

DURKHEIM IN DISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

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Emile Durkheim's claim to being the father of sociology lies in his insistence that a model developed on the basis of one set of data may then be applied to many – ideally all – others. From the time Durkheim's most mature work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (*Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*), was published in 1912, this premise has been the basis of social science. Even though we are not 'pure' scientists, social theorists posit hypotheses that must be tested in the face of emerging empirical evidence. These models either stand the test of time, as it were, proving themselves resilient and useful in the interpretation of new data, or they crumble in the face of evidence that shows they simply cannot explain the world as we thought they might. By taking up the premises of Durkheimian sociology a century on, we prod the social sciences of religion as far as we can.

The chapters in this book take up Durkheim's central premise in the sociology of religion – that religion is a social form that will continue to define a mode of human communication and connectiveness – and continue to test it, in multiple contexts, with different bodies of evidence and from the vantage point of numerous theoretical and historical critiques. The volume was designed as an effort to commemorate the centenary anniversary of the publication of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, which remains one of the core textbooks in sociology and has become a key source for understanding the study of religion (Durkheim 1995 [1912]). This collection brings together scholars from a range of disciplines to explore just how widely

Durkheim's legacy is felt in the natural, social and cultural sciences, present and past, and to consider the extent to which his description of religion as a social form may still be productively used. Sociology has come a long way in its first century and may, as in this volume, be seen alongside and even as the foundation of work on religion in anthropology and cognitive science, in addition to the core disciplines that Durkheim built upon in his time, namely archaeology, ethnology and political philosophy. Our findings, approaches, priorities and objects of study have changed a great deal over the last hundred years, but the methods and theories that Durkheim set out in 1912 remain quietly central, though often unacknowledged, in our contemporary multidisciplinary investigations.

In 2012, much substantive and methodological work (in not only the social sciences but also the psychological or cognitive sciences and even the humanities) can be traced, explicitly or implicitly, to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. A philosopher by training, Durkheim based his model of the twinned nature of religion and society upon then recently released ethnographic accounts of Aboriginal life. His 1912 text set forth new innovations in both method, in that he was determined that society could be studied scientifically with a careful understanding of ethnographic material that could provide useful data, and theory, in that he had become convinced that at the heart of any social group were its shared categories, or sets of symbols, that also formed the essence of religious thought. From there, the world of social theory opened up, such that we may investigate every aspect of the person and every arena of socio-religious life, including ideology, cognition and experience.

These subtle interpretations of Durkheim's work are not always reflected in the contemporary teaching of *Elementary Forms*. Although discussions of sacred and profane are everywhere in contemporary public life and the terms are instantly recognizable, they are rarely attributed. This famous Durkheimian polarity may not, perhaps, reflect a perfect binary division in all cases, but it remains a seminal distinction in understanding the categorical dualisms that came to underpin French structuralism, feminist theory and linguistic, discursive and praxis-based models of social worlds and human realities. As a global category of identity, religion is arguably more important, not less, than it was a century ago, and yet definitions of the sacred are no further advanced (Pickering 2002: 32f.). If we wish to understand why this is so, we might well return to Durkheim's classic text, which reminds us that it is the category, not the content, of the sacred that matters so consistently to human populations across the ages.

Although we claim the discussion here is interdisciplinary, what follows is largely constituted by the various sub-disciplines of anthropology. Sociology is our progenitor, in the father figure of Durkheim; from this disciplinary starting point, we move outward to discuss the dynamics of ritual, the structures of mind, theories and histories of warfare and the tenets of human evolution. While social anthropology is at the heart of the volume, we draw on and contribute to cultural studies, history and archaeology in our conversations with the multiple theoretical fields that place religion at the core of their analyses. Sociological narratives are set alongside philosophical queries, so that anthropology – the analysis of particular cultural forms with an eye to the human condition more broadly – acts as an empirical and theoretical mediator, as Durkheim would have wanted.

Religion

The chapters in this volume argue that Durkheim's theoretical model of and for religion is still good to think with, even though a century has passed since he offered it, and the world has changed in multiple ways. What might surprise us, as scholars of religion and theorists of the social form at large, is that Durkheim's model is as good or better than it ever was, insofar as he can help us explain new modes of religion, or ways of being religious (or social), that he never encountered and that no one would have conceived of a century ago. Nationalist fronts, new religious movements and modern and postmodern forms of group formation – including cults, group associations, humanists, atheists, secularists and artists who claim to be anti-religious (never mind football clubs, rock concerts and Facebook) – need only look to *Elementary Forms* to understand the social dynamics at work, whether or not we (or they) call it religion. The capacity of a theory of religion to explain forms of collective life whose members refuse to call themselves religious presents us with a paradox of definition that is part and parcel of Durkheim's intention: to what extent may religion be considered a core feature of human collectivity? What is called a religion by whom? This secondary question (different from the one Durkheim set out to solve but no less salient today), grounded in contemporary cultural politics, emerges from a growing global consciousness about the potency of the human bonds on which we all depend. These are the social emotions that Durkheim placed at the centre of his work.

We might conceive of Durkheim's core problematic as one of set theory: how much individual cognition – or the sense of identity that attaches to it – is shared by the collective to which a person belongs? The problem is one of categorization, and it grows out of the central question of cognitive classification in *Elementary Forms*. How is a social group defined or delimited, that is, where does the group boundary end, and who draws it in the symbolic sand? To what extent are rules of social and conceptual logic shared between the most so-called primitive human societies and the most seemingly advanced, in the form of the French Republic? This is set theory as applied to human sociology: Durkheim asks us first to establish the formative relations between the individual and his or her collective, and then to scale up the model such that each collective may also be understood as an individual or holistic entity in relation to the whole of human society.

Religion is both the core of the analysis and a tool for thinking about human collectivity in general. Religiosity and sociality (and spirituality, too, which is no different) are equally significant in the theoretical framework Durkheim gives us. This equivalence has been the cause of some consternation on both sides: from the theological perspective, religion is seen as 'reduced' to a social set of meanings; from the sociological perspective, religion is seen as insufficient as a base explanation or definition of many social phenomena, including (and perhaps especially) secularism. These equations misconstrue what Durkheim intends to show: that religion is primary, and perhaps universal, because it is the mechanism that enables collectives to bind together. Theological premises are not undone by such a position: what is rather offered is the possibility that theologies – in all their human variety – share a use value; they need not be posited against each other but understood as viable means for social health. Nor is sociological work in fields other than religion maligned; instead, religion is shown to be a human activity that grounds other spheres of social life insofar as it is understood as the very capacity of the human mind to distinguish between orders of experience.

Theologians may worry that explaining the mechanisms of something called religion somehow undoes or undermines it, or that understanding how religion serves a social purpose (and why it is as effective as it is) will somehow expose belief as an edifice or falsity, like the Wizard of Oz standing small and meek behind his curtain. But this logic does not do justice to Durkheim – or to the human beings he seeks to describe. We give of ourselves to the totem, or to God, and in so doing, we create collectivities, of ourselves and for ourselves; from our beliefs and the gods that we pray to, we become people. To understand this

process is not to undermine it: in the Durkheimian reading, people do not see or believe in a deity that is not there; they see and feel a force that *is*. That human societies create – and feel bonded by – their God or their gods might be taken as the core of human experience, including moments of extraordinary spiritual effervescence. Durkheim not only explains how religion and religious institutions serve as the glue of human societies but also, possibly, gives us a clue as to the source of individual (as well as collective) mystical experience. No theologian or sociologist could disagree that we gain strength from knowing who we belong to, whether we draw from totemic, divine or human realms.

Durkheim famously argues that all religions are true. He must argue from this intellectual position because his work is premised on the insistence that all peoples are capable of working from the basic structures of human logic. If his intention were to undermine the weight of religion in the world, we would expect the oft-heard opposite assertion that all religions are false. Durkheim argues that religions cannot be false: they work, as they are meant to (and there is nothing duplicitous about their function). What he seeks is a model whereby any cultural form can emerge as logically coherent, encoded in its premises of belief. This position requires a true ecumenism – the acknowledgement that another religion is as true to its members as the theologian's is to him.

Political or social scientists interested in alternative social formations may worry about the opposite pole, namely that Durkheim does not allow for the secularist position that seems all too apparent in the world today. Again, this critique misconstrues the central problematic of *Elementary Forms*: collectivity *is* religion, even, ironically, in the form of secularism. Such an equation undermines neither society nor religiosity (although scholars who care more about one pole or the other fear it unbalances their side, failing to see the strength that accrues to both sides through their linkage). Durkheim thus explains the primacy and endurance of religion in the modern world (even or especially when secularism forms part of a global political discourse) as that which enables our social selves.

Is this position tautological? If religion is that which keeps society going, are we obliged to see religion where we see society? If an avowedly secularist society is considered religious in the Durkheimian rendering, is there room for sociality outside of religion? Certainly, for Durkheim, such a construction is not theoretically possible, as he locates the sticky bonds of social life in religious thought, those shared categories that he considers central to the emergence of both society and religion. It is in these structures of thought that Durkheim lo-

cates the central dynamic of human life (which must be collective): it is both religion and society. To equate society with religion is not a tautology, then, but a transitive relation. We cannot be social without being religious, insofar as we draw our sense of ourselves from common meaning, and we cannot be religious without being social, even if some of the most intense religious practices may be undertaken in isolation. Beliefs and practices alike are drawn from a collective pool.

Durkheim is interested in how human minds work, and his answer, in brief, is through a set of categories or matrix for seeing the world. Religion is thus a phenomenon that must be traced to human minds (in opposition to doctrine, but not, significantly, in opposition to God). Far from negating religious experience, Durkheim appears to take effervescent, mystical and otherworldly experiences and accounts at face value. The human psyche is capable of transcendent life not because of institutions, but despite them – as evidenced by the primitive society he uses as his test case. Far from insisting that such experiences are the purview of particular or unusual individuals, he goes further to suggest that such experiences may emerge precisely through the influence and effects of collective life. God is not denigrated in this equation: He is simply refracted into the many bodies that make up society, like the proverbial multiple drops of humanity that together form the Hindu oceanic divine.

Method and Theory

Durkheim's methods have been and remain the subject of much critique, including by some of the authors of the chapters in this volume. Students today are wont to call him a 'reductionist' or, critically, an 'armchair anthropologist', although he wrote *Elementary Forms* a decade before anthropology became a discipline of actual fieldwork upon Malinowski's unwitting but perhaps fortuitous stranding in the Pacific. Many worry that Durkheim did not correctly read his sources (the ethnographic diaries of Spencer and Gillen), or that he drew his own inferences from them without acknowledging the diversity of practices in Aboriginal societies. Even staunch Durkheimians question him on some of these points. In this volume, for example, Watts Miller suggests the material he used from the ethnographic record was selectively drawn to prove his theoretical point, and Chau exposes what he calls Durkheim's 'conceptual sleight of hand' in that he allowed the data from a particular society to stand in or become the model for a universal form of society.

Ironically, these critiques lie at the very heart of the science that Durkheim wished to develop and apply to social life: he would be proud of his protégés. Developing a general model of society, derived from the empirical evidence of life in a particular society, that might work as a lens through which to analyse other societies (analogous to a model of religion that might equally be drawn from and used as a way of understanding the multiplicity of religions) is the challenge he set himself. If he has come up with a theory that stands the test of further empirical evidence, more power to it. If new data emerges to bend it out of shape, the model will have to adjust. Data from a particular case becomes theory that might – or might not – be generalizable, with an acknowledgement that moving from the particular to the general may alter the terms.

This dialogue or dialectic, intrinsic to the methods of *Elementary Forms*, is what grounds the social sciences today, making data useful and theories dynamic. If a previously generalizable theory is shown to fail or falter in light of new evidence, the theory must be modified. Here lies the power of data, which is otherwise meaningless beyond the nugget of information it contributes to the encyclopaedia of human ephemera. Yet a theory that is promoted with no evidence is nothing beyond a thought experiment. Concrete data and conceptual theory must exist in conversation with each other, each refining the other: theory gives meaning to the interpretation of data; data grounds the details of theory. Ultimately, this social scientific project is what Durkheim wished to establish with the publication of *Elementary Forms* (see Allen, Pickering and Watts Miller 1998).

By pursuing the methods of advanced knowledge, we may come to understand the bases of human thought, from which we have built ourselves up and will continue to develop into the future, for our cognitive capacity has no end. But this is not a call for science to trump religion: if religion can be identified through a scientific process of investigation (even the sort that depends on only one experiment), we need not conclude that God is false. On the contrary: *Elementary Forms* testifies to not only the presence of religion, but also the presence of God. Religion *exists*, and God *exists*, everywhere, among human beings. Indeed, human beings cannot live without a god, or God, or the gods. We are the god we worship, as every church in history has proclaimed.

Perhaps even more significant for the Western philosophical tradition is that religion in *Elementary Forms* gives us reason. In this volume, Fields reminds us that '[w]hen human beings learned to sophisticate perception with conception, however bizarre the result,

they gained the intuition that internal relations may exist between externally disparate things. Durkheim claimed that religion thus made philosophy and science possible.' Science and religion implicate each other in *Elementary Forms*, each giving rise to the other. The chapters in this volume take Durkheim's methodological dialectics to their full expression in a contemporary world, drawn from cases as far-flung as China and Africa, and applied to contexts as varied as Star Trek and rebel insurgencies. Each case aims to push or pull or deploy or debate the core conceptual frameworks set forth in *Elementary Forms* (and the authors sometimes disagree as to how successful those frames are). There is no single disciplinary method used by the contributors to this book. But each piece takes on the basic, critical dialogue between data – whether it be ethnographic narrative, television script, historical archive or human bone – and theory, to come to a potentially universal conclusion about the human race and its relation to religion. This dialectical construction lies at the heart of Durkheimian social science because, he intimates, it reflects the mechanism of the human mind, just as religion does.

What follows applies Durkheimian theory to the exigencies of war, in the case of ethnographic work in Sierra Leone (Richards) or the historical archives of colonial Sudan (Baumann). Durkheim himself is set into his own historical time by the intellectual genealogies of a moral social order (Ji), mental representations (Stedman Jones) and the potential links between religion and society writ large (Watts Miller). The uses of *Elementary Forms*' theoretical framework are expanded outward in time, to see if they might apply to contemporary popular culture (Child) or archaeological deep history (Gamble). And the model itself is probed further (Allen), in dialogue with other major theorists of the twentieth century (Hausner) or in possible parallel with other sociological categories, such as race (Fields).

The book is divided into five parts, including an opening and a closing chapter, and three substantive sections that reflect Durkheim's main theoretical contributions. The first of these, *Social Forms* (Part II), focuses on the classic collectives in three rather non-classical forms. Together, discussions of the role of religion in the post-communist Chinese state, the solidarity that emerges from ritual initiations into African youth militia and the interrogation of television as a cultural form investigate the various ways collectives may be understood in contemporary contexts.

The next section of the book, *Collective Minds* (Part III), takes up the possibility that Durkheim gives more weight to individual members of society – or at least their mental capacities – than is commonly under-

stood (see also Watts Miller 1996). As Durkheim argues, society as an abstract form cannot exist anywhere but in the minds of individual people; his great innovation was to enquire whether that abstract form might be collectively produced, as a reflection and also enabler of the social form itself. At stake here is whether the sacred/profane dichotomy lies at the base of the human mind – or whether that binary distinction may ground complex systems of classification. If the human mind may be cognitively mapped, does it follow that we might trace it back in human history to the origins of the species itself? Is the mind the root of human sociality?

The last section, *Effervescence* (Part IV), looks at the ritual dynamics that Durkheim places at the core of the interaction between any individual and his or her collective. What is that mechanism, and might we look to Freud to help us understand it? And what of agency: must effervescence imply the continuity of a social form, or might it enable historical change in its liminal, transformative capacity? Finally, is it enough to consider human beings in ritual – or might we claim that, in a different cultural context or festival form, we need to hear the voices of all the beings present in order to understand fully the effervescent emotions that produce collective life? Here, in this final set of essays, effervescence is offered up as the mode (totemic, narrative, festive) through which collective minds become social forms.

Chapters of the Book

Karen Fields, the translator of a recent English edition of *Elementary Forms*, opened Durkheim up to a new generation of anglophone scholars that would read his dynamic assertions about perennial tensions – between the particular and the general, the part and the whole, the case and the model, the cultural and the universal – in her evocative, sensitive language. Are the Arunta the same as the French, or not? Fields brings her own voice to this volume, where she explores soul as a universal referent for Durkheim. If soul is present in every society, ‘so, too, is blood’, Fields reminds us. Soul may be the way Durkheim knows that religion is everywhere, for it is both the evidence and the result of religion. And blood – the blood of a person, the blood of a race – may be understood as both that which binds and that which demands social action. In Fields’s account, blood becomes a symbolic stand-in for science in the politics of race segregation histories in the United States, pushing us to reconsider what, actually, determines the contours of a socially defined group, and the extent to which

Durkheim's famous answer – religion – might be seen as precisely traversing the divide between nature and culture.

The next chapter, which opens the group of essays in Part II, investigates a different location, but it is impelled by the same passionate determination to consider the constitution of society with a clear – and a just – eye. Recalling the potential of the Durkheimian collective, Ji Zhe calls on his readers to be vigilant about the make-up and rule of a social order, using the case of China as a state where, in some historical instances, solidarity has been imposed rather than emerging organically, a state of affairs that will never be satisfactory. Ji uses Durkheim's own comparative method to bring the political philosophy of Rousseau (as interpreted by Durkheim, and then by American sociologist Robert Bellah) together with that of China, both in its 'traditional' guise (although tradition can be invoked in many ways and for many reasons) and in the form of contemporary Chinese politics. Those who claim Confucianism is a kind of Chinese contemporary civil religion must do so in the spirit of a just and voluntary polity, not as a patriotic statement that demands a singular set of morals to underscore the state's regime.

State and rebel politics also ground Paul Richards's consideration of the mechanisms of warfare in Sierra Leone in the third chapter of the volume. Rather than political philosophy, however, Richards uses the work of cognitive scientists studying sound and dance to indicate how unity may arise from shared sense experiences. Richards considers how social formations of even the most violent or terrifying variety – the initiation of child soldiers – may draw precisely on Durkheimian notions of solidarity. He reopens the question of the peculiar rite and reminds us of the possibility that violence or trauma may, ironically, serve the same purpose of social cohesion that joyous effervescence is usually thought to.

Louise Child's essay stays in the realm of blood sacrifice, though not in the literal sense. Child draws our attention to the relationships between blood and solidarity as popularly represented tropes in the American television serial *The Sopranos*. Her analysis also shows how collective perceptions of time may be what unify a social group – on this planet or in outer space, as represented in the television series *Deep Space Nine*. Sacred time, as experienced by a character who departs from his regular social milieu, is precisely 'without differentiation'. The collective experience of shared temporality can be the ground of mystical transformation, whereby the individual finds the collective within himself. By exploring both literal and metaphorical or psychological cases, the television dramas that are the focus of

Child's analysis are able to deliver her Durkheimian interpretations of the moral tensions inherent in a social order that requires solidarity to survive but also uses mechanisms such as therapy to cultivate individual wholeness.

Part III begins with N.J. Allen's piece, which distils the essence of the Durkheimian contribution to thinking about the human mind. Even if we acknowledge that the sacred/profane dichotomy is not always or purely an operative distinction (the River Ganges is both the holiest body of water and a good place to wash), the opposition gives us a binary with which to cognize. *Elementary Forms* contains the very roots of structuralism in social theory (de Saussure had written his famous lectures on linguistics eight years before its publication). In this volume, Allen identifies Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane – the logic of oppositional thinking – as a fundamental contribution to the way the human sciences understand the functioning of human societies. From this logic springs an understanding of the way kinship works (taken to its logical conclusion by Lévi-Strauss), as well as the possibility that social structure may be correlated to the structures of the human mind.

Clive Gamble asks whether such social insights might have helped us understand deep human time as well as the depth of the human mind. But the history of archaeology has, until recently, pre-empted the Durkheimian model: 'the suggestion that religion would be familiar not because it was Christian but because it was social countered the very impulse that justified the search.' Although the human capacity for symbolic representation – and indeed, totemism itself – were all the rage in archaeology at the turn of the twentieth century, Durkheim was largely ignored as an interpretative scholar, although he might well have furthered our analysis of these principles. Gamble attempts to right this historical oversight, suggesting that Durkheimian theory might have advanced archaeological thinking about early human religious practice and social configuration. Even in a field where it has been largely overlooked, *Elementary Forms* still has contributions to make.

Susan Stedman Jones takes us back to the era of the text's publication, looking at reviews published in 1913. She wonders, a century later, whether *Elementary Forms* was misunderstood, even by some of anthropology's luminaries, who did not quite intuit the structuralist inklings of the work. The delicate balance of theory and ethnography was the focus of most of the reception of the book at the time, such that the philosophical force of the ideas encoded therein were in a sense delayed in coming in to their full intellectual potential (arguably

until Lévi-Strauss recovered them in a reclaiming of cognitive binary thinking half a century later). Early anthropologists, though heavily influenced by the notion of collective solidarity, seemed to misread the text, emphasizing weakly interpreted ethnographic data. For example, Malinowski, an innovator in the field, critiques him but does not seem up to the task of using the theoretical or conceptual advancements that Durkheim offers in methodological stead. Representations – the categories – as the basis of religion are fully explored here.

Stedman Jones reminds us that categories of cultural meaning are both projected outward into public domains and interpreted inwardly by the humans that inhabit them. Durkheim was deeply concerned with the inner (*le dedans*) and its relation with the outer (*le dehors*): to assume that only the collective form interested him wilfully misunderstands his intention to describe the complete social process at work. Both Gamble and Stedman Jones regard Durkheim's work as pioneering in its ability to understand the way human beings relate to each other through lenses of representation, and even symbolic imaginaries. What they hint at is how Durkheim lays the groundwork for the social science of the future, which would become primarily concerned with questions of identity, in terms of how people see themselves as individuals, groups or both, and also how they project or represent those selves to others (Barth 1969). These kinds of self-projections, or practices (or performances, in some renderings), are multilayered. They are aspects of the mind that are inextricably connected to the way people act or behave in the world: representation is not – and cannot be – separate from action. The essays in this section point to how cognitive mechanisms, far from being ignored by the text, are at the heart of Durkheim's analysis.

Here we emerge with possibilities for the future of cognitive science in the history and heart of sociology: how do human minds work, individually and in collectivity? There is a psychological dimension to the way we function, especially in the capacity of creative effervescence. Durkheim has been critiqued for giving insufficient attention to the individual in his weighting of the collective, but the authors here suggest that individual minds – cognitive processes – are also considered in *Elementary Forms* if we care to look for them. In Part IV, Sondra Hausner continues by interrogating where, in the cycle of collective to individual to collective, we find the possibility of agency. Against the frequent critique that Durkheim prioritizes the collective over the individual, she reclaims the role of the individual in his analysis. The collective cannot exist but for the minds of individuals: as Durkheim famously argues, it is the interaction between the individual and the

collective that makes the whole system work. Lest we forget, 'Man is double.'

Any detailed ethnographic case will tell the story of individuals. Gerd Baumann acts as both an ethnographer and a historian in his case history of the Sudan, a story that continues today. In the unfolding of any event, or the description of any set of collective actions, individual choices are made and individual actions are conducted. These decisions and acts may defer to collective ideologies or defy them; they may be demonstrations of allegiance or aggression. Whether they are experienced or interpreted as such depends on the exigencies of the situation and the context, as well as the collective set of representations on which the culture of the particular group depends. The Durkheimian method of generality does not foreclose particularity; on the contrary, the capacity to generalize depends precisely upon the availability of material with which to assert the model, much as the events of history depend upon the individuals who live it, be they colonial administrators, rebels or historical archivists.

If particularity is all, Adam Chau pulls our appreciation of Durkheim into the festival arena of modern Taiwan. Chau insists that in describing the kind of event that is sure to inspire human effervescence, we must recall all the elements of such a collective gathering, including the food, animals, winds and smells of a particular space-time. An effervescent event cannot be adequately represented without these sensory overloads, he intimates, nor are humans the only species to consider in our analyses of ritual: collective effervescence, it turns out, is a ritual experience on much more than the human level. From the kind of ethnography that he describes as 'red hot', Chau gives us a sense (literally) of all the living (and dead) beings present at the Righteous Martyrs Festival in Xipu, Taiwan. His descriptions evoke a sense of being there at the festival, such that we develop a subjective intuition of how it is that collective effervescence works at all: the heat, the liquid, the pulsations and the dynamism all play a part in producing the social event that Durkheim and his legacy point to. Chau worries that the ethnographic voice has been subordinated to the theoretical or philosophical work of *Elementary Forms*, and he wishes to bring it – or rather, the occasions that inspire it – right back up to the surface. The feeling of the festival is evoked through the narratives of a giant pig, a crocodile (both of whom are killed during the ritual event, but whose narratives need not be cut short by virtue of moving between the worlds), a betel nut, an iron frame (used to hold the pig once it is on display), a ghost and, finally, the collective

advocate of the group of martyrs in whose honour the entire event is performed and experienced.

Effervescence was not always a productive force for Durkheim. In the final chapter of this volume, W. Watts Miller carefully takes us through the evolution of Durkheim's concern with effervescence, which slowly evolved in his own thinking to become a positive force for the stability of society. Watts Miller plays with Durkheim's temporalities: we learn how, by changing location from ancient Israel to Australia, Durkheim moves backward in evolutionary time to find the essence of the theory. He can also move forward in evolutionary time to the French Republic: to his great and enduring credit, he deliberately draws out the parallels between the ideologies of Republican secularism and clan-based or totemic life. They stretch into an evolutionary timeline of humanity's past, present and future, reflecting his confidence in the universal capacity of the human mind. Collective mind is remarkably stable in this evolutionary historical model; what changes through time is its chosen expression.

In situating Durkheim historically, Watts Miller leaves us with a reminder that the theoretical innovation in *Elementary Forms* is itself indebted to anthropologists of religion of its own time, particularly James Frazer. Durkheim criticizes Frazer, of course, for assuming a difference between science and religion (if not between magic and religion). But Watts Miller indicates that it is Frazer's insistence that religion and society are two sides of the same coin that makes its way into the heart of *Elementary Forms* as a theory of the 'indivisibility of social and religious life'. Frazer leaves the insight untouched, letting it take hold in Durkheim's intellectual and methodological imagination. Frazer has taken his rightful place in the history of anthropological thinking on religion as a great cataloguer of religious and symbolic practices, but it is Durkheim who has left us with a theory – a philosophical attempt – to consider the place of human beings in the religions they create.

A philosopher eminently concerned with historical and ultimately social situatedness, Durkheim did not, as is often wrongly assumed, ignore the specificity of temporal location, or the way things change over time. The accusations of fixity, stasis or synchrony may not adequately allow for the deep changes that are inherent in his evolutionary (or even historical) view. But more importantly, they may not adequately consider Durkheim's awareness of the dynamism within social structure. Effervescence may keep social forms alive and constant, in one sense, but it also implies flow and fluidity, change and shift, as fundamental principles of human life, even when they are meant to keep things recognizably themselves.

Durkheim for the Next Century

Minds can be individual, or collective, or both. The possibility of historical shift that Durkheim hints at is more readily understood at the level of deep time, and the repeated cognitive processes that, taken together, explain the evolution of the human race. These are the layers and layers of representations that Stedman Jones equates with the categories, the shared bases of *a conscience collective*, which must, by definition, be in flux as an interactive product of the individual minds that together constitute the collective one. For Durkheim, the main difference between primitive and modern societies might be thought of as one of layering: the basic structures of mind might be the same, but the more modern the society, the more self-conscious its members become – and the more layers of representation emerge to account for its complexity.

As a whole, this book pushes Durkheimian theory to its current ethnographic and theoretical limits. Chau's evocation of sense in a Chinese festival – what it is like to be the crocodile getting gutted, or the betel nut being chewed – reminds us once again that an event is in the eye (or the gut) of the beholder. Data, whatever its form, must be digested through an interpreter, whoever that may be. Whether we perceive a social fact correctly depends precisely on our capacity to distinguish mystification (when we convince ourselves to take the representation for the referent) from mysticism (when we have understood the category in all its layers, or where there is no deeper place to go, for we have understood its essence). Durkheim's unique brilliance is his insistence that there is both a universal truth and manifold possible representations of it. Multiple forms of social life, both elementary and elemental, are no less correct when removed in time or in space (as was he from his own data). The primitive aspect, not limited to so-called primitive societies, is to be caught up in the categories themselves, or to be unwilling or unable to see their very malleability or refractive capacity.

Composition is a theme that emerges repeatedly in these chapters, as the process of producing a social form from symbolic representations demands it. For Chau, 'compositional assemblage' is the way to understand the festival dynamics that underscore effervescence. For Richards, 'compositional resources' are a way to understand the energy, produced by effervescent events, that collectivities want and need to harness, insofar as it can be redirected in all kinds of ways depending on who the 'group' is understood to include. In both contexts, we are reminded that although we tend to think of agency as individualistic, it may equally be thought of as collective action, in the form of

ritual. How and by whom collectives are determined or defined – as far as which kinds of humans or other beings count in a social universe – are the variable terms of the equation. The particular ways groups are confirmed in their compositions, or to what end they are cultivated by their respective rituals, will be the subject of much future work in the social sciences and the humanities.

This volume is a different kind of composition. Each of the authors has studied Durkheim on his or her own terms, using his or her own favourite edition or translation. These essays reveal the kinds of intellectual debates that contemporary Durkheimians are grappling with in their own disciplinary fields and fieldwork locations. Working with a group of scholars as talented as these, in dialogue with one of the great theorists of the twentieth century, has been an honour indeed. My hope is that the discussions that take place between the voices in these pages will bring studies of the collective and of ritual to new levels, claiming a single source of shared intellectual inspiration. We have found dynamism in what has been critiqued as static, explanatory value in what is thought of as descriptive, occasions of mourning and also of joy in the way we relate to one another as human beings. Ours is another layer of thought on Durkheim himself, and on his text. We have tried to place Durkheim in context, reconfiguring the theoretical achievements of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* as an enduring, vibrant way to consider social orders, mental processes and effervescent times in an ever-changing world.

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