

Introduction

Society, Morality, Embodiment: Tracing Durkheim's Legacy

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Abstract: This issue of *Durkheimian Studies* presents the collective efforts of the participants of a workshop held in late 2017, the centenary anniversary of Émile Durkheim's death, at the University of Oxford. The articles that emerged from it, published together in this special issue for the first time along with some new material, demonstrate a continuation of classic Durkheimian themes, but with contemporary approaches. First, they consider the role of action in the production of society. Second, they rely on authors' own ethnographies: the contributors here engage with Durkheimian questions from the data of their own fieldsites. Third, efferescence, one of Durkheim's most innovative contributions to sociology, is considered in depth, and in context: how do societies sustain themselves over time? Finally, what intellectual histories did Durkheim himself draw upon – and how can we better understand his conceptual contributions in light of these influences?

Keywords: British Centre for Durkheimian Studies, Émile Durkheim, legacy, genealogy, Marcel Mauss

This issue of *Durkheimian Studies* presents the collective efforts of the participants of a workshop held in late 2017, the centenary anniversary of Émile Durkheim's death, at the University of Oxford. The workshop was called 'Why Did Durkheim Have to Die?' and the question was posed as a lament. We wished to honour the passing of the great theorist 100 years earlier, to be sure, but we were also keenly aware that laments are offered by the living for the living: embedded in the workshop's memorial question was also an intention to consider whether and how the Durkheimian legacy endures into the present day.



All of us have to die, of course, but our question thus went deeper. Had Durkheimian thought – once so prominent in the French and even the English schools of social theory – been a primary reference for so long that it was now entirely *passé*? Had it slipped irreparably from an assumed (if sometimes unacknowledged) position of dominance to the truly marginal and out of fashion; was it now to be relegated to a hopelessly out-of-date theoretical canon? Was the conceptual modelling of the Durkheim school no longer deemed necessary or worth acknowledging as an intellectual forbear or inspiration, explicitly or implicitly – and if not, what might become of what some of us still saw as our continued collective debt to the source of sociological disciplinary thinking? Durkheim and his intellectual followers might be taught to advanced research students as a classic thinker – useful in the history of the discipline, perhaps – but to what extent, if any, did students today (and even contemporary scholars) consider themselves descendants of this long and noble lineage?

Gathered together from the UK, France, Germany and Canada, we were pleasantly surprised to discover that Durkheim's lineage has not died in the annals of social theory, and that new and vibrant scholarship continues to draw consciously and explicitly from his extraordinary insights and unparalleled theoretical subtlety. Durkheim may have had to die, as any mortal must, but Durkheimian thinking endures, and expands: we have learned that we can apply his thinking to in-depth ethnographic study as well as to advanced analytical work about the dynamics of religion in society. We have moved well out of the armchair, but we continue to probe the contours of social formation. Durkheim may have passed away, but Durkheimian studies live on, and continue to grow.

The inaugural workshop: Why Did Durkheim Have to Die?

2017 marked the centenary anniversary of Durkheim's death, but it also inaugurated a new phase of life for the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies, which moved into its new home in Oxford's Faculty of Theology and Religion at the beginning of the year. To mark these multiple transitions, our inaugural workshop for the regenerated Centre took place on 28 September 2017, at St. Peter's College, Oxford. The workshop provided a forum for the consideration of the place of Durkheimian thought in the field of religion and beyond over the course of the twentieth century, identifying ways in which Durkheim's theoretical work has been instrumental in European and American structuralist, post-structuralist, modernist and post-modernist approaches – even when it has not always been explicitly named as such. Together we set about trying to ascertain the extent to which the Durkheimian frame can still enable robust, enduring analyses

that are capable of informing debates and scholarship on religion, society and politics – as well as on space, place, time and the body – in modern academia and the modern world.

The answer was clear: contemporary anthropology cannot do without Durkheim. Not only is he too important to the origins of our disciplinary thinking to be dismissed, but his theoretical rigour about the nature of the collective bond and the genesis of solidarity remains at the core of our questions about the formation and contours of culture, and cultures. Durkheim wanted to penetrate the very nature of society, and his answer is a construction that – explicitly or implicitly – we use all the time: society is both natural and cultural. Both nature and nurture constitute who we are as social beings, as we all know, even in the popular press, but it is Durkheim who first shows us that – even as embodied, biological beings – we are also and undeniably cultural to our very core. This delicate balancing act – between nature and culture – is one that humanity has navigated since its origins, and that scholars have debated for centuries. It is Durkheim who, promoting science as a method of thinking, insists that our social aspect is not separate from but *is itself* our biology – and vice versa, that our biology, our very bodies, individual and collective, are social. There is no duality, homo duplex though we may be. Nature and culture constitute each other; there is no template apart from our essential sociality.

Understanding this dynamic – and exploring its manifestations and representations in cultures and societies across the world – has kept anthropology going for more than a century. To forget or to ignore the Durkheimian legacy in anthropology – which still spoke out clearly in the American school, through Clifford Geertz; in the British school, through E. E. Evans-Pritchard; and in the French school, through Claude Lévi-Strauss, to name only the most famous or renowned spokesmen – is to occlude our disciplinary history, and to dangerously underplay how it is we have come to have such a nuanced understanding of how nature and culture interact in our bodies and societies, and of how individuals and collectives quite literally constitute each other. Contemporary anthropology can – and indeed should, according to the participants of our workshop and the contributors to this volume – consciously bring to fruition the classic scholarship of our discipline, in all its care and nuance. Knowledge of our discipline’s history – and of the multi-dimensionality of its greatest proponents – can only deepen our understanding of society and culture, which is our field’s most important goal.

Durkheimian themes

Our workshop and the articles that emerged from it demonstrate both a continuation of classic Durkheimian themes – those long debated in

sociology, social theory and anthropology – and the opportunity to shine a light into previously uninterrogated corners of the work of the Durkheim school, through the lens of contemporary concerns in scholarly worlds. As a result, multiple articles traverse arenas that, until recently, could not have been combined, even in Durkheimian studies. Take, for instance, the body and morality: if Durkheim has tended to be used exclusively in the culturalist or sociological understandings of morality, the articles in this volume put the individual body back at the heart of collective knowledge. They do so not with the intent of making culture exclusively biological, but rather to show us where collective cultural thought is located: social life is grounded in the body. Thus do we see how a classically Durkheimian position can be updated to reflect the current state of our disciplines, both expanding our sense of what Durkheim can do and enriching our own fields of study.

Concretely, then, in this issue, Hardenberg, Hsu, and Schüttpelz and Zillinger all consider how, for Durkheim and his interlocutors, morality is grounded in the collective body, even as it is experienced or learned by the individual body. (Whether the individual can be thought to precede the collective is a question that follows in the Durkheimian spirit, but this is a perennial chicken-and-egg problem, even or especially in Durkheimian circles.) How does the physicality of the human body – its affects, emotions, rhythms, senses or states of consciousness – generate the collective effervescence which Durkheim knows to confirm sociality, and the moral structures that uphold it? Our considerations of religious action (Karsenti), political activism (Blanes) and religious habit (Coleman) also tacitly put the body and embodied sociality on centre stage, in ways Durkheim might never have imagined, while keeping his memory vividly intact.

In many ways the authors here are traversing perennial Durkheimian themes: morality, commonality, anomie, effervescence. But they are also charting untapped legacies, philosophically and regionally; innovative approaches; and perhaps most significantly, new and exciting uses and applications of Durkheimian thought and theory. What does effervescence offer medical anthropology? How can anomie be used in the considerations of the state? What does the concept of collective morality mean in an age of multicultural pluralism? How does using on-the-ground ethnography and data from the field change the ways we engage with conceptions of solidarity? All the articles collected here combine the history of the Durkheim school with its future potential: how does the Durkheimian notion of collectivity relate to the contemporary study of space? Does a focus on resources help us see Durkheim's work anew? If we locate a Hegelian legacy in Durkheim's work on the categories – as much as a Kantian one, if not more so – do we see a new focus on totality or the body? If we see Mauss and Hubert's Indological work on sacrifice as inspiring the late Durkheim,

do we read *Elementary Forms* with a new clarity or emphasis: does a new mode of comparison come through?

On one hand, the articles in this volume thus use Durkheimian thought in new and innovative ways, asking creative questions that can move our discipline – and our understanding of disciplinary history – forward. But on the other, we move backwards in time as well, tracing the history and genealogy of Durkheim's school and work in order to chart the development of particular themes and conceptual modules. These explorations, like those of morality and action, travel in both philosophical and ethnographic directions. We encounter Spinoza on salvation (Karsenti) and Hocard on the value of life (and, implicitly, the resulting hierarchy of power relations; Hardenberg), as well as the possibility of the direct influence upon Durkheim of Hegel on totality (Schüttpelz and Zillinger) and, significantly, Durkheim's nephew Marcel Mauss (Hsu; Hausner), whose many interactions and collaborations with his uncle are well documented but are interrogated further in the pages of this volume. Durkheim, like all great theorists, draws on multiple strands and multidisciplinary strains of thought to develop a new model of understanding social life, and collective structure, interaction and meaning.

Countering a larger tendency in the field of anthropology (if not by Durkheimian scholars as such) to regard Durkheim and Mauss as separate entities with their own lineages, bringing Durkheim and Mauss into direct conversation with each other is a central theme of multiple articles in this volume (Hsu; Schüttpelz and Zillinger; Hausner). From a multilateral reading of the works of Mauss and of Durkheim in tandem, it is clear that the two shared a mutually sustaining intellectual collaboration that was not always exactly in sync (Hsu) or explicitly acknowledged (Hausner), especially in the case of the younger Mauss's influence on the older Durkheim. There was a hierarchical relationship, and it may not have been seemly for the disciple-nephew to be seen as triumphing over the teacher/guru-uncle. And yet the collaboration of the two has produced some of the most extraordinary anthropology of the early twentieth century, laying the foundation for the contemporary discipline, as well as for many schools of social theory in France and elsewhere over the course of the twentieth century.

There is a living history to Durkheimian thought, then, much as there is a future. Too often we focus on understanding Durkheim in isolation, but the authors in this volume seek to map out the lineage and the network of Durkheim's ideas, arguing that the closer we can track his own sources of inspiration and influence, the better we can understand what Durkheim intended, and where he promoted – as well as where he diverged from – prevailing wisdom in the intellectual culture of his time. Thus might we find fresh ways to apply his exceptional insights and theoretical contributions

to new and unanticipated social formations that we wish to understand in the contemporary world.

In short, Durkheim does not have to die. By exposing the sources of his own intellectual lineage, the authors in this volume indicate clearly that the themes taken up by Durkheim and his disciples no more start with them than they must end with them. Structuralism may long be passé in the minds of our students, but the kinds of questions that Durkheim and his coterie raise and continue to ask throughout their lifetimes endure in ours. How do collectives make meaning? What is the relationship between representations and their real-life referents? How do we explain collective – and intersubjective – consciousness? And, coming full circle, what does shared meaning and consciousness signify for our individual bodies, or, as Schüttpelz and Zillinger put it, intercorporeality? These are core Durkheimian questions, rooted in core human experience – time, space, the individual body, the social body, the political body, numeracy, orientations and, of course, ritual – and they are not going to subside any time soon. Long may they wave.

The structure of the volume

The articles in this volume bring Durkheim's work of a century ago into the present by placing his theoretical innovation into conversation with contemporary anthropology, while at the same time plumbing its depths and its own intellectual histories. The seven substantive articles that follow broadly elucidate four main approaches, and they are ordered accordingly – although the reader should bear in mind that all the articles transcend these conceptual categories: indeed, none of the articles is limited to a single approach, and some of them pursue all four at once. First, they consider the role of action in the production of society, whether it is explicitly considered by the actors themselves as religious action (Karsenti, along with Hardenberg and Coleman), action in a so-called secular society (Karsenti), political action (Blanes) or healing action (Hsu). In almost every article in the volume, the authors consider Durkheim's themes as produced by actors themselves, reinserting agency and process (perhaps usually considered more Weberian concerns) into the Durkheimian model of social production.

Second, the central body of articles relies heavily on authors' own ethnographies: the armchair of anthropological lore has long disappeared from the present-day discipline, and part of the focus on action in this volume derives from authors' immersion into the real-life worlds of their long-time informants, including extensive discussions with, and observations of, known (and sometimes unknown) individuals getting on with their lives. From exploring the activist movement in Angola (Blanes) to the world

of ritual actors in western India (Hardenberg) to that of cathedral-goers of northern Europe (Coleman) or that of medical practitioners of China (Hsu), the authors of the articles in this volume engage with Durkheimian questions using data from their own field sites, and the deep and contextual knowledge that results from extended periods in active research locations. Thus do we keep Durkheim's legacy alive through placing it in direct discussion with material from our own ethnographies, and thus may we both use it – and adjust it as necessary – in light of actual contemporary life from different contexts around the world.

Third, one of Durkheim's most innovative – and perhaps controversial – contributions to sociology is considered in depth, and in context: how do societies sustain themselves over time? Durkheim's answer, of course, is effervescence. But is the collective always evenly elevated, or might the maintenance of social or community values be generated through means guaranteed to ensure hierarchy rather than solidarity (Hardenberg)? Is effervescence always... effervescent (Coleman)? How is effervescence – even in its productive, society-enhancing guise – experienced at the bodily level, in detail, at individual and collective scales (Hsu)? And how does it relate to Durkheim's understanding of collective cognition (Schüttpelz and Zillinger)?

Finally, what intellectual histories did Durkheim himself draw upon – and how can we better understand his conceptual contributions in light of these influences? The last group of articles explicitly tackles the histories of Durkheim's own lineage to consider questions of the body in particular (Hsu; Schüttpelz and Zillinger), and the ways in which German philosophical and philological disciplines necessarily informed Durkheim's thinking about practice at the time (Hausner). We can perhaps understand Durkheim's innovations more clearly still by considering Hegel's influence on his notion of totality (Schüttpelz and Zillinger), along with his refusal to accept the dominant Indological view that language trumped praxis in ritual (Hausner).

We discover in these pages that Durkheim – and Mauss, alongside him – were inspired by thinkers as diverse as Franz Boas (writing on the Eskimo) and Max Müller (writing on Vedic ritual). All these scholars appear as part of the lineage accounted for in this volume, representing an astonishing range of disciplines, models, theories, histories, societies and cultures (of both those who were studied and those who did the studying). No wonder the Durkheim school offers so much food for thought, across time and discipline: its members were voracious, multilingual, interdisciplinary (to use the contemporary parlance) seekers of knowledge, continuously attempting to understand how sameness and variation – universality and particularity; the human condition and the cultural form – could co-exist and be mutually interdependent, at the same time and throughout human history.

In order: the articles of the special issue

What form does the concept of salvation take in a secularised society? How do religious ideals reframe themselves as secular ones? These are the questions Bruno Karsenti takes up in the first article of the volume, which tackles Durkheim's analytical work on religion from the perspective of salvation (here not necessarily meant as an exclusively Judaeo-Christian theological term). Starting with Spinoza, and opening the issue with an awareness of and gesture towards the questions of intellectual genealogy that ground the volume throughout, Karsenti shows how the concepts of morality, ideology and salvation are neither static nor confined to self-consciously religious worlds, nor to those institutions that are explicitly dedicated to religion and the promotion of religious life. True to the spirit of the workshop, Karsenti confirms Durkheim's intuition that religious society and secular society are not founded on different kinds of structures or principles; they are rather different names for the same thing, and Karsenti builds upon this premise. We can see precisely how the tenets of religion – such as those contained in the term 'salvation' – establish the very moral principles of a post-Enlightenment so-called secular society. Where the line between 'the ideal' and 'the real' lies is anyone's guess, but in the final analysis, religious action is that which can impel the progression between the two – even if salvation itself inevitably remains a red herring.

Continuing the focus on action in an entirely different context, Ruy Llera Blanes takes us to the contemporary ethnographic political world of Angola, where, over the last 20 years and especially since 2011, activists have clashed directly with the government, which has tried to keep them down and quash their reforming efforts. This state of political breakdown could be understood as national 'anomie', to use the Durkheimian phrase. Just as Karsenti looks at the translation of salvation in multiple contexts, asking if we can move laterally from religious action to secular action, Blanes challenges the classic Durkheimian term 'anomie', which, if used in its original context, would imply a level of despair and disintegration from which the collective whole could not recover. By contrast, Blanes's work with his informants from the Revolutionary Movement leads him to find in such a state of ruin – what he calls 'anomic diagnostics', or lawlessness, as derived literally from the etymology of *anomie* – a sense of potential, for it is only when the collapse is complete that the phoenix, as it were, can rise from the ashes. In this context, then, Blanes suggests, anomie does not signal irrecoverable collapse, but rather a location of possibly productive collective action.

Roland Hardenberg also builds on the Durkheimian lineage to push theoretical possibilities forward, this time at the heart of anthropology. Hardenberg proposes a model based on 'resources' as a way of

understanding both shared values in a given society and the means through which individual actors in that social order will attempt to procure or control the sources of those values, thus ensuring the endurance of the value of those resources – and the society that depends upon them – in a kind of endless loop, socially (and even politically) speaking. Thus do social values endure: indeed, thus are social hierarchies perpetuated, in a Durkheimian twist to the question of who controls the means of production. In this case, Hardenberg asks who controls the means of symbolic production – which, of course, from a Durkheimian perspective, is just as real as any other kind of production. Resources can and must be understood as both material and immaterial, just as both human and divine actors must be understood as real agents. Using ethnographic work from Puri, a pilgrimage town in western India, Hardenberg asks that, in addition to Durkheim's focus on the sacred, we consider Hocart, who insisted that we consider primarily how that which is valued by a society is maintained. Like Karsenti, whose focus on action derives from the idea of salvation, Hardenberg infuses the premise of social solidarity with questions of temporality: how does a community sustain its own values – its prized resources – over time?

Just as Blanes wonders what happens to anomie when breakdown is re-appropriated as potentially redemptive, Simon Coleman asks if effervescence must be an intense, loud, earth-shattering, explosive occasion. Taking the cathedral as a largely urban, but often quiet, site of ritual in modern northern Europe, Coleman wonders how to incorporate both formal events and informal, individual actions in a religious location within our still-Durkheimian understanding of ritual generativity. Both in tone and scale, then, ritual occasions in the cathedral diverge dramatically from the great collective festivals that ground Durkheim's understanding of the productive capacity of ritual. And yet they still convey and contain the meaningfulness of social worlds, thus ultimately confirming a Durkheimian orientation in our studies of religious action.

Wonderfully spanning the bridge between the deep ethnography and the detailed genealogical work that shapes many of the articles in this volume, Elisabeth Hsu pushes further still and asks where Durkheim's thinking – and that of his *équipe* and Mauss in particular – can take us in contemporary studies of embodiment. In one fell swoop does she combine ethnography, genealogy and legacy, bringing us firmly into the present, and the present body, by looking to the past and to the particular ways historical ethnographies would have inspired Durkheim and Mauss. She continues the focus on effervescence that Coleman introduces in the previous article, arguing that it can provide a shared experience of synchronicity. She also sets up the question that Schüttelpeiz and Zillinger take forward in the next article, specifically the extent to which a genealogy of Durkheimian theory can lead us to thinking about the (individual and the collective) body as

a repository of social knowledge, morality and sensory experience, all of which are critical to the sustenance of particular cultural forms.

Erhard Schüttpelz and Martin Zillinger continue with the volume's focus on embodiment and its role in effervescence, while grounding their discussion in a consideration of the role of Hegel's influence on Durkheim. By looking at the 'Category Project' as a whole – the Durkheim school's research on and promotion of the question of categories as central to our understanding of human cognition – Schüttpelz and Zillinger argue that the emphasis on collective consciousness must also be traceable in the individual body. Thus, they suggest, is Durkheim's famous maxim – 'Man is double' – able to stand as the great contribution of the Durkheimian school to contemporary social theory: we are ourselves and each other at one and the same time. If effervescence produces the collective body, and an attendant sense (literally, if we follow Hsu's materials) of social totality (complete with Hsu's rhythmic synchronicity), our bodies are the vehicles for the production of social reality, reverberating outwards.

Such a construction almost sounds Indological, and the last article in this collection suggests that, in its genealogy, it might well be. Tackling intellectual histories of Durkheim's work as a way to probe his conclusions further, Hausner suggests that the conceptual conclusions of *Elementary Forms* are based on material not from the accounts of nineteenth-century Aboriginal Australia, as Durkheim would present it, but rather from nineteenth-century textual renditions of much older Indological materials that focus on the primacy of Vedic ritual in ancient India. These ritual texts were the focus of many philologists at the time, including Mauss and his collaborator, comparativist Henri Hubert. Thus does Durkheim challenge the world of philology, along with that of social science, which was similarly working on the origin of religion, and which, according to Durkheim, wrongly prioritised human thought in language (perhaps mistaking their own metier for humanity's). Practice, Durkheim argues, and not language – ritual, not discourse – should be understood as the rightful source of human society.¹

Two more creative pieces follow, to conclude the volume, each taking up the mortal truth of Durkheim's death, even as we show throughout the volume how Durkheim lives on. The first, a short exploration of the circumstances of Durkheim's death, by Robert Parkin, looks at what hard facts we know of his passing at 59 – young by today's standards. Parkin considers how little information we have about what happened to cause Durkheim's death, especially given the paucity of death records in Paris in the early twentieth century. The second piece, a poem by Sienna Craig, recounts the search for his gravesite in the well-known Parisian cemetery of Montparnasse; she and her companion need first to locate the Jewish corner of the cemetery and then, amid the gravestones, Durkheim's grave

itself. When they do find it, they see with delight that it is adorned with small offerings – shells, coins, mementos – that have presumably been left by devout scholars who have come to pay homage. These memorials to Durkheim, presented at our workshop, also belong in this collection, which as a totality links the man to his work, to his school of thought as developed and promoted in his lifetime, and to his legacy. In these pieces we remember Durkheim as himself embodied, and now beneath the ground. And they show us in no uncertain terms how death is followed by memory, and by lineage.

A renewed Centre

Many individuals – and collectives – have come together to ensure that the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies could continue its work in Oxford, and that these inaugural workshop papers could be published for wider dissemination. In the wake of the passing of the inestimable Bill Pickering, who founded the Centre in 1991 and led it unflinchingly for 25 years, a great deal of effort was required to ensure that the Centre as an institution, and its many relationships with the continent and globally, could endure and be productively sustained. At Oxford, Nick Allen, Wendy James and Robert Parkin all contributed considerable time and effort to ensuring that the Centre could survive its transition from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology to its new home in the Faculty of Theology and Religion, where it was welcomed with open arms by Johannes Zachhuber. William Watts Miller has been a steadfast support of the Centre, and the publication of these papers in this journal; he and Susan Stedman Jones have joined the Centre’s advisory board, and we are grateful for their exceptional knowledge and expert counsel in the field of Durkheimian studies.

The workshop was held with the generous financial assistance of the Faculty of Theology and Religion’s Strategic Fund and the University of Oxford’s John Fell Fund, and we are grateful for the funding that allowed it to be such a success. We also benefited from the hospitality of St. Peter’s College, Oxford, and the generosity of Graham Ward. As Durkheim would have expected, an effervescent social gathering works best when many individuals come together in the spirit of a shared purpose and a common goal.

This volume in particular is the product of extraordinary scholarship and exceptional patience. Robert Parkin has been a tireless, capable and astonishingly efficient co-editor, from start to finish. Marek Sullivan has been on hand with gracious help at every turn. At Berghahn Books, Caroline Kutztz, Harry Eagles and Vivian Berghahn have shepherded the

issue to fruition with patience, clarity and efficiency, an unusual combination that stands out in the world of scholarly publishing. And the authors and reviewers of the pieces in this issue bring to bear their superlative scholarship along with an openness to new ways of thinking about classic theories. It has been a privilege to work with each and every one of them.

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Note

1. This article was not presented at the inaugural workshop itself, but it was originally offered at one of Bill Pickering's last study days, on *Thinking about Religion in France around 1900*, which was co-sponsored by the Centre, the Faculty of Theology and Religion, and TORCH (The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities). The study day was constructed as a way that we could begin to host the transition of the Centre to the Faculty; now that the transition is complete, the article comfortably belongs in this collection.