent reasons. For if there is one single flaw fatal to Durkheim's thinking with regard to the connection between the categories and religion, it consists precisely in his failure to distinguish between correlation and cause, in his readiness to construe correlations of categorial concepts with religious phenomena as entailing a causal relation.

In addition, Durkheim appropriates from Frazer's treatment of magic a law of similarity or homeopathy. He terms this "the power attributed to 'like to produce like'" and asserts that it is this conception which "dominates primitive thought."[98]

Despite these influences, it is equally clear that Durkheim did want to allow for diversity among primitive

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[98] Ibid., p. 406.

societies.[99] In a review of an article by Steinmetz, he remarked that "people argue as though the so-called savages or primitives formed a single identical social type."[100] And of great significance are the following statements made in the "Conclusion" to Elementary Forms: (1) "Each civilization has its organized system of concepts which characterizes it,"[101] and (2) "The system of concepts with which we think in everyday life is that expressed by the vocabulary of our mother tongue...."[102] This, of course, reflects a relative conception of origin, i.e., "origin" in the sense of "provenance." I shall further elaborate this point in discussing the issue of how rigorously y "reflects" or "corresponds to" x.

(2) Causation. The concept of causation is theoretically so difficult that many scientists and philosophers consider it quite worthless, anthropomorphic in origin, and replaceable by less esoteric concepts, such as concomitant variation, invariable sequence, etc.[103] Indeed, its difficulties provoked

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[99] According to Lowie, Durkheim realized this diversity better than many of his contemporaries. Lowie, op. cit., p. 201.

[100] This review was published in l'Année sociologique, 4: 341 (1901) and is quoted in Lowie, ibid.

[101] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 480.

[102] Ibid., p. 484.

[103] Richard Taylor, "Causation," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 5 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 51.

Bertrand Russell into disclaiming the existence of such things as causes, saying that "the law of causality...is a relic of a bygone age, surviving, like the monarchy, only because it is erroneously supposed to do no harm."[104]

In the final analysis, Durkheim states that his discussion does not amount to "a complete theory of the concept of causality."[105] This shows admirable candor. In view of the ongoing debate over how (or whether) causation is to be considered, it shows considerable foresight as well. However, this qualification is rather extensive and would appear to weaken his analysis of this concept to such a degree that one wonders if indeed it could be an empirically useful analysis. "The views we have set forth," he says, "should be regarded as mere indicators....We presume that /our/ remarks may be generalized to a certain degree."[106] The supposition that a scientist is justified in generalizing "mere indicators" (even "to a certain degree") sometimes points toward the delay of a gratification which may not be in the offing. And, of course, the point of an empirical analysis of causation is to set forth a conception in terms of what does happen, not what might or possibly could happen. Offering a critique of how

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[104]Bertrand Russell, "On the Notion of Cause," in Mysticism and Logic (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1963), p. 132.

[105]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 412.

[106]Ibid., p. 413.

well Durkheim himself did in attempting to steer toward an empirical analysis does not lie within the scope of this study. What I wish to show is simply the connection between his view of causation and a tendency to seek absolute origins. Perhaps this can be done most economically by pointing out those aspects of his conception which exemplify some connection with an absolute sense of origin.

In his explanation of the causal relation, Durkheim defines a cause as "something capable of producing a certain change."[107] The causal relation first of all implies "the idea of efficacy, of productive power, of active force." Both cause and effect are explained in terms of this force; cause is the power prior to actualization, effect the same power actualized.[108] For the primitive peoples he studies, the "prototype" of the idea of force is the "collective force objectified and projected onto things," i.e., the totemic principle, whether known as mana, wakan, or orenda. Thus, the first power of which these primitives conceive is "that of humanity over its members."[109]

Durkheim claims that the notion of power could have no source other than society. Neither empiricism, apriorism, nor animism explains the necessity or authority which, he

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[107] Ibid., p. 406.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

holds, is implicit in the concept of causation. In his own explanation, he states that "the idea of force implies the idea of power." The idea of power

> does not come without the ideas of ascendancy, mastership and domination, and their corollaries, dependence and subordination;...the relations expressed by all these ideas are eminently social. It is society which classifies beings into superiors and inferiors /and/ which confers upon the former the singular property which makes the command efficacious and which makes power.[110]

The conclusion drawn from this is as follows:

> So everything tends to prove that the first powers of which the human mind had any idea were those which societies have established in organizing themselves; it is in their image that the powers of the physical world have been conceived.[111]

Here Durkheim trips over the same stone as in his treatment of survivals (supra, 26). He fails to distinguish correlation and cause. He assumes that de facto uniformities reveal causal connection of an inherent sort, but this seems by no means certain. He also disallows the possibility of a plurality of causes and instead tends to adhere to what Nagel terms a "single factor" or "key cause" type of explanation.[112]

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[110] Ibid., p. 409.

[111] Ibid. (Italics mine) The use here of the word "prove" and of the phrase "tends to prove" is inappropriate. Either something is proven or it is not. In this instance, nothing has been.

[112] Ernst Nagel, The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), p. 448. Such an analysis identifies some single variable, e.g., religious belief or economic organization, in terms of which institutional arrangements and social development are to be understood.

This in itself would seem more amenable to an absolute sense of origin, if for no other reason than that it risks encouraging a temporally static orientation.[113]

In trying to demonstrate the necessity of the concept of causation in the authority of society, the latter seems to be posited as the first-cause. But should we not be as warranted in positing that the first idea of power or force that man had, resulted from seeing the effects of climatological variation or simply from having fallen over a precipice? That man should have survived his pre-historic era at all necessitates his having come to grips with a number of threats from the physical world about him. He clothed himself against the cold, followed game with glacial recession, fashioned tools for different tasks, increasingly perfected them for greater efficiency, and standardized them in tool "industries." It hardly seems conceivable that any of these ways of surviving would have occurred to man had he not had the idea of means and ends, of cause and effect. It seems far from clear that the necessity Durkheim assumes for the conception of causation derived from social authority. Certainly his own survival might have been adequate for pre-historic man to develop an idea of such necessity. In rebutting Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim writes: "concepts express the manner in which society repre-

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[113]For example, if x is explained in terms of y (the latter being a single factor and not a cluster of factors), and x is later found to be explained equally well in terms of z, there is no provision for this in a "key cause" analysis.

sents things.../and/...conceptual thought is coeval with humanity itself."[114] From what is known of Cro-Magnon man, for example, it seems perfectly proper to attribute conceptual thought to him; he did live in societies, i.e., collective groups, and such activities as tool-making in all its variety and cave-art (a symbolic representation) surely presuppose the ability to conceive of, and indeed actually have, categorial concepts such as causation, space, time, etc. It seems safe to assume, too, that Cro-Magnon had a conception of substance, a category Durkheim mentions but makes no attempt to derive from society.[115]

Durkheim himself might counter the above possibility by reverting to his argument against empiricism.[116] He holds that the senses only furnish external experience as raw input, and that "the internal process uniting these realized and known conditions escapes /the senses/."[117] However, this will

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[114]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 487. "A man who did not think with concepts would not be a man, for he would not be a social being."

[115]The omission of substance from Durkheim's treatment of the categories is uncommonly interesting, the more so since empiricism offered at least strong attempts to account for it. Whether one agrees with Locke, for example, in his account of our knowledge of substance, is quite beside the point; what is significant is that he tried to account for it. And if we pause and try to imagine a way in which collective representations might be the single independent variable in this case, we should be hard pressed to find a sensible explanation.

[116]Ibid., pp. 406-407.

[117]Ibid., p. 407.

not do. While not perhaps battling a straw-man, Durkheim is constructing the radical empiricist as his opponent, and in doing so he is using one of his standard methodological devices, argumentum per eliminationem. Why assume that man has only the senses upon which to rely in conceptualizing? In his discussion of functionalist interpretations, Nagel makes the following important point:

> To show that a given sort of social function can be performed only by a particular social organization, it is necessary to show it could not be performed by some other organization (whether yet existent or not).[118]

This might be paraphrased thus: to show a given phenomenon (e.g., a category) has some given condition or set of conditions as its absolute origin, it would be necessary to prove that that phenomenon could not have originated otherwise.

Still another aspect of Durkheim's view of causation carries the connotation of absolute origin. This is the second element which must be added to the notion of force in order to develop the principle of causation.

> This consists in a judgment stating that every force develops in a definite manner, and that the state in which it is at each particular moment of its existence predetermines the next state.[119]

This incorporates genetic explanation into his account of causation, inasmuch as the former explains a particular event or state of affairs occurring at time t' as the result of an

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[118] Nagel, op. cit., p. 534. (Italics Nagel's)

[119] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 410.

event or series of events (or state of affairs or series of such states) which occurred at time t, i.e., prior to t'. This is committing the logical fallacy of ergo propter hoc, that is, arguing from a premiss of the form "A preceded B" to a conclusion of the form "A caused B."

Apart from the logical difficulty involved in such an explanation, we are landed with a start against the very controversial general issue of causation and induction. When we say that event e' would not have occurred had not event e preceded it, does this simply indicate that event e' has never been found to occur without event e? However, it is not my intention to take up either the deductive or inductive difficulties in Durkheim's view of causality. I have only wished to point to the elements in his view which are closely linked to the notion of absolute origin, and I believe this has now been done.

(3) Definition. A third emphasis in his work may serve to reveal the tendency toward absolute origins. This is Durkheim's great interest in definition.

By "definition" I do not mean definition in the grammarian's sense. Nor do I mean the explanation of the meaning of a word in terms of its use. A glance at the "Contents" of Elementary Forms is enough to show what is meant by saying that its author maintained a strong interest in definition. There he mentions definitions of "religious phenomena and religion." Clearly, what he means by "definition" is explana-

tion of another sort. This is not an arbitrary suggestion, for we have only to note how he sets about defining religion and religious phenomena to see that his attempt is one aimed at discovering those characteristics of a phenomenon which give it its "nature," i.e., which make it what it is. In this sense, this entire work might be seen as a study in definition.

There are differing views of what a definition is, just as there are several types of definition. What I shall propose here is that the particular view of definition Durkheim held is significant. Its significance for the present discussion lies in the influence it had upon his inability to leave "absolute origin" a sleeping dog.

It is now common to distinguish three types of definitions --essentialist (E-type), prescriptive (P-type), and linguistic (L-type).[120] Only the first of these need concern us in discussing Durkheim's view of definition. A brief description of this type of definition will clarify the degree to which our theorist is essentialistic.

The reasoning upon which essentialism is based is most beguiling. As George Pitcher has remarked, "there can be no gainsaying the powerful influence this idea has exerted on

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[120]For an explanation of these, see: Raziel Abelson, "Definitions," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2, p. 314.

man's thought from the time of Plato down to the present."[121]

Plato held that definition was concerned, not with the word itself, but with the thing to which the word refers; according to this "realistic" theory of definition, what is defined is the form or common nature present in many particular things.[122] For Aristotle, definition is objective (in the sense that its truth or falsity is always determinable).[123]

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[121]George Pitcher, The Philosophy of Wittgenstein Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 217. While many of his dialogues take the form of a search for definitions, according to Aristotle Plato's interest derived from Socrates' attempt to define metaphysical terms. Kneale thinks Plato, like the earlier mathematicians, was impressed by definitions in mathematics and viewed them as non-arbitrary and informative. (Vide: William Kneale and Martha Kneale, The Development of Logic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 21.)

[122]In the Meno, Socrates asks "What is it that is common to roundness and straightness and the other things which you call shapes?" (Vide: Plato, Meno, tr. by W. K. C. Guthrie (Baltimore: Penguin, 1956), 74D-75A.)

[123]Aristotle distinguishes definition from property, essential from non-essential connection. Essential attributes belong to their subject as elements in its essential nature, i.e., their connection is "consequential" and they are not predicated of other subjects; accidental attributes, however, enjoy only a "coincidental" relation to their subject and are not constitutive of its nature, i.e., do not make it what it is. (Vide: Posterior Analytics, tr. by G. R. G. Mure, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), I. 73a. 34-35, 73b. 1-24.)

Essentialism, with its belief in essences, has traditionally resulted in a search for sameness and unity, whether in defining things, phenomena and events, or words. Following the Aristotelian distinction between essential and accidental attributes, it holds that the characteristics of every member of any class C to which a common term T is applicable can be divided into

> (a) a relatively small group of essential characteristics--the qualities a thing must have in order to be a member of the class C, and which only members of class C have, and (b) a larger group of non-essential, or accidental characteristics--the qualities that members of class C may or may not typically have, but in either case do not need to have in order to qualify as members of C. The essential characteristics were each supposed to be necessary, and the group of them together sufficient, for membership in the class C.[124]

Durkheim voices some basic assumptions in his "Introduction" which provide unequivocal evidence of his strong essentialistic bent.

> Since all religions can be compared to each other, and since all are species of the same class, there are necessarily many elements which are common to all.

He then expresses his intention to discover these

> permanent elements which constitute that which is permanent and human in religion, /i.e./, a certain number of fundamental representations or conceptions and of ritual attitudes which, in spite of the diversity of forms which they have taken, have the same objective significance and fulfil the same functions everywhere.[125]

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[124]Pitcher, op. cit., pp. 221-222. (Italics Pitcher's)

[125]Durkheim, op. cit., p. 17.

These he terms "the objective contents of the idea which is expressed when one speaks of religion in general."[126]

It is clear that if all religions are "species of the same class" and thereby share elements "common to all," religion is being viewed as an institution which has an essence made up of a set of common characteristics. It is equally clear that the word "religion" is to be defined essentialistically, i.e., in terms of those common characteristics which must be possessed by a phenomenon in order to be so referred to.

In explaining why he has chosen primitive societies as subjects for study, Durkheim tells us that "what is common" is more easily discerned there.

> All is reduced to that which is indispensable, to that without which there could be no religion. That which is indispensable is also that which is essential, that is to say, that which we must know before all else.[127]

This is compatible with the evolutionary procedures of searching for genetic affinities among existing types and ascertaining earlier types, as well as with his view of causation, wherein cause and effect are explained in terms of "productive power" or "active force." In demarcating apparent cause from

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[126] Ibid. (Italics Durkheim's) It may be noted that in identifying the "permanent elements" for which he proposes to search as certain representations or conceptions and ritual attitudes, Durkheim has again resorted to petitio principii. (Supra, p. 13, n. 34)

[127] Ibid., p. 18. (Italics mine)

effective cause, he hoped to "go underneath the symbol to the reality which it represents and which gives it its meaning,"[128] and in so doing to discover "the ever-present causes upon which the most essential forms of religious thought and practice depend."[129] Looking for ever-present causes assuredly reveals an essentialistic persuasion.

Durkheim does not make it explicit whether he views the conditions constituting the provenance within which religion and conceptual thought originate as necessary, sufficient, or necessary and sufficient conditions.[130] However, it would seem that given the indispensability or essentiality of conditions y for the occurrence of phenomenon x, we should be justified in venturing the suggestion that he views these conditions as both necessary and sufficient.

Finally, when the two essential characteristics of the categories are pointed out, we have still another indication of Durkheim's essentialism. He says that the categories are characterized by "stability" and "impersonality."[131] These

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[128] Ibid., p. 14. Rites and myths "translate some human need, some aspect of life, either individual or social."

[129] Ibid., p. 20. (Italics mine)

[130] "Necessary conditions" provide a circumstance in whose absence a given event could not occur or a given thing could not exist. "Sufficient conditions" provide a circumstance such that whenever it exists a given event occurs or a given thing exists. "Necessary and sufficient conditions" provide a circumstance in whose absence the event could not occur or the thing exist, and which is also such that whenever it exists the event occurs or the thing exists.

[131] Ibid., p. 488.

are the attributes which account for their nature, which make them what they are and enable them to function as they do. Durkheim's having proposed particular characteristics that explain the essence of categories is essentialistic.[132] His having posited society (or social consensus) as the authority (or ever-present cause) for these essential categorial attributes reveals a concern for absolute origin, i.e., the authority postulated for essential categorial attributes is itself essential.

Showing the strong element of essentialism in Durkheim's conception of definition does not simply relegate him to scholasticism. Indeed, he did share adherence to E-type definitions with Kant, as well as with the Greek originators of essentialism. But he sought to account for essence differently, i.e., in an empirical fashion. And this shows the degree to which he wanted his approach to be empirical.

This attempt to arrive at essentialistic definition in an empirical fashion seems to have been ill-fated from the outset, however. Sensations or images, he says, are "essentially individual and subjective;" they are imposed on us and we are free to conceive them "otherwise than they really are."[133] He holds that under such conditions, the reduction of the

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[132]Talking about the essence of anything is simply talking in as fundamental or absolute a way as possible about the thing or phenomenon in question. This is nicely shown in the Aristotelian conception of substance, the primary category, as essence.

[133]Ibid., p. 26.

universality and necessity characterizing conceptual thought to experience is tantamount to reducing conceptual thought to "pure appearance, to an illusion...which corresponds to nothing in reality;...it is denying all objective reality to the logical life, whose regulation and organization is the function of the categories." The result of classical empiricism is "irrationalism" and, he adds, "perhaps it would even be fitting to designate it by this name."[134] And yet, he does not seem to want to accept the essentialist claim that the unchallengeable character of definitions is valid simply because of the corrigibility of empirical statements. Instead, he tries to turn this reasoning about-face and account for the essential or unchallengeable character of definitions in an empirical manner. Actually this seems to amount to trying to reach inductively the sort of certainty for which deduction aims, something as contradictory as a solipsist campaigning for political office.

In this section I have offered an account of the interest in absolute origin revealed in Durkheim's work. Aside from a desire not to engage in criticism that is more slipshod than my own limitations impose, this explanation has been motivated by a wish to show how the doctrine of evolutionism and Durkheim's own conceptions of causation and definition exerted a certain amount of influence which resulted in a tendency to give

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[134] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

attention to absolute origins. I do not wish to imply that these are the only factors which had such an influence. A study of much wider scope and depth would be needed to comprehensively investigate such inputs. My primary purpose has been to acknowledge that an interest in absolute origin does exist in Durkheim's work. This seems only just if one is to maintain that origin in this sense is not the dominant sense of origin in his epistemic theory.

We have now seen that Durkheim does slip and begin to conceive of origins in an absolute sense. Now the task before us is to demonstrate that this is not the sense of origin that must be kept in mind if we are to understand the question "what does Durkheim mean when he says that 'the categories are social in origin'?" In other words, the next step is to produce evidence in support of a different interpretation of his proposition "the categories are social in origin." For this purpose, we turn to the second of the issues mentioned earlier, that of determining how rigorously x "expresses" or "corresponds to" y.

The Rigor of "Expresses" and "Corresponds to"

In the discussion which follows, we shall move closer to a clarification of the relationship Durkheim posits between the categories (x) and society (y). It is the character of this relationship which needs to be better understood in order to know the meaning of the proposition "the categories are social in origin."

At this point, it will be well to remember that for Durkheim the categories are symbols or conceptual tools. Their function is to "express" what he calls "the fundamental relations that exist between things."[135] Given (1) that the categories are symbols ("constructed concepts"), and (2) that it is the role of symbols to represent or stand for something else, then the categories must have a relationship to that which they symbolize, i.e., xRy. This is the relationship the character of which may be more clearly comprehended by first turning our attention to the expressions Durkheim uses in talking about the relationship and the terms it connects.

The word "express" is frequently used in this connection. The categories are said to "express the fundamental conditions for an agreement between minds."[136] The relations which they "express could not have been learned except in and through society."[137] "What the category of time expresses is a time common to the group, a social time, so to speak. In itself, it is a veritable social institution."[138] "A calendar expresses

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[135] Ibid., p. 31.

[136] Ibid., p. 488. In other words, they express the fundamental conditions that must be met for consensus to be possible.

[137] Ibid., p. 491. This is given as a justification for having identified the "constituent elements" of the categories as stability and impersonality.

[138] Ibid., p. 23, n. 6. This helps clarify his earlier-quoted remark that "there is a close relationship between the ideas of tool, category, and institution."

the rhythm of the collective activities, while at the same time its function is to assure their regularity."[139]

From these uses of the word "express," we may see that on Durkheim's view, the categories are indeed conceptual instruments used in what Whorf calls the "compartmentalization of reality." When the latter says that "the forms of a person's thought are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious," and that these patterns are "the unperceived intricate systematization of his own language,"[140] he sounds quite Durkheimian.

Durkheim also uses the expression "correspond to" in speaking of both the categories and general concepts. He states that the former "correspond to the most universal properties of things,"[141] and that the latter "correspond to the way in which...society considers the things of its own

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[139] Ibid., p. 23.

[140] Benjamin Lee Whorf, "Language, Mind, and Reality," in Language, Thought, and Reality, ed. by John B. Carroll (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1964), p. 252. "Every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness."

[141] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 22.

proper experience."[142] It may be understood that in saying that the categories "correspond to the most universal properties of things," he is not using "properties" in the scholastic sense of attributes; rather, he is referring to what is predicable of all things. This is clarified by his statement that we cannot think of objects that are not in time and space, have no number, etc. Herein lies the difference between categorial concepts and general concepts; the latter may or may not be predicable of things, whereas the former must be.

He makes the important point that "all the men of a single civilization represent space in the same way,"[143] and that "the divisions of space vary with different societies" thereby giving to the conception of space its "social character."[144] In trying to account for this, he employs the notion of a "model" and writes that "the social organization [is] the model for the spatial organization and a reproduction of it."[145]

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[142] Ibid., p. 483. One should not be misled by the way he uses "society" or by the allusion to the "proper experience" society has into assuming that this indicates an unduly substantival conception of society. I believe the theme of social reification in Durkheim's sociology is an overworked interpretation, which in its most frenetic form has assumed that he posits a "group mind." I would suggest that in speaking of society's experience, he is merely referring to shared experiences of the individuals who form collectivities. This is quite in line with his emphasis upon consensus, a notion which when discussed by others (without recourse to metaphor) seldom elicits outrage or even increases blood pressure.

[143] Ibid., p. 24.

[144] Ibid., p. 24, n. 8.

[145] Ibid., p. 24. I find it puzzling how social organization could be both "the model for" and "a reproduction of" spatial organization.

The view that conceptions of space vary from one society to another reveals a significant element in Durkheim's approach to the categories, that of pluralism. This sort of flexibility is compatible, for example, with recent developments in physics, where space may be conceived of as Euclidean, Riemannian (curved in), or curved outward in accordance with the conception of Bolyai and Lobachevski; it has been pointed out that this illustrates the fact that one particular conceptual frame is not necessary for understanding the world.[146]

In part, this pluralism of categorial frameworks relies upon a dichotomization of the category itself and the sense-impressions for which it stands. Durkheim terms the latter "corresponding sensations." Yet, this carries no implication of naïve correspondence, as Merton claims. These impressions are variously represented. In order to charge Durkheim with holding a naïve theory of correspondence, it would have to be demonstrated that he thinks a category copies what it symbolizes. And this would be sheer nonsense. His pluralistic view of representation shows this, as do several other positions he holds. For example, there is his recognition of the fact that conceptions of the categories of space may vary from society to society. He also states that religion as "something essentially social" does not imply that it is a "mere epi-

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[146]Farhang Zabeeh, "On Language Games and Forms of Life," in Essays on Wittgenstein, ed. by E. D. Klemke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 350-351.

phenomenon" concerned with "translating into another language the material forms...," but rather that it "depends upon its material foundation and bears its mark";[147] religious "translation" is merely explanatory in the sense of making certain realities more "intelligible."[148] Finally, the point is made that collective representations "may express" what they stand for "by means of imperfect symbols," and that even "scientific symbols themselves are never more than approximate."[149] Now, if symbols are "imperfect" and still do the job they are intended to do, it would seem clear that Durkheim does not insist upon a naïve theory of correspondence. Merton's charge, therefore, is quite unjustified.

Durkheim also uses the notion of "prototype" in suggesting "collective force /as/ the prototype of the concept of efficient force...."[150] He does not deny the existence of such force in the physical world, but makes clear that it is more marked and more apparent in society; this is why its provenance is considered social.

In discussing the category of class, it is held that "society has furnished the outlines" for that category. The element of hierarchy is important here, since classification

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[147] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 471. (Italics mine)

[148] Ibid., p. 477.

[149] Ibid., p. 486. (Italics mine)

[150] Ibid., p. 488.

is considered a system based upon hierarchical arrangement. Such arrangements, Durkheim avers, are exclusively social inasmuch as "it is only in society that there are superiors, inferiors and equals."[151]

We need take this investigation into the ways in which our theorist refers to the relationship between the categories and society no further in order to assess the rigor with which he uses the expressions in question. They are all used in a sense perfectly compatible with a relative, not an absolute, sense of origin. The character of the relationship between the categories and the social world which they symbolize is clearly not so rigorous as to presuppose a naïve theory of correspondence. The conclusion is therefore inescapable that when Durkheim states that "the categories are social in origin," he simply means that the conditions which are their provenance are social. Despite both his interest in absolute origins and his periodic tendency to be side-tracked by this concern, when he posits social origins for the categories of the understanding, he is not alluding to absolute beginnings but to "origin" in the relative sense of "provenance."

I shall propose in the following chapter that Durkheim did not expect his readers to have to interpret so nebulous a proposition as "the categories are social in origin." Instead

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[151] Ibid., p. 173.

he gives us the very interpretation at which we have arrived. And I shall suggest that his commentators have simply stopped in mid-paragraph and thus understood improperly his categorial claim and its extensiveness.

CHAPTER III

REINTERPRETATION AND SOME IMPLICATIONS

> There is only one way of seeing one's own spectacles clearly: that is, to take them off. It is impossible to focus both on them and through them at the same time.
>
> --Stephen Toulmin

When Durkheim outlines his categorial argument in the "Introduction," the proposition commonly assumed to be his conclusion is immediately followed by this statement.

> At least--for in the actual condition of our knowledge of these matters, one should be careful to avoid all radical and exclusive statements--it is allowable to suppose that they /i.e., the categories/ are rich in social elements.[152]

It is curious that this statement seems largely to have been ignored by commentators on Durkheim's theory of the categories. There are similar statements in his "Conclusion." These, too, appear to have had no particular effect upon exegesis and/or criticism.

At minimum, it must be admitted that this observation is not mere whim. We may grant the possibility that most readers have regarded it as no more than a qualification; even in this capacity, however, it would merit some mention. In view of the analysis in the previous section, plus certain similar statements made elsewhere in Elementary Forms, I shall suggest that Durkheim's epistemic claim is more closely approximated in the above quotation than in the proposition

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[152] Ibid., p. 22 (Italics mine)

"the categories are social in origin."

It may seem unclear what Durkheim means by the expression "social elements" when he writes that the categories are "rich in social elements." He clarifies this at once by saying:

> Even at present, these can be imperfectly seen in some of them. For example, try to represent what the notion of time would be without the processes by which we divide it, measure it or express it without objective signs, a time which is not a succession of years, months, weeks, days, and hours! We cannot conceive of time, except on condition of distinguishing its different moments.[153]

In other words, the "social elements" in the category of time are reflected in the way in which time is conceived of in a particular civilization. We compartmentalize the temporal dimension of reality differently, for example, from civilizations which do not agree to demarcate time by minutes, hours, the seven-day week, the twelve-month year, etc. The category of time as it is conceived by a people is clearly the product of consensus. It has the character of "publicity"--which is how Durkheim uses the term "universality"[154] throughout this work in connection with the categories and other concepts--and so acts as both tool and institution.

Individual awareness of time is recognized, e.g., a person's memory of past events. But, Durkheim points out,

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[153] Ibid. The same claim is made for space. "Space could not be what it is if it were not, like time, divided and differentiated." (p. 24)

[154] Ibid., p. 482, n. 9. "What we mean by universality is the property which the concept has of being communicable to a number of minds, and in principle, to all minds...."

such an awareness could never enable men to develop the category of time, since the latter must have the character of publicity; it follows then that the category of time must be a product of social consensus. "It is not my time that is thus arranged; it is time in general, such as it is objectively thought of by everybody in a single civilization."[155]

It seems unfortunate that Durkheim should have tried to provide empirical demonstration of such a claim as this one by postulating religion as the particular institutional provenance from which the categories arise. Even were we to suppose that religion "reflects all...aspects /of society/,"[156] as Durkheim believes, there would be no reason to assume that religion is the only social institution which does so, or even that any single social institution does so. Still, this is a secondary postulation and in no way necessary for taking seriously Durkheim's claim that the categories are "rich in social elements."

Like the category of time, that of space represents "a primary co-ordination of the data of sensuous experience."[157] Space, if purely and absolutely homogeneous (as Kant holds),

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[155] Ibid., p. 23. (Italics Durkheim's)

[156] Ibid., p. 468.

[157] Ibid., p. 23.

"would be of no use, and could not be grasped by the mind."[158] (This may sound as though space must be such that man would be able to have given to him a conception of it, but this is not what is meant. The ways in which space is differentiated are not inherent in space itself; as the author points out, "by themselves, there are neither right nor left, up nor down, north nor south, etc.")[159]

It is posited that

> since all the men of a single civilization represent space in the same way, it is clearly necessary that these sympathetic values, and the distinctions which depend upon them, should be equally universal, and that almost necessarily implies that they be of social origin.[160]

This last phrase is an extremely important one. Had the word "almost" been omitted here, we should have had a statement equivalent to the proposition "the categories are social in origin." However, Durkheim carefully avoids making this assertion, and instead contents himself with suggesting that it follows that the category of space is social in origin. This cautiousness supports my contention that his epistemic claim is in fact not so strong a claim as has been supposed.

He also wants to point to the probability that the other categories he considers--class, force, and personality--and the distinction between right and left, are social in origin. He adds that "it is even possible to ask if the

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[158] Ibid. (Italics mine)

[159] Ibid., p. 24.

[160] Ibid. (Italics mine)

idea of contradiction does not also depend upon social conditions."[161] And, of course, to say that "it is possible to ask if" is noticeably more muted than saying that "it does."[162]

Most of the quotations used thus far in this section are from the "Introduction." Durkheim refers to all of these as an "hypothesis" which, if admitted, has the result that "the problem of knowledge is posed in new terms."[163] He adds that

> if...the categories are, as we believe they are, essentially collective representations, before all else, they should show the mental states of the group; they should depend upon the way in which this is founded and organized, upon its morphology, upon its religious, moral, and economic institutions, etc.[164]

Therefore, the points we have discussed thus far have expressed the author's intentions. Now we shall have a look at his "Conclusion" in order to see how consistent his remarks there are with his preliminary remarks. Our focus remains that of classification.

Durkheim's final conclusion regarding the categories is that "<u>at least some</u> of the categories are social things."[165]

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[161] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 25. Note that "social conditions" is used here and quite clearly is intended to be synonymous with "origin."

[162] There is an oddity about asking this of the idea of contradiction. One of the author's chief tenets posits variation among societies of the other concepts he discusses, and there is no way to allow for variation in the notion of contradiction. If 'p.-p' were variously conceived, it would no longer express a contradiction.

[163] <u>Ibid</u>.

[164] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 28.

[165] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 488. (Italics mine)

There remains a qualification here in his phrase "at least some." Plainly no claim of any sort is being made for all the categories mentioned at the outset of his study.

The question of how the categories acquired their social character is then answered, and this answer explains what he means when he terms them "social things." The categories[166] are social in two senses. First of all, they are concepts, and concepts are "the work of the group."[167] They are socially elaborated and thus reflect consensus. Durkheim claims no absolute universality or immutability for them; he says they are often seen as "absolutely universal and immutable" merely because they do reflect consensus and therefore a noticeable stability and impersonality. Secondly, "the things...they express are of a social nature."[168] They are modelled upon social phenomena; e.g., collective force is "the prototype" of the concept of efficient force. In suggesting why the constituent elements of the categories should have been taken

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[166] By "categories" we must now understand the author to be speaking only of those categories for which he finally postulates a social character. If we did not thus restrict the use of this term, we should not be taking account of his final conclusion mentioned above.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

from social life, the important point is made that "the relations which they express could not have been learned except in and through society." He continues

> It is not surprising that social time, social space, social classes and causality should be the basis of the corresponding categories, since it is under their social forms that these different relations were first grasped with a certain clarity by the human intellect.[169]

Here, the author reintroduces the idea that cooperation with an end in view is based upon "agreement as to the relation which exists between this end and the means for attaining it."

Once more, in speaking of the relation between society and concepts, Durkheim characterizes the role of society in "the genesis of our nature," not as an absolute role, but as a "preponderating" one.[170]

Finally, it should be noted that his epistemic claim is again referred to as an "hypothesis," one which he has tried to "submit...as methodically as possible to the control of facts."[171] Caution is still apparent here when he writes:

> To be sure, it cannot be said at present to what point these explanations may be able to reach, and whether or not they are of a nature to resolve all the problems. But it is equally impossible to mark in advance a limit beyond which they cannot go.[172]

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[169] Ibid., p. 491. (Italics mine)

[170] Ibid., p. 495.

[171] Ibid., p. 496.

[172] Ibid.

In an essay written two years later, he refers to his epistemic claim in the Elementary Forms as a "conjecture."[173]

We are now in a position to present a reformulation of Durkheim's categorial argument.

> Religious representations are collective (social) representations.
> Some of the categories are found in, and take their form from, religious representations.
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> At least some of the categories are rich in social elements.

Since all representations or symbolizations are collective or social, there is no quibbling with the first premiss.

Some of the categories are indeed found in religious representations as in the representations of any other social institution. The only problematic aspect of the second premiss is the inference that religion is the provenance from which these categories arise; this might be taken to mean that the way the categories are conceived in the societies Durkheim studies is shaped by religion; on the other hand, it might be construed as meaning that this is true of the categories in any society. There appears to be a clue as to how this part of the second premiss is to be taken in Durkheim's discussion of his methodological claims in the "Conclusion." Here he states the following:

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[173]Émile Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions," in Wolff, op. cit., 338. This essay was originally published in 1914.

> If among certain peoples the ideas of sacredness, the soul and God are to be explained sociologically, it should be presumed scientifically that, in principle, the same explanation is valid for all the peoples among whom these ideas are found with the same essential characteristics.[174]

Although this is a statement regarding religion, it does represent one of the author's methodological claims; therefore, it would seem to hold for the categories as well. Provided this is an acceptable assumption, we should be warranted in interpreting the problematic part of the second premiss as indicating that the provenance wherein the categories originate is religious in any society where the same essential characteristics are predicable of the religion of that society as are predicable of the religions of the societies he has studied.

So far as his conclusion is concerned, he is saying that the conventional conceptualizations of at least some of the categories are derived from social conditions. This accounts for the variation in categorial frameworks so often found among different societies. And it seems plausible to assume that from this conceptual variation, it follows that for a given people its particular conceptualization of a category is that category, i.e., that a category and the conventional categorial representation are the same.

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[174] Elementary Forms, op. cit., 463. (Italics mine)

Implications of the Reinterpretation

The final step in this reinterpretation is to point to a few implications of this new interpretation of Durkheim's epistemic claim. First we shall see in what way his actual conclusion differs from the conclusion he has commonly been understood as having given. On the one hand, this involves consideration of some of the criticisms that have been made of his epistemic claim. On the other hand, it has to do with the extensiveness of what he claims for the categories. This, in turn, will lead to suggesting fresh answers to two perennial questions: (1) has he formulated a theory of the categories?, and (2) does this amount to a theory of knowledge?

Exegesis and criticism in the literature has shown that the proposition "the categories are social in origin" has commonly been taken as an assertion about absolute social origin. Analysis of this proposition has made possible the suggestion that Durkheim's claim for the categories is merely that social institutions constitute their provenance, and therefore that his claim for their origin is relative, not absolute. The reinterpretation suggested in this study is consistent with such an understanding of the proposition in question, but in its clarity and in the way in which it is cautiously set out by Durkheim himself, this reinterpretation is much more valuable as a contribution to sociological theory and to several other areas as well. (This will be further elaborated in the "Conclusion" of this study.)

There is a difference between the empirical stature of

the two propositions "the categories are social in origin" (understood in the absolute sense of "origin") and "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements." The first proposition, construed as it usually is, is an assertion for which empirical verfication is possible only in principle. The second proposition, however, lends itself quite easily to empirical verification in fact. Studies conducted by social anthropologists and linguists, as well as work in the sociology of knowledge and philosophy of language, attest to the de facto empirically testable character of Durkheim's claim that "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements." In fact, since Durkheim's time this has become something of a truism. The view, for example, is widely held that "connotations tend to be common to members of a culture, while 'association' is subjective."[175]

By rigorous adherence to the most stringent interpretation of Hempel's position regarding the predictive value of an hypothesis, it might seem that the proposition in question is not a true hypothesis. The basis for such a view lies in the suggestion that "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements" is not translatable into "if...then..." form and that if this is the case the statement is merely descriptive

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[175]William K. Frankena, "Some Aspects of Language," in Language, Thought and Culture, ed. by Paul Henle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 128.

and not empirically testable.[176] However, it seems possible to meet this objection by showing that in fact empirical findings either do or do not accord with what the proposition states. In Hempel's words, if "it is possible to derive from /the statement/...certain test implications of the form 'if test conditions C are realized, then outcome E will occur,'"[177] then this condition is satisfied. For example, if connotations did not "tend to be common to members of a culture," as Frankena and others hold them to be, then Durkheim's proposition would be falsified; that the reverse is the case shows that the above proposition or one semantically equivalent to it is confirmed. Therefore, its predictive power would appear to be assured.

Moreover, it might be argued that since some lawlike statements are atemporal--e.g., Galileo's law of falling bodies --in that the correlations contained therein are not sequential, such statements need not be translated into the "normally" conditional character of "Hempel-explanation." I would suggest that Durkheim's proposition, as it stands, may be viewed in this way. And if this view is admissable, it is difficult not to agree with Rudner's observation that "there appears to be no very good reason for withholding the term 'explanatory

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[176] "The test implications of a hypothesis are normally of a conditional character...." Carl G. Hempel, Philosophy of Natural Science (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 19. (Italics mine)

[177] Ibid., p. 30. (Italics mine)

argument' from an argument that fulfills all of the conditions for such but that contains only laws of atemporal correlation,"[178] and to apply this remark, mutatis mutandis, to Durkheim's proposition. The chief empirical goal, after all, is explanation; predictiveness is only a device useful, in certain cases and in varying degrees, in enhancing explanatory power.

Implications for Criticism

This reinterpreted claim carries with it some interesting implications for the criticisms advanced against Durkheim's epistemic efforts. It is not the chief purpose of this study to enumerate these implications and consider them in detail, but I shall mention several.

The sense in which aprioristic criticisms of empirical claims are inappropriate in general has already been pointed out. The following remarks, therefore, are simply made in addition to the earlier blanket indictment of such criticism.

We might begin with Cassirer's charge that in trying to derive the categories from social reality, Durkheim fails to see them as "the conditions of this reality."

Cassirer fails to note that when Durkheim speaks of a particular category in this connection, he is talking about that category as it is conceived of within a society. The

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[178]Richard S. Rudner, Philosophy of Social Science Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966). p. 65.

conception a particular people has of any category is that category. There is no distinction, in Durkheim's thought, between a category and a categorial conceptualization. He does not adopt the apriorist's procedure of reifying the categories as something apart, and hence there is nothing to which a particular categorial conceptualization must approximate. This explanation is equally useful in countering all three of Merton's criticisms.

Merton's accusation of "uncritical acceptance of a naïve theory of correspondence" is misdirected. That a category is "rich in social elements" scarcely implies such a theory. His second objection is also a misfire. He states that Durkheim's analysis is intended to account, not for the particular categorial system in a society, but for the existence of a categorial system common to a society. The preceding explanation that is intended to meet Cassirer's criticisms meets Merton's second charge as well. There is no reason to make a distinction between a categorial system "common to" a society and "the particular" categorial system of that society. They are the same categorial framework. Merton's third criticism is much like his second and may be dissolved in the same way. That Durkheim is not dealing with something called "the categories" but with their conventional manifestations is not a defect. Again, to assume a distinction here is to accept the view that the categories somehow exist apart from particular conceptions of them. Thus, all of Merton's criticisms of Durkheim's analysis of the categories are deflated.

Among the most muddled interpretations of this categorial analysis are those which take it to mean that the concepts it attempts to explain are purely social products. This position is diametrically opposed to the actual claim made in Elementary Forms. It is expressed by Charles Ellwood's statement that when Durkheim "attempted to construe as purely social products such prevalent social concepts as space and time, he bordered upon the absurd...."[179] The difference between suggesting that "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements" and asserting that certain categories are "purely social products" is obvious and requires no further comment.

The authors of Social Thought from Lore to Science really fare no better. Their discussion is simply less polemical. Having observed that "Durkheim commits himself to the by no means unambitious attempt to derive the fundamental categories of thought from the nature of society itself," they continue:

> This is clearly an excursion into philosophic territory, and Durkheim exposes himself to philosophic counter-criticism, which runs as follows: To bring in society adds nothing new whatever, for insofar as the categories reflect society alone, they are inadequate for understanding nature; and insofar as society itself is only a part of nature, there is no need to give it special consideration.[180]

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[179]Charles A. Ellwood, A History of Social Philosophy (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1944), p. 433. (Italics mine)

[180]Howard Becker and Harry Elmer Barnes, Social Thought from Lore to Science, 2d ed., III (Washington, D. C.: Harren Press, 1952), pp. 838-839. (Italics mine)

Again we find the assumption that the categories "reflect society alone." What else, one wonders, would they reflect? (But as Becker and Barnes use the word, "reflect" seems to do the same rigorous task Merton takes it to be doing; perhaps there is also an implication here of the "naïve theory of correspondence" charge.) As for the sharp demarcation between society and nature, it seems almost as though the authors had forgotten about language or conceptual thought and its purpose. The question of giving society "special consideration" equally dismisses the way in which language is learned and how languages differ in what they express. As Ernest Gellner has remarked: "It tends to be forgotten that Durkheim's main problem, as he saw it, was not to explain religion but to explain conceptual thought and above all the necessity, the compulsive nature of certain of our general concepts."[181]

Given our analysis of Durkheim's claim, we may also take issue with Benôit-Smullyan's characterization of this explanation of the categories as "speculative." Since the proposition "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements" is empirically verifiable, referring to it as "speculative" reflects gross misunderstanding. It is not clear whether this critic regards as "speculative" the entire enterprise or merely that part wherein Durkheim tries to test his hypothesis with regard to religion. Even in the latter instance, however, we should take into consideration something I mentioned earlier,

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[181]Ernest Gellner, op. cit., p. 119. (Italics Gellner's)

viz., that the premiss "some of the categories are found in, and take their form from religious representations" is not crucial either to the validity or the usefulness of Durkheim's final claim.

In this connection the following quotation from Paul Feyerabend is especially relevant:

> At all times, the existence, within a certain tradition of a variety of opinions (or a variety of theories) has been regarded as proof of the unsoundness of the method adopted by the members of this tradition. It was assumed, as being nearly self-evident, that the proper method must lead to the truth, that the truth is one, and that the proper method must therefore result in the establishment of a single theory and the perennial elimination of all alternatives. Once a dispute has been made empirically testable, it becomes an essential element in the development of knowledge.[182]

Feyerabend's observation points toward the two standard questions regarding Durkheim's categorial analysis--whether it is a theory of the categories and whether it amounts to a theory of knowledge. It is to these questions that we shall now turn.

"A Theory of the Categories?"

The purpose of a theory of categories, according to Manley Thompson, is to provide principles by which categories can be determined and ordered.[183] There is no longer agreement

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[182] P. K. Feyerabend, "Explanation, Reduction, and Empiricism," in Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, III (Scientific Explanation, Space, and Time), ed. by Herbert Feigl and Grover Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 73.

[183] Manley Thompson, "Categories," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2, p. 54.

among philosophers that such a theory is even possible, however, since it presupposes that there is a universal schema of the categories to be unveiled. This would hold on the Wittgensteinian view, for example; since the limits of all language cannot be stated, philosophic clarity is achieved only in piecemeal fashion, context by context, so that a fortiori there is no universal categorial schema to be determined and ordered, nor would it be possible to have one. As one Wittgensteinian has remarked, "it is a mistake to try to find a boundary to the use /a word has/ when none has been drawn in our language."[184]

Traditionally, such attempts have been made, the best known, of course, being those of Aristotle and Kant. The former's theory of categories has at its foundation the principle that only substances can have accidents and categories other than substances are accidents. The categories Aristotle includes in his schema vary in number from eight to ten;[185] there is no insistence that they be restricted to either number or that they be mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

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[184]Alice Ambrose, "Wittgenstein on Universals," in Essays in Analysis (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1966), p. 118.

[185]These are: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, date, action, passivity, posture, and possession. The last two are mentioned only twice in his works, and at one point he refers to the remaining eight as a complete list. (Vide: Sir David Ross, Aristotle (London: Methuen & Co., 1964), pp. 21-22.)

Kant holds that the categories are a priori forms of understanding which are necessary conditions for there to be objects of experience. They number twelve[186] and, according to Kant, "yield an exhaustive inventory of /the/ powers /of the understanding/."[187]

A major criticism of both the Aristotelian and the Kantian schemas is that the subject matter of these theories is not discovered, but created.[188] And while both set forth principles providing a categorial schema, it has been asked whether these principles amount to anything more than rules for the construction of a certain kind of language. P. F. Strawson maintains that their theories describe, not their subject matter, but the conceptual framework actually presupposed by ordinary language; both Aristotle and Kant, Strawson says, use metaphysical or transcendental hypotheses purporting to account for and establish the necessity of the categorial framework that underlies common sense.[189]

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[186] Categories of quantity: unity, plurality, totality; of quality: reality, negation, limitation; of relation: of inherence and subsistence, of causality and dependence, of community; of modality: possibility/impossibility, existence/non-existence, necessity/contingency.

[187] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, tr. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1929), p. 113.

[188] Manley Thompson, op. cit., p. 52.

[189] P. F. Strawson, Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 9-11, passim.

Now, given that the purpose of a theory of categories is to provide principles by which these concepts can be determined and ordered, let us try to discover whether Durkheim's anslysis yields such a theory.

The first condition that must be met by a theory of categories is the provision of a principle (or principles) for determining the categories themselves. Durkheim does not present a list of categories determined according to any particular principle. Instead, he merely observes that "the ideas of time, space, class, number, cause, substance, personality, etc." are "what philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of the understanding."[190] In a footnote, he writes:

> We say that time and space are categories because there is no difference between the role played by these ideas in the intellectual life and that which falls to the ideas of class and cause.[191]

What is interesting here is that (1) Durkheim makes no attempt to come up with his own list of categories, but rather takes as "given" some categories from Aristotle's list, adding the concept of "personality,"[192] (2) his list is more open-ended than either Aristotle's or Kant's, as shown by his use of the word "etc.," and (3) he asserts that "philosophers since Aristotle" have endorsed this catalogue, despite the fact that

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[190] Durkheim, op. cit., pp. 21-22. (Italics mine)

[191] Ibid., n. 4.

[192] What he means by "personality" is human nature dualistically conceived as comprised of an impersonal (social) aspect and an individualizing aspect. (Ibid., pp. 305-306)

neither time, space, nor class are categories in the Kantian schema.

If our theorist were trying to demarcate what he terms "a certain number of essential ideas which dominate all our intellectual life,"[193] we might expect an attempt to arrive at a comprehensive list, one comprised of that "certain number" of ideas; our expectation would be strengthened inasmuch as these are "essential" ideas, i.e., presumably ideas without which intellectual life would be somehow incomplete. But he does not provide such a list. (This is not meant as a criticism of Durkheim. Nowhere does he state that it is his intention to provide a "theory" of categories. I want only to show that the first condition such a theory must meet is not satisfied in his case.)

The second condition a theory of categories must meet is provision of a principle or principles according to which the categories can be ordered. Despite his interest in the hierarchical element in classification, this condition is not fulfilled in Durkheim's analysis either. The only trace of ordering of these concepts is found in his ideas regarding "totality." Having given a logical definition of "class,"[194] he goes on to say that it is "the idea of all which is at the basis of...classifications," and that no category is more

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[193] Ibid., p. 21 (Italics mine)

[194] Ibid., p. 489. Class is defined as "a mould including the whole group of all possible objects which satisfy the same condition." (Italics Durkheim's)

important, "for as the role of the categories is to envelope all the other concepts, the category par excellence would seem to be this very concept of totality."[195] (It is interesting to note that although this concept is accorded an eminent position equivalent to that of substance in Aristotle's schema, it is not mentioned among those concepts given categorial status in Durkheim's "Introduction." Perhaps this is meant to strengthen the thrust of its preëminence later in his work.) In any case, the only thing that comes of this is a suggestion that one concept is basic to all other concepts. There is no attempt to order the other concepts which that of "totality" is considered to underlie. For example, time, space, and personality are not placed in an hierarchical sequence. Therefore, Durkheim's categorial analysis does not meet either of the conditions for a theory of categories.

His most vigorous interest regarding the categories is to offer an account of their necessity. This has been recognized by a number of writers. But we must take care to distinguish this emphasis from a theory of categories. Accounting for the necessity of these concepts does not amount to a categorial theory. And regardless of how on-target we may consider his account of categorial necessity, no such account amounts to a theory of categories.

The only other point I wish to make in this connection is that Durkheim gives no indication that he was attempting

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[195] Ibid. (Italics Durkheim's)

to formulate such a theory. As we have seen, the conclusion that emerges from his analysis is consistently referred to as an "hypothesis," not as a theory. It only makes sense to ask if he has given us a true, empirical hypothesis.

Therefore, I suggest that it is more than a trifle pointless to criticize Durkheim for not having provided a "tenable theory of the categories" or an "empirically testable theory of the categories." It is true that he did not develop a "tenable theory of the categories" or an "empirically testable theory of the categories," but it is also true that he was not trying to develop a theory at all. His claim obviously is not as large as most commentators have wanted to make it. If a man composes a ditty, one would hardly complain that he had not written a requiem mass, unless he had promised to do so.

"A Theory of Knowledge?"

It is the business of a theory of knowledge to provide a systematic investigation and explication of those principles which make knowledge possible. The epistemologist may be defending knowledge from scepticism, as he is commonly taken to be doing, but I would agree with John Pollock that his distinguishing role is "to explain how knowledge is possible."[196] This means that the theories with which he has to do are attempts to set forth the conditions that must be met for there to be something called "knowledge."

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[196]John L. Pollock, "Perceptual Knowledge," Philosophical Review, LXXX (1971), p. 287.

Theories of knowledge take into account--in varying degrees--such matters as different kinds of knowledge,[197] how we acquire knowledge and what we do with it, and whether or not there is certain knowledge (and in lieu of certainty, what does count as adequate justification). It is altogether incorrect to relegate theories of knowledge to that body of metaphysical considerations which are unanswerable in principle.[198] Empirical, no less than deductive, science tries to arrive at reliable knowledge; therefore, investigating the conditions for knowledge must be as necessary for empirical as for non-empirical endeavors. Otherwise, we should only end up with a body of useless data. Raw data must be interpreted, and interpretation presupposes agreement about what to do with the knowledge that can be gotten from this data. The very existence of empirical methodologies disallows our shuddering and turning away when the phrase "theory of knowledge" is uttered.

The present issue is whether or not Durkheim has given us a theory of knowledge. The issue is all the more intriguing since he keeps his categorial claim at an hypothetical level

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[197]For example: knowledge of facts (such as are expressed by "knowing that..." and "knowing which") and technical knowledge (such as "knowing how to...").

[198]Here I have in mind such questions as "What is Time?", "What is Meaning?", and "What is Knowledge?" These are the sorts of "what is" questions that arise from the traditional, essentialistic orientation, and which Wittgenstein proposed to dissolve. This, he said, would "shew the fly the way out of the bottle."

and uses the phrase "theory of knowledge" so seldom.

In his "Introduction," the author refers to "the rationalism which is imminent in the sociological theory of knowledge /as being/ midway between the classical empiricism and apriorism."[199] He speaks of the need to interpret "a sociological theory of knowledge" in such a way that we keep in mind that society is not something apart from, but is a part of nature.[200] And he remarks that

> thus renovated, the theory of knowledge seems destined to unite the opposing advantages of the two rival theories, without incurring their inconveniences....It leaves the reason its specific power, but it accounts for it and does so without leaving the world of observable phenomena.[201]

At last, in his "Conclusion," Durkheim modestly qualifies his epistemological endeavor.

> Perhaps we shall be found over bold in attempting so complex a question here. To treat it as it should be treated, the sociological conditions of knowledge should be known much better than they actually are; we are only beginning to catch glimpses of some of them. However, the question is so grave, and so directly implied in all that has preceded, that we must make an effort not to leave it without an answer. Perhaps it is not impossible, even at present, to state some general principles which may at least aid in the solution.[202]

In this passage, we find clarification of the question of how what he is doing may be seen as a theory of knowledge: the

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[199] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 31, n. 22.

[200] Ibid., p. 31.

[201] Ibid., p. 32.

[202] Ibid., p. 480. (Italics mine)

conditions that must be met for knowledge to be possible are social conditions.

Of course, a theory is necessarily a theory of something. And in examining a theory of knowledge, we must take account of what counts as knowledge. Rather than fall into the trap of asking "What is 'knowledge'?," we shall follow A. J. Ayer (who chose at this point to follow Wittgenstein) and ask "how does he use the word 'knowledge'?"[203]

Actually, Durkheim rarely uses the term "knowledge." For it he substitutes the word "truth." On the face of it, this seems a rather spooky manoeuvre, for what is gained by it is a certain measure of persuasiveness, the same sort of respectability-by-connotation that is gained by using the word "logic" in lieu of "conceptual thought." This move is further enhanced by the fact that the author discusses "truth" in connection with "the genesis of logical thought." At any rate, using "truth" for "knowledge" appears to presuppose the initial condition which epistemologists commonly insist be satisfied in a theory of a knowledge, viz., "that p be true."

The characteristics of truth are the same two essential elements that characterize the categories--stability and impersonality.[204] These demarcate truth from "sensuous

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[203] A. J. Ayer, The Problem of Knowledge (Baltimore: Penguin, 1956), Chapter 1. Ayer asks the question "what is knowledge?," then immediately switches to a discussion of how the word "know" is used.

[204] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 488.

appearances," as they demarcate the categories from "sensual representations" (sensations, perceptions, or images).[205] The author speaks of truth as "founded in collective experience," a statement which has at its foundation the assumption that without the ability to conceptualize, knowledge would be impossible. And since conceptual thought is possible because men can reach consensus, it follows that knowledge is possible because of consensus.

It may seem as though Durkheim is reifying truth as something "out there," something to be got at. However, he is not talking about knowledge or truth as some sort of hypostatized entity, but instead about the way in which it is possible for men to achieve knowledge.

Nor is he oblivious to the element of belief, a condition which the Standard Analysis of knowledge (and its variants) holds must be met.[206] On this Analysis, this is known as "the entailment thesis," since knowing is held to entail believing. Durkheim states that the authority or necessity implicit in our concepts comes not only from their "objective value," but also from their "harmony with other beliefs or opinions."[207]

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[205] Ibid., p. 484. Cf., p. 488.

[206] According to this Analysis, the following necessary and sufficient conditions must hold for "S to know that p": (1) p is true, (2) S believes p, and (3) S is justified in believing p. It must be noted that the Standard Analysis has variants because some of its conditions are disputed or considered insufficient, including that of belief.

[207] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 486.

We believe those things which, in other words, are consistent with our other beliefs. And this disposition, too, is rooted in consensus. The same account would seem to hold for the condition of "justification for believing."

Thus, Durkheim's analysis of the categories, while not a theory of the categories, does lead to an account of the conditions which must be met for knowledge to be possible. These are the conditions of stability and impersonality, realizable only in and through the most dominant collective representations, i.e., the categories.

While a further implication of his epistemological position will be drawn in the following chapter, I want to suggest that we are warranted in saying that Durkheim has formulated a theory of knowledge. It is not very tightly formulated; one must gather scraps, orts, and fragments from here and there. And, of course, it is well to remember that to suggest that he has produced a theory of knowledge neither implies that it is an acceptable theory of knowledge nor that it cannot be improved upon. It is merely to say that the author produces an investigation and explication of the conditions that make knowledge possible.

I shall shortly suggest that Durkheim has made a contribution not only to epistemology but to several other areas, as well.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

> Confidence in authority is indispensable for the transmission of any human culture.
> --Michael Polanyi

The primary concern of this study has been to achieve a clearer comprehension of Durkheim's treatment of the categories of the understanding. It was postulated that his categorial doctrine, when not ignored completely, has been misinterpreted. What commentators have made of it has been pointed out, together with sources of dissatisfaction resulting from their exegesis and criticisms.

Misinterpretation was found to stem principally from two assumptions: first, the assumption that Durkheim's categorial claim is summed up in the proposition "the categories are social in origin"; and second, in the belief that the meaning of this proposition is such that what is predicated of the categories is absolute, historical rather than relative, social origin. As interest in absolute origins was revealed in Durkheim's work; a partial explanation of this interest was offered by showing how much he was influenced by evolutionism and by his own views of causation and definition. Nonetheless, the suggestion followed that "the categories are social in origin" does not lend itself to interpretation in the absolute sense of "origin." Support for this claim was offered by a linguistic analysis of the meanings of an assort-

ment of locutions Durkheim uses in referring to the relation between the categories and society. In consequence, I have posited that when he states that "the categories are social in origin," he means that social conditions constitute, not their absolute beginning, but rather their provenance.

In clarifying his categorial claim, it was suggested that this claim does not actually take the form "the categories are social in origin." Instead, it consists of the hypothesis, "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements."

Given this interpretation--with its support from Durkheim's text--we find significant differences in the extensiveness of his actual (as opposed to his apparent) claim. New answers have therefore been proposed to the stock questions of whether Durkheim's categorial treatment is a theory of categories and whether it amounts to a theory of knowledge. Since it does not meet the conditions for a theory of categories, I have suggested that it is not a categorial theory, and, further, that the author did not intend it as a theory but as an hypothesis. While denying this enterprise status as a theory of categories, I have suggested that it is plausible to view it as a theory of knowledge.

Perhaps the weakest aspect of Durkheim's epistemological enterprise is his attempt to identify religion as the provenance from which the categories arose. During the present investigation, I have tried to indicate, both from a logical and an empirical point of view, just how unfortunate this move was. For, as has been pointed out, "it is a question-begging

procedure to use a statement whose cognitive status is at issue as a premise in any argument, inductive or deductive."[208] Nonetheless, the following quotation from the Polish semanticist, Adam Schaff, is pertinent here:

> The conviction that the falsity of some opinions expounded in a work cancels the correctness of all other theses of its author arises from a specific interpretation of the development of science as following a straight-line course in which some theoretical systems represent pure truth, whereas others represent pure untruth. This is nonsense, and can be refuted by any confrontation with facts. Thus, myths can play a certain role in the history of science. Truths, even those of great significance, can be found in systems that are otherwise in error and even anti-scientific....Falsehoods, even very serious ones, can appear in systems that are otherwise highly correct. It is well known that in science the placing a finger on the problem itself is often no less important than its positive solution.[209]

To suggest that the same may be true of theories or hypothetical formulations would not seem to distort the point Schaff has made. The value of hypotheses does not lie exclusively in their having been verified; that is to say, verification is not the sole criterion by which we are warranted in rejoicing over some formulations and embarrassedly sweeping others under the carpet. There is also the matter of what Popper calls "nearness to truth or verisimilitude" which is based on the idea of "the amount of interesting and important

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[208] Wesley C. Salmon, "Verifiability and Logic," in Mind, Matter, and Method: Essays in Philosophy and Science in Honor of Herbert Feigl, ed. by Paul K. Feyerabend and Grover Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 360.

[209] Adam Schaff, Introduction to Semantics, tr. by Olgierd Wejtasiewicz (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1962), pp. 56-57.

true consequences" a theoretical proposition may have.[210] And, just as highly testable theories that fail to pass our tests may retain their interest-value and importance and even be fruitful in pointing the way to the construction of better theories, so it is with some hypotheses. The latter may be of considerable value in "placing a finger on the problem."

I should like to suggest that this is the case with Durkheim's categorial claim that "at least some of the categories are rich in social elements." From this claim and the lengthy attempt to provide evidence for it, a number of rather important insights emerge. By pointing out some of these, we may see how he has contributed to, and in some cases anticipated, subsequent developments in several academic disciplines.

Durkheim's interest in language and in the connection between language and society lies at the root of these contributions. In a paper presented to the Société Française de Philosophie in 1906, he said that "without society, language would not exist; and without language, the higher mental processes would be impossible."[211] Here in a single statement, apriorists have been indicted, and a necessary relation posited between society and language and between society and abstract thought.

"How does it happen that people communicate with one another?" has been termed "a philosophical and sociological

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[210] "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject," op. cit., p. 366.

[211] Quoted in: Benôit-Smullyan, op. cit., p. 512.

problem of enormous significance,"[212] and it is in great part to this problem that Elementary Forms is addressed.

The answer proposed in that work emphasizes the phenomenon of consensus. Without consensus, there could be no such thing as language. The latter, Durkheim writes, "is something fixed; it changes but very slowly, and consequently it is the same with the conceptual system which it expresses."[213] Without publicity, or what Durkheim terms "universality," there could be no consensus and hence no communication between men. "Concepts are the work of society and are enriched by its experience." And it is this that "makes conceptual thought so valuable for us." Since they are collective representations, concepts "add to that which we learn by our personal experience all that wisdom and science which the group accumulated in the course of centuries."[214]

The emphasis Durkheim gives consensus in the role of concept-formation leads to the significant observation that "each civilization has its organized system of concepts which characterizes it,"[215] that there is variation in conceptual frameworks from one society to another. We may compare with this some remarks made in his 1904-1905 lectures to a class

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[212] Schaff, op. cit., p. 120.

[213] Durkheim, op. cit., p. 481. Inasmuch as linguistic change is acknowledged, it is obvious that "fixed" is used here in a relative sense.

[214] Ibid., p. 483.

[215] Ibid., p. 484.

in the history of education at the University of Paris:

> ...the notions which we would regard as indispensable to the normal functioning of all thought are erroneously made normative for all peoples;...it can no longer be a question of bestowing upon the species a clearly asserted reality which one can express once and for all in one formula /for/ when, in order to form an idea of what man is, one addresses oneself uniquely to some people called privileged, the representation which one makes is grossly truncated.[216]

Another important and related notion is found in the author's observation that the relations which the categories and other more general concepts express could have been learned only in and through society. This follows, of course, given the phenomena of consensus and cultural variation in conceptual frameworks.

This fact, in turn, is related to his view of concepts as tools. If men are to communicate in everyday situations, there must be a standardized way of doing so, and the means for achieving this end is precisely that of ordinary language. And in the latter, concepts and the categories do serve as tools--hence, his statement that the notions of tool, category, and institution are intimately connected.

The four insights into the workings of language which I have selected as of uncommon importance--consensus, cultural pluralism, learning a language as a social occurrence, and concepts as tools--have considerable cross-disciplinary relevance. A separate and more exhaustive study would be

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[216]Émile Durkheim, l'Évolution pédagogique en France (2 vols.; Paris: Librarie Félix Alcan, 1938), II, pp. 197, 199.

required to indicate the actual magnitude of these implications. I shall but point to some of them here.

The author's influence among British social anthropologists, especially those of the functionalist persuasion, is well known. Although much of the stir created among ethnologists has focussed upon his treatment of various aspects of primitive religion, there are those who reflect the direct influence of his epistemological claim, e.g., Victor Turner, in his own combination of psychoanalytic concepts with Durkheim's observations concerning the partial dependence upon its emotional overtones of the effectiveness of a symbol in its social context.[217]

Less familiar perhaps is Durkheim's direct influence upon semantics, whose founder, de Saussure, was a Durkheimian. One of de Saussure's basic tenets is that with respect to a given language community choice of the sound image (signifiant) is socially conditioned.[218] Notions which are more attributable to what anthropologists would call "independent invention" are common among semanticists and include all four of the aforementioned linguistic ideas.

Rather closely related to the approach of sociology of knowledge is a trend among those philosophers of science who are interested in showing the connection between the metaphysical assumptions of scientists and scientific theory and

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[217] Turner, op. cit.

[218] F. de Saussure, Cours de linguistique générale (Paris: Payot, 1949), p. 99.

practice. Here, too, the notions of consensus and concepts as tools, and (more broadly) metaphysical assumptions as reflective of society, are operant. This is illustrated in Stephen Toulmin's remark that

> The structure of a scientific theory may be built up entirely from the bricks of observation, but the exact position the bricks occupy depends on the layout of the scientist's conceptual scaffolding....[219]

There is little to add to a claim for Durkheim's contribution to epistemology. However, it might be mentioned that in the Standard Analysis, the implicit appeal to standards of adequacy (both for the truth of p and the belief that p) is to assumed standards, i.e., standards arrived at by virtue of consensus. This notion is carried still further by Wittgenstein in such observations as that standards of measurement are not "given," but agreed upon,[220] and that rules of inference do not compel us as rails compel a locomotive to keep to its course. He remarks that the sense in which laws of inference do compel us is

> in the same sense, that is to say, as other laws of human society....If you draw different conclusions you do indeed get into conflict, e.g., with society; and also with other practical consequences.[221]

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[219] Stephen Toulmin, "Contemporary Scientific Mythology," in Metaphysical Beliefs: Three Essays by Stephen Toulmin, Ronald W. Hepburn, Alasdair MacIntyre, 2d ed. (New York: Schoken Books, 1970), p. 8.

[220] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, ed. by G. H. von Wright et al, tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), I.5.

[221] Ibid., I.116.

Proofs and paradigms serve as rules and, according to Wittgenstein, rules are principles we have decided to follow. When we consider a mathematical axiom to be self-evidently true, "it is our making the self-evidence count, that makes it into a mathematical proposition."[222] And it may be noted that, like Durkheim, Wittgenstein emphasizes social learning --in his case, often as the reason we accept what we accept; we learn a certain technique, rule, or formula, it works, and so we continue to use it.

Finally, Durkheim's views have implications for the attempts of philosophers of language to analyze certain general features of language such as meaning, truth, verification, and logical necessity. The above remarks made with regard to epistemology would overlap here.

These points have been very much skimmed over. However, the point has been made that Durkheim's categorial formulation has proven fruitful for several of the ideas it has yielded. And in mentioning various areas of study in which these notions have application, I have wanted to show, with regard to Durkheim, a point Popper makes in Conjectures and Refutations when he speaks of the arbitrary distinction of disciplines. "Problems," he writes, "may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline." And so, I would add, may promising ways of clarifying and solving, or dissolving, those problems.

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[222] Ibid., III.3.

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