

Introduction

Durkheim's sociology is not usually considered in regard to its relationship to the economy—an economy which belongs to *la vie sérieuse* and which, together with religion and ritual (*la vie religieuse*), stands in opposition to the life of pleasure and art. Indeed, of all the classical founding fathers of sociology from the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is Durkheim who seems most removed from such a context, as compared with the work of Vilfredo Pareto, Georg Simmel or Max Weber, for all of whom this connection is both recognised and well established. It is the same for writers of the previous generation—Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer and Alexis de Tocqueville. It could even be said that Durkheim has become the representation par excellence of the sociologist who clearly distances himself from the economist, almost eclipsing Auguste Comte in this respect. Precisely because Durkheim's sociology is holistic in approach, and emphasises the common values that will programme the individual right from the very first steps that individual takes in society, it seems to be the antithesis of an economic approach founded on methodological individualism and rational self-interested behaviour.

One can almost forget that Durkheim's first work, his French dissertation, dealt with the division of labour, an economic topic if ever there was one. But saying that, it has to be admitted that the distinct message the reader takes from the book, following Durkheim's own emphasis, involves the non-economic dimension of economic relations; once again it is the opposition to economics which dominates. This reading is lent even greater weight by Durkheim's explanation, in the preface to the second edition of *Division of Labour*, that he was abandoning an extensive and ambitious research programme devoted to the historical transformations through which professional groups had passed—from medieval corporations to those forms of association engendered by the development of modern industry—in favour of a completely different programme: the sociological study of religion in primitive societies.

However, there is an unavoidable question that arises from the importance given to the economy by all the major founding fathers of social science in general, and sociology in particular, at the exact time when Durkheim was elaborating his own work: how could a major sociological body of writing emerge during this period *without* confronting questions arising from the disruption of contemporary economic change? This was after all an issue that preoccupied all other great thinkers of the time.

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How could the study of social facts, the study to which Durkheim attached both his name and his work, simply disregard the abundance of facts arising from modern economic activity, whether the latter is conceived in terms of capitalism, industrial society or, of course, the division of labour? Can we believe that a sociologist who claimed in the strongest terms that sociological research was not worth one hour of his time if it did not allow him to better understand the present would be capable of *not* closely studying the functional economic conditions of modern societies?¹

By turning our attention to the way in which the economic dimension bears upon Durkheimian sociology, we are not merely examining one dimension among others of his work, but one of the most important. This was something Durkheim had in common with contemporary classical sociologists.

But does Durkheim's change of perspective, placing the sociology of religion first among his preoccupations, not imply an abandonment of any sociology of the economy? We do not think so. Weber proved that an interest in the sociology of religion was in no respect contradictory to a strong interest in the sociology of the economy. We will demonstrate that the reorientation of Durkheim's work after *Suicide* did not mean that he ceased thinking about the economic dimension of social life, for this reorientation led to a new and original approach, linking economic sociology, the sociology of religion and the sociology of knowledge.

Sociological reflection on the economic conditions of modernity takes the form of two research programmes in Durkheim's writings. The first outlines the contours of a critique of economic categories, expressed either as an epistemological critique and a sociology of knowledge or, positively, as the development of an economic sociology of contract and forms of socialisation within the economic sphere. The second research programme deploys the sociology of religion to renew the functional understanding of modern societies, and especially of the categories within which members of these societies think about economic processes. The initial focus of this book is upon a presentation of these two programmes.

Is it possible to deal solely with Durkheim when considering Durkheimian economic sociology? Not at all. The contribution made by François Simiand and Maurice Halbwachs is essential, since they were after all the principal contributors to the "Economic Sociology" section of the first two series of *L'année sociologique*, and then later to *Annales sociologiques*.

¹ "[W]e consider that our studies would merit not one hour of trouble if they were only of speculative interest . . . It will be seen [in this book] that science can help us to discover the manner in which we have to orient our conduct, so that we might determine the ideal towards which we confusedly tend." (Durkheim 1893/1984: xxxix).

The extent of their contribution makes consideration of their work indispensable. But, in so doing, there should be no misunderstanding: it is not that, failing to find anything of great substance in Durkheim's own economic sociology, we turn instead to the writings of his disciples. To do so would be quite inappropriate, for Durkheim clearly expressed his aim and scholarly practice in a letter to Marcel Mauss of 15 July 1897: "my true ambition is to see some young people of merit, like those [Célestin Bouglé, Simiand, Paul Lapie], following me not unquestioningly, and freely using the results of my work" (1998: 98).² Durkheim strongly believed that it was important that the different branches of scientific knowledge work closely together, and he hoped to form a group, a team of "workers", dedicated to the proper development of the sociological approach that he advocated.³ The group which formed around the *Année sociologique* produced a remarkable range of sociological work and established a moral unity in which Durkheim obviously took great pleasure, even if there were recurrent crises within the group, whose members found the constant labour of reviewing very demanding (Besnard 1998: 18–20). While the work of Halbwachs, Mauss and Simiand is given the most prominence in what follows, there is no intention of neglecting the work done by other members of the team such as, for example, Bouglé, Hubert Bourgin, Georges Davy and René Maunier, even if there were differences between them and they rejected this or that thesis of Durkheim.⁴

²In the following letter Durkheim returned to the subject in a more composed way: "I have no other ambition than to see that my work is not unfruitful. I set no great store by my talent, or my style, but only that the pains I take be used and that I know of it. If, as you tell me, this satisfaction will not be withheld from me, I will consider myself well-rewarded. I took hope this evening from reading the article by Simiand that will appear in the *Revue de métaphysique*." (Letter to Mauss, July 1897, in Durkheim 1998: 80–81). In 1930, when his candidacy for the Collège de France was under consideration, Mauss came back to this characteristic of the Durkheim School: "We were not simply a school of disciples blindly gathered around a master. Of course, Durkheim was full of ideas that had a major impact. But what brought us to him was that we knew he was a thinker [*savant*], that his methods were very sound, that his knowledge was extremely extensive and scrupulously substantiated." (Mauss 1930: 210).

³Following Besnard (1979, 1993, 1998), the collective dimension of Durkheimian sociology must be emphasised. It is also remarkable, and uncommon, to see a great thinker forming, during his lifetime, a school within which thinkers as brilliant as Halbwachs, Mauss and Simiand were able to develop, all of whom would end their careers in the Collège de France.

⁴Referring to the existence of theoretical differences between Durkheim and Maunier (the rejection of holism and of the emphasis placed upon legal norms), Alain Mahé (1998: 47) argues that Maunier should not be treated as one of Durkheim's disciples. Such a view is an error. Being a Durkheimian means being one of the group formed around the *Année*, so a Durkheimian like Bouglé was no less distanced from some of Durkheim's holistic principles, as his interest in Simmel's formal sociology makes clear. Similarly, and as will be discussed in detail below, when Durkheimians such as Simiand and Halbwachs attributed

This argument also applies to the team that reunited around the short-lived second series of *L'année sociologique* and, to a lesser extent, to those who worked on *Annales sociologiques*.

Once we have extended the field of enquiry to include Durkheimians, what becomes of the two research programmes that Durkheim had in view?

As we follow the writings of Simiand, from the numerous reviews that he published in *L'année sociologique* to his major works of the 1930s, it seems that his virulent critique of economic categories followed closely the line already taken by Durkheim when reading contemporary economic writings during his work on the *Division of Labour*. In other words, Simiand's work does not appear out of nowhere: its structuring principle is the methodology put forward by Durkheim in the *Rules of Sociological Method*, and he went on to develop a critique of economic categories for which Durkheim had laid the initial foundations. Moreover, in Simiand the sociological critique of economics quickly led into the elaboration of sociological concepts which were, in his view, necessary to overcome the defects to which he drew critical attention in the writings of a broad range of economists; the empirical work of Simiand, his "positive economics", consequently makes a contribution to the first Durkheimian research programme regarding the sociology of the economy.

What of the second research programme? The intertwining of Durkheim's work with that of Mauss has been clarified by Camille Tarot (1999), but when we come to the relationships between the economic and the religious we enter an area less clearly marked out than the first. One has to return to the basic material and emphasise that Mauss's noted essay *The Gift* and the works leading up to it over a quarter of a century are part and parcel of Durkheim's economic sociology. The pages in which Mauss successively presents his conclusions concerning "moral codes", "economic sociology and political economy" and "general sociology and ethics" represent those points where he invokes the existence of Durkheim's second programme of research into the sociology of economics, laying claim explicitly to this relationship at the very point where the sociology of religion and the sociology of economy are so vividly reunited. Moreover, Mauss's work is placed within a sequence including Davy's thesis (1922) and Maunier's studies of exchange rituals in North Africa (1927, 1933). By recognising the significance of Mauss's economic sociol-

importance to the motives and actions of agents in their economic sociology, they made no attempt to conceal the fact that they here broke with a point central to Durkheim (Halbwachs 1930: 11–13, 473). But who would claim that Bouglé, Halbwachs and Simiand did not belong to the Durkheimian school?

ogy, and making the necessary connection to Durkheim's second research programme, Durkheim's economic sociology gains a resonance that it has hitherto been denied.

The presentation of these two aspects of the work of the Durkheimians—the critique of political economy on the one hand and reflection on the foundations of religion on the other—forms the second objective of this book.

The plan of the book is as follows.⁵ The first two chapters outline in turn Durkheim's two research programmes. Chapter 1 examines the nature of the critique of political economy developed in texts originating during the period that Durkheim was preparing his thesis and reaching up to the publication of *Suicide*. The second chapter is directed to the origin and characterisation of the second research programme: beginning with his reflections on the ideal, Durkheim relinquishes politics for religion as the counterpoint to the economic. The sociology of knowledge becomes an essential intermediary for the relationship between religious sociology and the sociology of economy. Overlooked right up to the present, this completes and augments the first, better-known perspective; it lends the Durkheimian approach, quite original on this point, a brilliance that neglect had dulled.

Chapters 3 to 6 show how these two programmes are taken up by Simiand for a critique of political economy and by Mauss for the relation between religion and economy. Chapters 3 and 4 show how Simiand and Halbwachs deploy the sociological critique of economics, whether as an epistemological critique of the categories and methods employed by contemporary economists or through the elaboration of an original approach to economic sociology, refined in terms of empirical studies of prices, wages, consumption and money. Chapter 5 is devoted to the connection between religion and economy. First of all Durkheim's own preliminary thoughts on the subject are dealt with; then the emphasis turns to Mauss's economic sociology at work in *The Gift*, as well as in the various essays that he published in the early twentieth century, especially his writings on change and Bolshevism in the 1920s. Finally, chapter 6 shows how these two research programmes, largely independent of each other in their initial phases, came together in the most thought-provoking writings of Mauss and Simiand—in *The Gift* once more, and in *La monnaie, réalité sociale*. In these works, the dialogue between the two Durkheimians, whether direct or indirect, is a valuable means for an understanding of the importance

⁵ Throughout this book, I will use masculine pronouns to refer to the generic human individual, as this usage reflects that of my sources. It is to be understood that this "he" includes individuals of both sexes.

of their joint ambition. Here one can most clearly see how the sociology of religion and economic sociology are blended through the medium of the sociology of knowledge.

These six chapters primarily constitute a history of sociological ideas. The final two chapters are addressed to an examination of that which continues to be of relevance in Durkheimian economic sociology.

Chapter 7 seeks to isolate the specificity of the Durkheimian critique when directed to the manner in which economic categories and representations are disseminated, especially among a growing public of experts, managers and engineers—categories which are at the roots of the diffusion of “economic belief” (*croyance économique*), to use Frédéric Lebaron’s (2000) striking term. Attention is then turned to the writings that Durkheim devoted to the sociology of the schooling system, which mesh perfectly with the sociology of knowledge and lay the foundations, in Durkheim, Halbwachs and Simiand, of a sociology of economic knowledge.

Chapter 8 will show that there is a convergence with Weber’s problematic on the question of social mechanisms—in Weber, confirmation before members of a sect; in Durkheim, the process of scholarly competition initiated by the Jesuits—where the attempt is made to explain the emergence and increasing power of the economy in seventeenth-century Europe. We will see that the Durkheimian sociology of knowledge and of the schooling system can be employed to go beyond Weber’s investigations, given that the latter tells us nothing about the manner in which the ideal motivations orienting interests and economic activity are produced and diffused after Puritanism is transformed into pure utilitarianism. Hence, the way in which Durkheimian sociology of economic knowledge is anchored in the sociology of the schooling system provides us with a crucial perspective upon the construction, the diffusion and the organisation of the economic understanding of the world that we moderns have; an understanding that, one can say, contributes more than any other to a very particular illumination of present-day society.