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## **Redefining the Sociological Paradigm: Emile Durkheim and the Scientific Study of Morality**

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**Abstract** Whereas Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) has long been envisioned as a structuralist, quantitative, and positivist sociologist, some materials that Durkheim produced in the later stages of his career—namely, *Moral Education* (1961 [1902-1903]), *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1977 [1904-1905]), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915 [1912]), and *Pragmatism and Sociology* (1983 [1913-1914]) attest to a very different conception of sociology—one with particular relevance to the study of human knowing, acting, and interchange.

Although scarcely known in the social sciences, Emile Durkheim's (1993 [1887]) "La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne" ["The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany"] is an exceptionally important statement for establishing the base of much of Durkheim's subsequent social thought and for comprehending the field of sociology more generally. This includes the structuralist-pragmatist divide and the more distinctively humanist approach to the study of community life that Durkheim most visibly develops later (1961 [1902-1903]; 1977 [1904-1905]; 1915 [1912]; 1983 [1913-1914]) in his career.

**Keywords** Emile Durkheim; Theory; Sociology; Morality; Pragmatism; German Social Realism; Wilhelm Wundt; Ethics; Folk Psychology; Aristotle; History; Symbolic Interaction

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ry, religion, education and scholarship, love and friendship, politics and governing practices, and deviance and morality. As part of a larger venture, Robert Prus also has been analyzing a fuller range of texts produced by Emile Durkheim (most notably Durkheim's later, but lesser known, works on morality, education, religion, and philosophy), mindfully of their pragmatist affinities with Aristotle's foundational emphasis on the nature of human knowing and acting, as well as Blumerian symbolic interactionism.

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*There is only one way to understand collective phenomena, that is to study them in themselves. In other words, it is social psychology (die Völkerpsychologie) that alone can furnish the moral theorist with the materials he or she needs; this, according to Wundt, is the gateway (die Vorhalle) to ethics. It is in the history of language, of religion, of customs, and civilization in general that we can discover the traces of this development of which individual consciousness contains and knows only the initial impulses.*

Emile Durkheim 1887 (Hall 1993:92 *Ethics and the Sociology of Morals [E&SM]*)<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, one of the most consequential statements on “pragmatist” or “social realist” thought in Germany was developed by the French scholar Emile Durkheim (1993 [1887]). Although cast in reference to “the scientific study of morality” rather than “social realism” or “pragmatism” per se, Durkheim contends that several German scholars, of whom Wilhelm Wundt is most consequential, had developed an especially promising, interrelated set of approaches for studying community life in the social sciences. Still, Durkheim was unable and/or did not consider it appropriate to openly stress his indebtedness to the German social realists when pursuing his career as a French academic. Thus, it is only later, as a more established scholar,

<sup>1</sup> The page references in this paper to Emile Durkheim’s “La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne” [“The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany”] are from Robert T. Hall’s English translation—as found on pages 57-135 of Hall’s (1993) *Emile Durkheim: Ethics and the Sociology of Morals [E&SM]*. I am very much indebted to Robert Hall for his translation and exceptionally insightful introduction to this text. Indeed, of the various commentators on Durkheim’s works, it is Robert T. Hall who has most centrally grasped the importance of this 1887 statement for Durkheim’s subsequent scholarship.

that Durkheim (1902-1914) more directly reengages [the pragmatist tradition] that he had found so intellectually compelling in his earlier contact with German social realism.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I consider the implications of a study leave in Germany taken by Emile Durkheim in 1885-1886 for the humanist/pragmatist sociology that would become prominent in Durkheim’s later scholarly works (1915 [1912]; 1961 [1902-1903]; 1977 [1904-1905]; 1983 [1913-1914]). In developing this statement, I build on Durkheim’s (1993 [1887]) article, “La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne” (“The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany”) which appears in Robert T. Hall’s English translation published in *Emile Durkheim: Ethics and the Sociology of Morals [E&SM]* in 1993.

<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to succinctly capture the overarching essence of Durkheim’s 1887 statement, Robert Alun Jones (1985; 1994; 1999; 2002) uses the term “social realism.” This seems entirely appropriate to me, especially since it reminds readers of the particular cultural context in which Durkheim’s statement was developed. Nonetheless, readers are advised that in this paper I am using the terms “social realism,” “social pragmatism,” and “pragmatism” in essentially interchangeable ways. Durkheim does not use any of these terms in his 1887 statement, but readers will recognize considerable overall affinity between these approaches to the study of human knowing, acting, and interchange and the concepts embedded in the specific articles Emile Durkheim discusses in the 1887 paper.

In addition to earlier discussions of “folk psychology” (*die Völkerpsychologie*) in German scholarship, the term “social realism” as used herein has many conceptual affinities with Aristotelian social thought (especially see *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*), as well as with what would later become known as American pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, interpretivism, and phenomenological sociology (see: Prus 1996; 2003; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2013a; 2015; 2017).

Most centrally, following Wilhelm Wundt (*Ethics*), Durkheim’s emphasis is on studying the developmentally shaped, collectively enacted, and linguistically enabled conceptual foundations of community life. It is within the context of ongoing human life-worlds that *all* realms and instances of human knowing, acting, and interchange become meaningful and achieve some historically constituted continuity. Envisioned thusly, Emile Durkheim’s depiction of “the social realist study of morality” represents an exceptionally enabling prototype for the study of all contexts and arenas of human group life.

Few sociologists seem familiar with Durkheim's 1887 statement and even fewer have considered the implications of Durkheim's encounter with "German social realism" (Jones 1999) during a study leave as a junior scholar—either for Durkheim's career as a sociologist or for the field of sociology and the study of human knowing and acting more specifically.<sup>3</sup>

Albeit notably compacted, Durkheim's 1887 text is important not only for (a) identifying some central features of Durkheim's approach to the study of human group life but also for (b) locating the conceptual core of these aspects of Durkheim's intellectual heritage and (c) enabling readers more adequately to appreciate some of the tensions that appear in Durkheim's subsequent analyses of community life.

Relatedly, this much overlooked statement also (d) alerts us to the role that some German scholars (especially Wilhelm Wundt) played in the development of Durkheim's pragmatist sociological ap-

<sup>3</sup> In developing this statement on Durkheim's encounter with German social realism, I also benefited from Robert Alun Jones' (1999) insightful historical commentary on Durkheim's career as a scholar—and in particular Jones' attentiveness to the contributions of Wilhelm Wundt to Durkheim's 1887 statement on the study of morality in Germany. While I am particularly grateful to Steven Lukes (1973) for the broad array of materials that he provides on Durkheim's scholarly career and publications, Lukes substantially understates the importance of Durkheim's encounter with German realism, as well as the humanist/pragmatist proclivities one encounters in Emile Durkheim's later works. Although providing an exceptionally extensive and highly detailed depiction of Durkheim's personal life and career, Marcel Fournier's (2013) biographical statement on Emile Durkheim also gives very little attention to what I have termed Durkheim's "sociological pragmatism" in his 1887 paper or in his later works (1902-1914). Fournier acknowledges Durkheim's subsequent attentiveness to history and ethnography as central features of the sociological enterprise in some of his later work, but, much like Lukes, Fournier is inattentive to the historical continuities of pragmatist Greek thought (from Aristotle via Wundt) in Durkheim's "The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany."

proach to the study of human group life and (e) denotes another set of connections between classical Greek scholarship and contemporary pragmatist thought.

It is commonly assumed that Durkheim's sociology was primarily inspired by the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Indeed, Durkheim's best-known works (*The Division of Labor in Society* [1893], *The Rules of Sociological Method* [1895], and *Suicide* [1897]) represent a structural-determinist, as well as a quantitative alternative (*Suicide*) to interpretivist/pragmatist viewpoints. Likewise, whereas one can locate some pragmatist themes in these three texts, emphases of these latter sorts generally have been envisioned as distinctively theoretically and methodologically marginal to his overall project.

Still, even though Durkheim's best-known texts (1947 [1893]; 1951 [1897]; 1958 [1895]) are noted for their structuralist, quantitative, and deductively rationalist emphases, it is likely that these texts also would have been more positivist, individualistic, and psychological in thrust—had Durkheim not had earlier contact with the German social realists.

Durkheim's education, if we may judge from some philosophy lectures that Durkheim delivered in 1883-1884 (Gross and Jones 2004), was very much the product of French social thought at his time. Thus, whereas Durkheim appears to possess a solid French philosophical background with a particular proclivity for analytic detail, the philosophical stances encountered in these lectures reflect the (structuralist, reductionist, deductive) rationalism of René Descartes (1596-1650), the raw individualism

championed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and the (structuralist, largely ahistorical) scientific emphasis of the scholars who became central at the time of the French Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

Albeit seemingly limited, Durkheim appears to have had some exposure to classical Greek thought (notably including aspects of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*).<sup>5</sup> Still, Durkheim's material on Greek scholarship is not presented in particularly distinct terms but rather is interfused with French structuralism, scientism, and individualism. Accordingly, in his 1883-1884 lectures, human behavior is explained primarily in terms of individual psychological cognitions and tendencies. There is very little emphasis on the group or community life in Durkheim's early lectures on philosophy.

As Lukes (1973:86-95) observes, Durkheim had a long standing interest in morality, and his 1887 article on ethics and morality emerged as a result of a study leave that took him to several German universities. The French government had sponsored

<sup>4</sup> This would include the encyclopedicists Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1717-1783), among others, who championed a more notably rationalist, structuralist, ahistorical, allegedly scientific approach.

<sup>5</sup> Although Aristotle is often described as an objectivist or raw empiricist and Plato as an idealist, these characterizations not only disregard particularly consequential pragmatist motifs in Plato's texts (Prus 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2013b; Prus and Camara 2010) but also dismally fail to acknowledge the broader, more explicit nature of Aristotle's pragmatist approach to the study of the human condition (see: *Nicomachean Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, Poetics, and Categories*; also see: Prus 2003; 2004; 2007a; 2008; 2009a; 2013a; 2013c; 2015; Prus and Camara 2010). Over the millennia Aristotle's scholarship has been represented in many different ways and across highly diverse realms of community life, but it is *Aristotelian pragmatism* (see Prus 1999; 2003; 2004; Puddephatt and Prus 2007) that provides the conceptual foundations of 20<sup>th</sup> century American pragmatism (and pragmatism's sociological offshoot, symbolic interactionism), as well as the somewhat earlier German social realist tradition that Durkheim discusses.

study leaves for promising young French scholars so that they might learn about the latest thought and research being developed in Germany.

Although many of his colleagues were notably disaffected with their study leave encounters in German academia, Durkheim (1993 [1887]) describes his contacts with particular German scholars as having given him a particularly clear conceptual paradigm and research agenda, as well as a much sharpened methodological standpoint for studying community life—and especially the matters of morality, regulation, and religion. As a result, the contrasts between Durkheim's (1883-1884) lectures and the statement on morality that he developed in 1887 following his (1885-1886) study leave in Germany are particularly striking. Still, the sources of Durkheim's ideas, along with the nature of their influence, have become a point of controversy.<sup>6</sup>

Drawing on Durkheim's 1887 paper, I will indicate his profound indebtedness to some German realists of whom Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) is particularly consequential.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Wundt and the German social realists Durkheim discusses seem foundational for Durkheim's (a) subsequent emphasis on the collective consciousness, (b) insistence on the essentiality of the group (as in language, interaction, concepts, and meaning) for all realms of human

<sup>6</sup> Had Durkheim (1993 [1887]) explicitly defined German social realism as but a variant of the pragmatist philosophy associated with Plato and (especially) Aristotle, he might have had received a more tolerant reception in the French academic community.

<sup>7</sup> I developed a much stronger appreciation of the impact of Wilhelm Wundt's analysis of morality on Durkheim's subsequent scholarship from directly examining Wundt's three volume *Ethics*. Indeed, there is much of fundamental sociological value to be gleaned from a more sustained examination of Wundt's *Ethics*.

knowing, acting, and interchange, (c) the notably relativist, pluralist humanist/pragmatist features of his subsequent sociological analyses, and (d) attentiveness to the developmental-historical flows—continuities and disjunctures—of community life.

In contrast to the position taken in the present statement, Steven Lukes (1973: especially 79-95) seems intent on minimizing the significance of Durkheim's contacts with the German social realists. Whereas Lukes generally distances Durkheim from a pragmatist viewpoint, Lukes partially may be responding to some comments Durkheim made in 1907.<sup>8</sup> Others, including Simon Deploige (1911), Pascal Gisbert (1959), Jeffrey Alexander (1986), Stjepan Mestrovic (1991), Robert Hall (1993), Robert Alun Jones (1994; 1999), and Mustafa Emirbayer (1996a; 1996b), would not concur with Lukes on this matter.<sup>9</sup> Readers may

<sup>8</sup> In 1907, and seemingly responding to more public (published) allegations that his sociology was very much a restatement of German social thought rather than having been derived from French sources, Durkheim would say that the major sources for his ideas were Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and (Spencer's student) Alfred Espinas (see: Lukes 1973:79-85). Whereas this claim generally seems much more appropriate for Durkheim's earlier works (1947 [1893]; 1951 [1897]; 1958 [1895]) than for his later scholarship, it notably disregards the interpretivist/pragmatist materials that Durkheim introduced in his 1890s texts. Claims of these sorts also understate the interpretivist-positivist tensions that Durkheim seems likely to have experienced in developing these three texts. Also see Alexander (1986), Emirbayer (1996a; 1996b), and Jones (1999). Durkheim's conceptual continuities with German social realism become more apparent when one examines his 1902-1903, 1904-1905, 1912, 1913-1914 texts in the light of his 1887 statement.

<sup>9</sup> Part of the failure of Steven Lukes (1973), Marcel Fournier (2013), and numerous other commentators to acknowledge the pragmatist features of Durkheim's work, as well as the connections of Durkheim with Wilhelm Wundt not only suggests a lack of awareness of Aristotle's pragmatism (Prus 2007a; 2008; 2013a; 2015) but also more direct familiarity with Wundt's *Ethics*—the primary source on which Durkheim built in his 1887 article. Still, given the many areas of social life in which Durkheim addressed during his life-time and the many statements he developed (published texts and articles, lectures, notes, correspondence), as well as the differing backgrounds and resources with which particular commentators have worked, significant diversity of emphases and interpretation seems inevitable.

judge these viewpoints for themselves when they examine Durkheim's fuller (1993 [1887]) text or the synopsis provided in the present statement.

Although Durkheim addresses the works of some German political economists, legalists, historians, and philosophers who adapt a realist (essentially pragmatist) perspective with an emphasis on "what is" and "how things are accomplished," those who examine Durkheim's "La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne" may be surprised to see the particular prominence Durkheim gives to Wilhelm Wundt's *Ethics* (1914 [1886]).

Wilhelm Wundt may be only marginally known in sociological circles and then likely almost entirely as an experimental psychologist rather than a "folk psychologist." However, Durkheim's portrayal of Wundt's *Ethics* makes it clear that Wundt (in developing his historically informed comparative analysis of morality) has defined much of the agenda that Durkheim intends to follow over his career. Indeed, on the basis of Durkheim's commentary and a fuller examination of Wundt's text, *one might very well include Wilhelm Wundt, the psychologist turned philosopher, historian, and analyst of community life, among "the founding fathers of sociology."*

Still, as Durkheim indicates in his 1887 paper, Wundt was not alone in stressing the irreducible nature of the human group and the importance of attending to human activity, linguistic interchange, and the historical, developmental flows of human group life. Notably, thus, Durkheim describes this as a visible element of the German intellectual climate of the day.

Although very much overshadowed by the philosophies of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), as well as the moralism of Karl Marx (1818-1893), there is a long-standing linguistic, philosophic, “folk psychology” (*die Völkerpsychologie*) or social realist tradition in German social thought. Not only have these scholars stridently criticized Kant and Hegel for their failure to attend to language as an essential enabling baseline element in all human thought and reasoning practices (i.e., for failing to acknowledge the intersubjectively accomplished nature of all human knowing and acting) but these scholars also challenged positivist conceptions of the human condition and the scientific rejection of historical and philosophical materials from the past.

In addition to the social realists that Durkheim discusses in his 1887 paper, this would include J. G. Hamann (1730-1788), G. Chr. Lichtenberg (1742-1799), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Wilhelm Humboldt (1767-1835), Otto Friedrich Gruppe (1804-1876), Conrad Hermann (1819-1897), Gustav Gerber (1820-1901), and Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900). Herman Cloeren (1988) provides a very insightful review of the works of these scholars. As indicated in Prus (1996), scholars centrally involved in related scholarly (pragmatist-related) developments would include Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and Georg Simmel (1858-1898).<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted as well that the social realism Durkheim discusses in his 1887 paper did *not* origi-

<sup>10</sup> Following his 1887 statement, Emile Durkheim would become well-aware of the academic risks of pursuing ideas associated with German social thought in France. Still, German social realism would further recede into the background with World War I and the subsequent increased scholarly attentiveness to a materialist, structurally-oriented scientific sociology in the ensuing decades.

nate in Germany but, as Cloeren (1988) observes, more centrally reflects the contributions of some British (pragmatist-oriented) scholars. This includes Francis Bacon (1561-1626), John Locke (1632-1704), and David Hume (1711-1776). Still, as with the German social realists, we may acknowledge a more extended (albeit often notably indirect) indebtedness of both these British and German scholars to Aristotle (particularly his *Nicomachean Ethics*; also see Prus 2004; 2007a; 2008).

In his comparatively short but still intense, conceptually compacted 1887 statement, Durkheim not only emphasizes Wundt’s contributions to the study of human group life but also acknowledges a set of somewhat parallel viewpoints articulated by some German economists, legalists, and historians that discuss the social order of community life in humanly engaged, developmentally sustained terms.

Pragmatist emphases pertaining to the nature of human group life and the relationship of the individual to society are prominent in Durkheim’s later (1915 [1912]; 1961 [1902-1903]; 1977 [1904-1905]; 1983 [1913-1914]) works.<sup>11</sup> However, the conceptual-analytic materials that can be gleaned from Emile

<sup>11</sup> Albeit considerably less evident, amidst the continuities of Durkheim’s earlier exposure to French structuralism and positivist social thought, some noteworthy pragmatist motifs can be found in Durkheim’s *Division of Labor*. Likewise, important features of *Rules* clearly reflect a pragmatist orientation to the study of human group life. By contrast, Durkheim’s *Suicide*, which is often (mis)taken as Durkheim’s “definitive methodological prototype,” has very little to offer to the pragmatist study of human lived experience—including suicide as a socially engaged process embedded in the context of ongoing community life. While appealing to “the remedial social problems mentality” of his time and corresponding searches for “structuralist factors and quick-fix solutions” of our own time, it is not apparent that Durkheim was conceptually or methodologically enchanted with *Suicide*. Still, Emile Durkheim had made long-term commitments to this project and, despite its substantial conceptual and methodological failings, he envisioned *Suicide* as a publication of considerable importance for his career.

Durkheim's "The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany" constitute an "intellectual sociological treasure chest" in themselves.

Whereas readers may be struck by the extended, pronounced emphasis on the collective consciousness of the group that Durkheim discusses in his 1887 publication, this statement also represents a direct critique of Platonist, Cartesian, and Kantian rationalism. Moreover, Durkheim explicitly challenges the viability of utilitarianism and individualism as overarching rationalities for explaining the moral order of the community.

For the German social realists, the interaction that takes place in the community is central for enabling all that is humanly known and meaningfully engaged. Moreover, there is a sustained pragmatist emphasis on activity. The group achieves its viability as people do things and relate to others in linguistically-enabled, minded, and socially acknowledged purposive terms. Still, and no less consequentially, people's conceptions of knowing and acting (and the resources accumulated therein) not only are collectively developed, sustained, and transformed over time but these "cultural accomplishments" also are very much one with the viewpoints, activities, and interchanges that constitute ongoing community life.

Accordingly, Durkheim (1993 [1887]) stresses (a) an attentiveness to the historical-developmental flows of human group life for comprehending the culture (as in traditions, knowledge, morality, and day-to-day practices) of the community and (b) the relativity of morality across societies, as well as within particular communities over time. Emile Durkheim also

acknowledges (c) the problematic nature of community life—viewing emergence as an indefinite, ongoing socially engaged process that transcends the interests and viewpoints of particular individuals. As well, (d) insofar as it is seen to epitomize the collective, reflective, enacted features of community—as a societal force or collective spirit that transcends the individuals within the community—morality is to be seen as a socially achieved process. It is for this reason that both religious and secular viewpoints and practices are to be given particular attention in developing a scholarly analysis of the moral ordering of community life.

Contending that (e) ongoing community life, rather than the physiological or psychological qualities of individuals, is the centering point of analysis for human knowing, activity, and interchange, Durkheim addresses (f) the importance of both meaningful, intentioned, and more collectively routinized activities and modes of association for the study of community life. Relatedly, he remains attentive to (g) the developmental, enacted interrelatedness and the associated resiliencies of the many humanly engaged theaters of operation that transcend more individualized, as well as more extended collective efforts to change aspects of community life.

Methodologically, Durkheim emphasizes (h) the importance of studying the developmental flows of community life, as well as (i) the necessity of attending to the instances and ways in which people engage and interact within the many organizational contexts of community life and (j) the importance of pursuing sustained comparative analysis (analytic induction rather than deductive logic) of developmental his-

torical and ethnological materials for (k) the purpose of discerning, identifying, and articulating the more fundamental (versus more transitory) viewpoints, practices, and processes of human group life.

### “La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne”

[Note: The page references are to the English translation of “La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne”—“The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany” that appears in Robert Hall’s (1993) *Ethics and the Sociology of Morals* [E&SM]. To maintain the overall flow and coherence of Durkheim’s statement, as well as enable readers to refer to Durkheim’s text (and Hall’s translation) for greater detail, I will be presenting this synopsis in the order in which Durkheim developed his statement, dealing in turn with each author that he considers.]

Durkheim begins his 1887 “The Scientific Study of Morality in Germany” (E&SM:58) by observing that French approaches to ethics can be characterized as either (a) idealist (presuming pre-existing or invariant truths) or (b) utilitarian (denoting variants of self/unit-serving rationalist principles) in emphasis. However, Durkheim observes, some German scholars have taken a different approach. This latter (social realist) approach, Durkheim contends, is extremely important for it provides a framework for studying ethics in more distinctively scientific terms.

#### Part I: Economists and Sociologists

Opening his discussion by considering the relationship of ethics to economics, Durkheim (E&SM:58-

62) says that economists typically have approached the linkages of ethics and economics in three ways. First, some view ethics as subsumed by, or as the emergent byproduct of, economic concerns with utility. Second, some see ethics and economics as existing as independent but essentially parallel developments, with all essential moral truths corresponding to economic truths. Third, there are those who seek correlations between particular economic conditions and specific moral viewpoints. Durkheim takes issue with each of these in turn. Thus, while contending that ethics and economics are distinct realms of activity in many respects, he stresses *the developmental, humanly engaged interdependence* of the two sets of endeavors.

In developing a fuller alternative to these first three views of economics and ethics, Durkheim (E&SM:62-68) draws on the German political economists Adolph Wagner (1835-1917) and Gustav von Schmoller (1838-1917). Both challenge the utilitarian position that society exists to serve the interests of the individuals within. Invoking expressions such as “social conscience,” “the collective spirit,” and the like [which Durkheim describes as a current analytic emphasis in Germany], these two political economists argue that society is much more than the sum of its parts and is to be understood as a genuine unity unto itself.

Relatedly, all aspects of the economy, including the private economy, are to be seen as within the context of the collectivity. The economy, thus, is a *social economy* and can only be understood with respect to the particular community in which it functions and takes its shape. In contrast to those adapting



notions of self-serving utilitarianism, Wagner and Schmoller contend that the realms of both economy and ethics incorporate elements of unselfishness and are mindful of differences between things “done for the good of the state” and “those pursued because of individual interests.”

As well, since morality and economics are interfused in a great many realms of community life, it is necessary to comprehend some fundamental economic processes to understand community morality. Likewise, whereas economics represents only one arena in which matters of ethics may be invoked, economics is shaped by people’s concerns with ethics, as well as the interests of particular individuals.

Then, after stating that the purpose of political economy is to explain the economic functioning of the (broader) social organism in which it is embedded, Durkheim (*E&SM*:66-67) says that economic phenomena, like all other matters of community life, are to be approached as *developmental social processes*.

Drawing directly on Schmoller, Durkheim explains that as people begin to do things more consistently, those practices “begin to impose themselves on the participants” as habits. As they reach this stage, routinized practices assume more restrictive, compulsory, or obligatory qualities and, thereby, provide the foundations for mores and, subsequently, law and morality. People’s economic activities also become crystallized in this fashion. Thus, amidst the changes and adjustments that take place over time, economic practices also become moral phenomena as people begin to establish particular ways of “doing business” and envision these as more entirely appropriate.

In contrast to those who treat economics and morality as if they were two separate worlds, Durkheim not only insists on the importance of attending to ways that economic practices enter into certain aspects of the moral order (e.g., property, contracts) but he also encourages analysts to be mindful of the ways in which people’s broader notions of morality become infused with their economic arrangements.

Elaborating further on Wagner’s work, Durkheim (*E&SM*:68-70) says that notions of individual liberty, ownership, and the like have no value or meaning in themselves. It is only within the context of the community that matters of these sorts assume any consequence.

Likewise, Durkheim says, it is inappropriate to start with some abstract principle of morality and proceed to deduce applications from this. Instead, following Schmoller, Durkheim insists that in order to comprehend the forms or principles of morality, it is necessary to *observe people’s actual practices* and develop inferences from these instances.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Durkheim states, morality would have no relevance as a detached, abstract concept. Notions of morality are meaningful only when these are linked to life in more direct, actively engaged terms.

<sup>12</sup> Durkheim makes no reference to Aristotle here. However, Aristotle contends that concepts (also forms, abstractions, generals) are derived from a comparative analysis of the instances in which things take place. Plato is not entirely consistent in his attentiveness to forms (and concepts). Thus, whereas Plato is highly attentive to the humanly, community-enabled, constructed nature of knowing, acting, and interchange in extended sectors of his texts (especially *Republic* and *Laws*; also see Prus 2009a; 2011a; 2011b; 2013b; Prus and Camara 2010), he sometimes addresses forms and concepts as pre-existing matters. Aristotle clearly does not accept this latter position.

Viewing ethics as a “science of life,” Durkheim (*E&SM:70-73*) stresses the point that it is humanity, *actual lived humanity*, as opposed to abstract principles, that is the subject matter of the study of ethics.

Then, addressing a related question of whether humans can effectively intervene in basic economic processes (which, Durkheim notes, are seen as immutable by the Manchester School), Durkheim takes the viewpoint that the economy has a broader social quality than the Manchester School recognizes. Still, Durkheim contends, these processes cannot simply be adjusted by people’s intentions or by invoking particular instances of legislation as Wagner has suggested. Although economic processes do change, sometimes comparatively quickly, Durkheim says, social facts are complex, diffuse matters and cannot be adequately comprehended (and regulated) by human minds. It is this multiplistic set of processes and the lack of an overarching rationality that not only obscures scholarly analysis but that also frustrates policy interventions.

Durkheim (*E&SM:73-76*) then references the economist Albert Schaffle whose works shed more light on morality as a social process. Rather than viewing morality as a system of rules, Schaffle argues that morality represents a dynamic social function. Not only does morality take shape through a historically articulated collective process but the morality of the community also “adjusts” to the conditions of the collectivity.

Thus, in contrast to Wagner’s assumption that morality can be intentionally adjusted through legislation, Schaffle views rules and policies more entirely as adjustive responses to collectively experienced

circumstances. Likewise, because of the emergent nature of public sentiments, transformations in morality cannot be predicted with much accuracy.

Still, despite his skepticism about invoking changes from the outside (as in imposing legislation on morality as the academic socialists Wagner and Schmoller have suggested), Schaffle argues for changes that develop from self-reflective, deliberate activities taking place within the institutions that constitute society.

Although accepting Schaffle’s views about the limited effects of legislation on morality and that legislation reflects acknowledgements of changes to generally existing practices, Durkheim says that he is skeptical of Schaffle’s claims that change within occurs because of direct, reflective, purposive behavior. In particular, Durkheim is reluctant to acknowledge the family as the central source of this artistic (architectural) morality and Schaffle’s associated tendency to envision the family in more psychological terms.

Durkheim concludes this section of his text by observing that philosophy has undergone a major transformation in Germany. Whereas psychology with its linkages to physiology has largely broken away from philosophy, so also does the study of morality in Germany (thusly transformed by the economists) seem on its way to becoming a field of study on its own.

## **Part II: The Jurists, Rudolph Jhering**

Continuing with this highly compacted set of essays on morality as a humanly engaged process,

Durkheim (*E&SM*:78-88) next addresses the work of an Austrian legalist Georg Jellinek (1851-1911) and a German law professor Rudolf von Jhering (1818-1892). Both approach the study of law in more distinctive, purposive, processual terms. Although focusing more exclusively on Jhering, Durkheim is quick to point out that the scientific-enacted approach of Jellinek, Jhering, and some others working in Germany stands in stark contrast to French perspectives on the philosophy of law.

In developing this statement, Durkheim (*E&SM*:79-80) notes that Jhering invites inquiry into the nature of law from a variety of analytic viewpoints. This includes linguistic analysis, mythology, etymology, pedagogy, and an empirical historical mode of inquiry wherein law is examined dispassionately. Jhering's emphasis is on comprehending law in the same way that one would study other natural phenomena.

After observing that philosophers since the time of Plato have routinely reduced reality to abstracted, logically connected sets of ideas, Durkheim (*E&SM*:80) says that by doing so, they miss the essential motivational elements of life. To live, Durkheim insists, people do not merely think, they *act*. And, it is with a purpose in mind that people give action a direction. Action is to be understood by reference to its purpose. It is this emphasis on people pursuing ends or objectives, Durkheim points out, that characterizes Jhering's position.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Those familiar with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics*, and *Rhetoric* will recognize that the purposive, interconnected, and adjustive qualities of human activity and interchange (denoting matters of intention, reflectivity, deliberation, planning, implementation, and adjustment) are central features of

Still, Durkheim (*E&SM*:81-82) adds, because instances of human behavior are bound up in the historical flows and developmental culture of the human community, people often are unable to appreciate the relevance or meanings of their behaviors in these broader terms and, relatedly, readily fit into these flows. As a result, people do not always act mindfully of the broader, more established purposes that these behaviors imply. For this reason, Durkheim states, it is important to go beyond Jhering and study the more general social contexts in which people act. Thus, whereas people may act in accordance with particular aspects of the law, they need not be mindful of the purposes of those specific aspects of the law when these regulations were earlier established [Durkheim addresses this point in more detail later in discussing Wundt's *Ethics*].

Then, returning more directly to Jhering's work, Durkheim (*E&SM*:82) says that law is developed to insure the existence of society. Still, acknowledging the *relativity of community morality*, Durkheim stresses the notably different versions of the law that may be invoked in this and that society even as the lawmakers address fundamental features of social life.

The laws of particular communities need not cover all aspects of community life but, following Jhering, Durkheim (*E&SM*:83-84) stresses the relevance of the law for wide ranges of individual rights. Still, whereas individual rights vary across communities, community conceptions of individual rights also

Aristotle's pragmatism. However, here, as in other places in his 1887 text, Durkheim remains more entirely focused on the German scholars who work with these notions rather than acknowledging their intellectual indebtedness to Aristotle's approach to the study of human knowing and acting.

bring with them increased levels of responsibility and obligation.

The “natural law” theorists (presumably referring to Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill), Durkheim (*E&SM*:84-85) says, fail to comprehend the actual nature of the human community—that societies are *not* simply masses of individuals and social order *cannot* be reduced to matters of individual interests.

Having thusly dealt with “the purpose of the law,” Durkheim (*E&SM*:85-86) next considers how the law is realized. The law, he says, is achieved by restraint. However, there are wide ranges of restraint. Relatedly, force and the impending sanctions are not sufficient in themselves for comprehending people’s compliance with the law.

For society to be possible, Durkheim (*E&SM*:86-87) emphasizes, it also is necessary that people have an unselfish appreciation of the law as signified by the matters of “love for the law” and “a sense of duty.” These elements, Durkheim adds, are central to Jhering’s broader theory of morality.

Whereas morality serves the same basic purpose as the law, that of sustaining social order, morality differs from law. While it is authority of the state that provides the basis for the continuity and enforcement of law, morality is the product of the entire society. Thus, Durkheim (*E&SM*:86-87) stresses, no one, regardless of one’s position in the community, is immune from moral constraint. Likewise, morality has a pervasive quality that permeates every feature of human group life. Consequently, although

morality lacks the (focused, authoritative) force of law and does not address the essential features of community existence in the same way, morality extends far beyond the law in regulating community life.

After observing that Jhering has examined morality in extended analytic detail with respect to language, mores, and customs, Durkheim (*E&SM*:87-88) says that although Jhering (like jurists more generally) still gives too much attention to calculated self interest and external matters, he is to be commended not only for (a) his work on the scientific study of morality and (b) his attempts to integrate the philosophy of law with the positive (enacted, actual) law, but also (c) for integrating the study of custom into the broader field of ethics. Having established these baseline positions, Durkheim says that he will next deal with Wilhelm Wundt’s work.

### Part III: The Moral Philosophers: Wilhelm Wundt

[Whereas Emile Durkheim is to be commended for his astute, comprehensive, and highly succinct rendering of *the uniquely enabling sociological quality* of Wilhelm Wundt’s *Ethics*, readers may easily underestimate Durkheim’s appreciation of Wundt’s analysis of community life. Still, while centrally grasping the pragmatist sociological potency of Wundt’s work in ways others have completely missed, Durkheim’s representations gloss over some of the more extended sets of insights and qualifications that Wundt (1914 [1886]) develops in *Ethics*. As a result, it is easy to lose sight of Wundt’s more substantial contributions to sociology—even as Durkheim emphasizes the centrality of Wundt’s analysis for the study of

morality. Whereas Durkheim rarely mentions Wilhelm Wundt, the German scholar to whom he is so indebted, in his subsequent pragmatist-oriented works (1915 [1912]; 1961 [1902-1903]; 1977 [1904-1905]; 1983 [1913-1914]), it is instructive to keep in mind that, following his studies in Germany, Durkheim had been criticized by French colleagues (of whom Simon Deploige seems particularly persistent) for being overly attentive to German social thought.]

After observing that that the authors he has discussed so far were moral philosophers in a more marginal sense, Durkheim (*E&SM*:89) says that it is Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) who has synthesized the works of the other German moral theorists into a more coherent, focused process-oriented study of ethics.

Defining Wundt's (observational, historical, comparative analytic) approach as distinctively empirical, Durkheim (*E&SM*:90-92) says that Wundt insists that reason alone is insufficient to comprehend ethics and that, as with other subject matters, *the study of ethics* must be grounded in observation. Thus, in contrast to considerations of ideals, motives, intentions, and consequences, Wundt emphasizes the necessity of focusing on practical action—the things people actually do. Relatedly, whereas the goal of ethics is discern the general principles which the instances represent, this is to be accomplished through an examination of the instances in which people act. In these respects, Durkheim explicitly points out, Wundt approaches ethics in a fairly conventional *scientific* manner.

Still, Wundt adds another highly consequential element to the study of ethics. To achieve a more ad-

equate comprehension of ethics, Wundt says that it is necessary also to embark on a comparative examination of the different moral viewpoints that people have developed throughout recorded history. Thus, while people may have certain psychological capacities or dispositions, *it is necessary to move past invalid tendencies to reduce morality to psychological properties or individual dispositions.*

According to Wundt (*E&SM*:92) it is only by studying collective matters as instances of social psychology (*die Völkerpsychologie*) that one can hope to understand ethics. Because ethics is a social, historically achieved phenomenon, it is to be studied as a collective process. As well, individual consciousness (as in people's thoughts, concepts, and notions of individuality) is to be understood as emerging *within the interchanges of group life*—not as people with solitary-enabled realms of consciousness producing the concepts that inform and shape human group life.

The *study of ethics*, thus, becomes the history of community life—language, religion, customs, culture, activities and interchanges, restraint, freedoms and regulation, including people's experiences with the physical environment. Still, of these processes, Durkheim says, it is religion and customs that merit most sustained attention.

Durkheim (*E&SM*:92-95) begins his discussion of religion by noting that it is impossible to differentiate the roots and early developments of religion and morality, adding that the distinctions emerged only over time. Continuing to draw directly on Wundt, Durkheim says that early group life consisted of vague mixes of ideas and practices and that

it is because of these more obscure and fortuitous combinations of things that the study of religion in primitive societies is so problematic. Accordingly, it is only in using the more distinct notions of religion and morality that have emerged among more civilized societies that one may have a basis for delineating the roots of religious ideas in more primitive communities.<sup>14</sup>

Approaching things in this more comparative sense, Wundt says that all viewpoints and representations of things that reflect human ideals may be considered religious [sacred?] in essence. Stating that people have a need for reference points, Wundt says that morality, like religion, not only is expressed as ideals but also readily becomes personified (i.e., objectified and sanctified through particular people and other things). Thus, whereas primitive peoples may have revered ancestors in cult-like fashions, envisioned natural objects and physical forces as deities, and later developed other notions of divinity, human ideals have been epitomized, supported, and sanctified in human expressions of religion. However, Durkheim adds, for the separation of morality from religion something more was required, the development of custom.

Still following Wundt closely, Durkheim (*E&SM*:95-97) says that although some theorists have argued

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, this is one place that Durkheim will later (see: Durkheim's [1915 <1912>] *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*) break away from Wilhelm Wundt. Thus, Durkheim will make the case for the importance of studying the fundamental features of primitive religions over the (seemingly more complex) major religions. While I have found so much of value in Wundt's work, I concur with Durkheim on this point—not to disregard more complex variants of some category of phenomena but to try to establish the most basic or foundational features of any particular realm of human interchange.

that custom emerges as the product of individual practices, it is mistaken to think that custom, like language and religion, is somehow the product of individual consciousness. Indeed, although custom and other collective matters presume human capacities for consciousness, *individual consciousness is the product of group consciousness*.

Thus, insofar as humans linguistically participate in “the consciousness of the community,” they become *the recipients and beneficiaries* (of viewpoints, practices, stocks of knowledge, and technologies) of the more enduring community life-worlds in which they find themselves. Still, even though it is people who sustain the prevailing practices and viewpoints of their own times, as individuals they typically have little direct, especially longer-term, influence on the overall collective life of the community.

As instances of collectively achieved group life, particular customs are to be explained through earlier collective practices and interchange. Further, although the bases on which specific customs emerged may long have disappeared from memory, these practices persist as phenomena carried forward in the culture of community life. Likewise, in tracing customs back over time, one only finds other collective phenomena in the form of customs, beliefs, and religious practices.

Referencing Wundt again, Durkheim (*E&SM*:96-98) directly opposes those (probably referring to Hobbes and Rousseau) who contend that customs are the products of individual interests and that these only subsequently had been sanctified by religion.

By contrast, Durkheim says, customs are *derived from religion* rather than from configurations of individual interests and that it is these (religious) ideals and the superior powers that religion represents that enable things to become established as customs. It is religion that binds people together. It is religion that generates an altruism or concern with the other that extends beyond the individual. As well, even when particular customs lose more direct connections with religion, they still maintain some of this altruistic base of support.

It is for this reason too, Durkheim adds, that law and morality remain largely undifferentiated among less civilized peoples. Likewise, whereas customs and morality are essentially synonymous among primitive peoples, more civilized societies judge customs from moral standpoints.

Durkheim (*E&SM*:98-102) next addresses morality in more focused terms. After affirming the point that customs had their origins in religious practices, Durkheim says that, in addition to people's religious practices, those who constituted early society were drawn together not by blood relationships but by commonalities of language, habits, and manners. Further, the first societies would have consisted of more ambiguous collectivities with concepts of families and other specialized divisions only emerging later on.

As well, Durkheim stresses, people's natural affinities with those who are similar to themselves are *not* the products of egoism (or the pursuit of people's own interests). Instead, it represents an autonomous tendency of great consequence for the social order

of the community. Indeed, all altruistic tendencies, as well as the very foundations on which all matters of morality are founded are based on (a) people's capacities to experience *sympathetic affinities with others*, and (b) *the respect* that people assign to religious ideals and practices—and the associated sense of the subjugation of the self to something greater than oneself.

Then, after asserting that these tendencies towards altruism are not products of egoist or self-serving inclinations as some have contended, Durkheim still acknowledges the powerful self-serving tendencies that people develop with respect to themselves, as well as people's capacities for developing personal satisfactions from helping others.

Although these latter sets of egoistic tendencies may seem to cancel out more genuine altruistic tendencies, Durkheim insists that altruism is not a disguised form of egoism. It is inappropriate to try to explain things (altruism) as functions of their opposites (egoism). Something more is needed.

Also, as Durkheim reminds readers, the natural moral practices of the community do not reflect some longer-term calculations or reasoned objectives but emerge as part of a broader, more nebulous, adjustive process that assumes a reality well beyond people's intentions.

Commenting next on the matters of homogeneity and division with respect to people's notions of morality, Durkheim (*E&SM*:100-102) says that the first societies would have been characterized by a single morality. However, people's notions of morali-

ty would become increasingly *diversified* as various groups and categories of people become more distinct within. With an increase in the size of the community as well, morality also becomes more *depersonalized* (and presumably more autonomous).

In the process, Durkheim says, people's affinities with more particular sets of others become replaced with more general but still strong attachments to aspects of the broader community (e.g., art, customs, science) in which they are embedded—and thus experience through a mutuality of participation. It is here, Durkheim states, through participation in the *collective consciousness*, that people experience the ideals of the community in more impersonal but still compelling terms.<sup>15</sup>

Elaborating on the tendency towards abstraction of the ideals represented by the collective consciousness, Durkheim says that it is on this basis that people routinely transcend differences within their own communities. Further, because the more impersonalized abstractions of the collective consciousness lend themselves to applications that are unbound by time and space, people also may begin to articulate moralities that encompass humanity in its entirety. Still, he comments, the civilizing process commonly entails other divisions and imbalances, which contradict these broader moral dispositions.

Mindful of these moral disjunctures and expressing some optimism for pursuing a more viable morality

<sup>15</sup> Unless they have been exposed to other well-articulated moral orders, individuals would have little basis on which to contest or *even knowingly consider* contesting the realism of the collective consciousness from whence they have derived all notions of “what is” and “what is not.”

for all, Durkheim says he will next proceed to summarize Wundt's history of moral ideas. [It should be noted that whereas Wundt traces the development of ethics from the classical Greek era to his own time in extended detail, Durkheim concentrates primarily on the more major sets of definitions and principles that Wundt offers. As a result, much of the scholarly value of Wundt's *Ethics* is lost. Still, Durkheim's synopsis of Wundt's text is valuable, not only for its exceptional attentiveness to human group life but also for enabling readers to better comprehend central aspects of Durkheim's sociology.]

Following Wundt along, Durkheim (*E&SM*:102) says that *the formal elements of morality* are expressed by the contrary notions of approval and disapproval (i.e., good and evil), wherein moral approval is associated with things fostering long-term, especially sanctified notions of satisfaction. The material or *foundational qualities of morality* reside in basic human capacities for sympathy and respect. Whereas sympathy is derived from the affinities associated with people's participation in human affairs, respect is the product of religious beliefs.

In discussing “the general laws of moral evolution,” Durkheim (*E&SM*:103-105) first addresses (Wundt's) *law of the three stages*, saying that moral life moves from (a) a comparatively vague, but generally homogeneous state to (b) a more extensively differentiated state, followed by (c) a pattern of synthesis and concentration.

Still, Durkheim centrally emphasizes Wundt's *law of heterogeneity of ends*. At the core of this principle are the ideas that (1) even when people act voluntarily



with particular ends in mind, their actions may generate consequences beyond any that they intended and (2) when people attend to these other effects and find these relevant in some way, they may begin to engage in the same activities, but now with these other effects in mind—thereby generating other objectives, motives, or purposes for the same acts; and (3) this process can continue indefinitely and takes people into increasingly extended realms of activity, meaning, and purpose. Relatedly, (4) because of this evolutionary (adjustive) process, people may subsequently engage in particular activities for very different reasons than those prompting the same behaviors at earlier points in time. Their activities (also meanings and purposes) also assume an *emergent*, unpredictable quality that goes well beyond any intentional or purposive ends or objectives.

Further, because of this set of processes, Durkheim continues, it is to be recognized that *theory cannot be expected to match the emergent, unpredictable nature of humanly experienced reality*. Because people cannot know the outcomes of their activities in this broader sense, the best they can do is anticipate the future in more general terms.

As a result, as well, deliberate thought and planning can assume only a small part in this evolutionary process for it is only after things have taken place and been experienced that people may define what has happened and judge their value as matters to be pursued further. Still, employing Wundt's reasoning, Durkheim says that if morality is derived from religion, it is because people have defined the things that emerge in religious contexts as denoting better approximations of their moral ideals.

As well, whereas Darwin and Spencer have applied the concept of natural selection to (human) morality, Wundt is adamantly opposed to ideas of that sort. Indeed, Durkheim indicates, rather than view morality as the product of a struggle to survive, Wundt emphasizes the point that morality functions to minimize disruption and promote social relations. Likewise, Durkheim observes, Wundt considers any idea that moral ideas can be (biologically) inherited to be preposterous.

Then, moving more centrally into volume III of Wundt's *Ethics*, Durkheim (*E&SM*:106-108) provides a broader introduction to Wundt's ethical principles before embarking on more focused considerations of ethical goals, motives, and norms. In contrast to the many theorists who strive to reduce ethical principles to individualistic impulses, Wundt states that ethical matters revolve around two centering points—individualism and universalism.

Noting that Wundt provides an extended refutation of the positions that Rousseau and other "theorists of individualism" assume, Durkheim (still following Wundt) says that just because all notions of individualism are rooted in (and are to be comprehended with respect to) the group this does not mean that notions of individualism cease or lose their vitality. However, rather than individuals being the foundational base from which society is achieved Durkheim (with Wundt) stresses the point that only by slow degrees are people able to achieve a more extended separation of self from its group-based foundation.

Next, taking issue with universalists such as Hegel and Schopenhauer, Durkheim (with Wundt) says

that while people are so thoroughly indebted to society, it is essential to recognize that people also act back on (resist/challenge/reject aspects of) the very communities in which they are situated. Indeed, there have been some people whose capacities to formulate and express the ideas of their societies and times were so great that they have served as a “form of living conscience” for their communities. As well, whereas most people may do nothing to alter their communities in any significant manner and instead largely perpetuate existing practices, it is important to acknowledge the changes that less prominent people may introduce in smaller segments of the community.

Concluding this broader introduction, Durkheim says that it is important for scholars dealing with morality to be attentive to the interconnections of groups and the individuals who constitute these groups.

Then, turning more directly to “ethical goals,” Durkheim (*E&SM*:108-111) begins to contrast Wundt’s position with the Utilitarians and Rationalists who address ethics by arbitrarily prioritizing specific principles. Mindful of Wundt’s position, Durkheim says it is essential to observe the things that specific communities (as collectivities) consider to be moral and attempt to ascertain the foundational emphases of these matters.

Following Wundt, Durkheim notes that the goals of people’s actions can be individual (as in attending to oneself and one’s more immediate associates), societal (community-oriented), or humanistic (in yet more generalized, encompassing terms). Still, there is nothing moral about doing things for oneself or even

helping particular others in the community achieve their goals. Indeed, people’s goals assume a moral essence only insofar as they are oriented towards others in more impersonal, generalized terms.

It is on this basis that societies, as essences unto themselves, became more worthy targets of moral activities. Observing that individuals, as individuals, are essentially inconsequential in the broader historical developments and futures of the human community, it is societies as more fundamental and enduring essences that merit love and devotion. It is human goals in this broader sense, particularly those directed towards humanity in more extended terms, that epitomize the ideals of moral action. Even so, Durkheim (following Wundt) observes these ideals will never be realized since people become aware of how these objectives might be better achieved only as they have moved in newly emergent directions and have become aware of the greater potential awaiting them through their earlier activities.

Having defined moral goals in terms of an unending pursuit of universalistic human ideals, Durkheim (*E&SM*:111-113) next summarizes Wundt’s consideration of “ethical motives.” Stating that every motive presupposes a feeling and some associated images, Wundt distinguishes three types of ethical motives. Whereas all motives are seen as products of the communities in which people know, value, and act, Wundt’s distinctions hinge on *the amount and type of deliberation implied in different decisions to act*.

Thus, regardless of whether actions are directed towards oneself or others, Wundt uses the term “motives of perception” to refer to cases in which things

seem so clear and direct that people react more habitually or “without thinking.” When things are more ambiguous or involve dilemmas of sorts and entail some reflection or deliberation (involving action pertaining to the self and/or the other), the term “motives of understanding” is applied. The third category of motives is yet more focused and revolves around the matter of pursuing activities in ways that are mindful of the broader ideals of humanity. Thus, although emphasizing the point that the broader spirit of humanity characterizes all moral motives, this latter “motive of reasoning” not only tends to be less common overall but assumes a nobler, reflective quality.

Observing that ethical goals are almost invariably envisioned in obligatory terms, Durkheim (*E&SM*:113-115) next engages “ethical norms.” Although people often assign an imperative quality to ethical goals, Durkheim (following Wundt) says that it would be erroneous to suppose that there is some special element that automatically makes ethical goals seem universal and intractable. Indeed, not only have matters of ethics been subject to extended debate but the motives that imbue ethical goals with authority also have little to do with particular versions of ethical goals. The first of what Wundt terms “imperative motives” is that of fear of restraint, more specifically—material restraints. The second imperative motive reflects people’s concerns with public opinion and its potential effects on them.

A third, somewhat nobler, imperative acknowledges people’s concerns about doing something that has some longer-term effects. Thus, whereas evil acts are envisioned as more transitory, good activities are thought to have more enduring consequences. The

fourth, less common and yet most noble motive is that which people assign to the contemplation of ethical goals as ends to be pursued for themselves.

In summarizing these notions from Wundt, Durkheim next outlines a taxonomy that suggests that ethical goals may be pursued through norms directed variously towards individuals, societies, and yet broader realms of humanity.

In writing a conclusion to his consideration of Wundt’s *Ethics*, Durkheim (*E&SM*:115-122) provides yet further insight into Wundt’s work and the analysis of human knowing and acting.

Thus, in the process of observing that Wundt has synthesized much of the thought of the German (realist) theorists that Durkheim has earlier referenced, Durkheim (*E&SM*:115-116) contrasts Wundt’s approach to ethics with that of Immanuel Kant. Consequentially, whereas Kant’s “moral imperative” is precise, invariant, presumed clear to all, and implies a mystical quality, Wundt is attentive to the variable, emergent, adjustive, and unevenly acknowledged nature of human morality. Moreover, Wundt also approaches morality as a complex phenomenon that can be comprehended scientifically.

Speaking more generally, Durkheim (*E&SM*:116-118) says that Wundt has advanced the analysis of ethics in two central ways. First, whereas most theorists have alleged that morality can be achieved as a philosophic process wherein one starts with a general principle and deductively arrives at a set of contingencies that promote social order, Wundt rejects this rationalist viewpoint and insists on developing a theory of mo-

rality that is built centrally on observation of actual human practices and arrives at conceptions of ethics though the use of induction or comparative analysis.

Subjecting reason to observation of actual historical cases, Wundt emphasizes the importance of considering the fuller array of ends that particular actions produce and *attending to morality as an emergent, adaptive, reflective process* rather than focusing directly on the intentions of moral viewpoints.

Thus, beyond (a) the intentioned, conscious aspects of morality, the things that people do (b) also take them into areas that go beyond their consciousness and (c) these activities unintendedly or unwittingly generate other sets of processes that subsequently may impact on the things people do. As a result, people not only cannot know the longer-term effects of their own behaviors but, even as they act, they also are apt to be only partially cognizant of the fuller range of concerns, circumstances, and contingencies affecting their activities.

The second way that Wundt has made progress in the field of ethics is by focusing on ethics as a field amenable to scientific inquiry. Thus, while most theorists have envisioned variations in the ethical practices of different communities as more unique matters of artistic expression, Wundt intends to examine the ways that things have developed in this and that context for the explicit purpose of comparative analysis.

As well, Durkheim notes, whereas all of the moral theorists he has discussed assume that the primary function of morality is to enable people to deal with one another more effectively and thus insure the survival of the group, Wundt observes this

moderating effect takes place inadvertently and is best known *after the fact* (as opposed to representing a reason for invoking morality).

The primary function of morality, Wundt contends, is to make the individuals who constitute the community realize that they are *not* the whole or centering point of the society. Instead, they are only part of the whole and, as individuals, people are comparatively insignificant relative to the larger community.

It is the recognition of *the importance of the community-based other* that makes society possible. Morality, thus, reflects the efforts of people to locate themselves in something that is more substantial, more enduring than themselves.

Continuing, Durkheim (*E&SM*:118-120) says that although society reflects this quest for “something more enduring” to which people might attach themselves, one still must ask from whence morality derives its authority or obligatory quality.

In developing a response, Durkheim says that if one puts aside religious obligations associated with divinity and also the social discipline associated with the potency of the community, then nothing is left. If everything were left to individual interests and inclinations, it would be futile to ask about a sense of obligation. Since obligations presume some outside source of constraint, how can one even be obligated to oneself if there is nothing beyond oneself?

Pursuing this line of thought further, Durkheim says that people need to believe that the effects of their actions extend beyond the immediate present. Nothing,

he says, has an absolute value, including one's own happiness. If things seem important, thus, it is because we value the comparisons they represent with respect to other things. Without these comparison points, and the goals they represent, life would be meaningless.

It is because of this, Durkheim stresses, that individualism, because it detaches the individual from everything, is *so completely inadequate as a philosophic stance*. It is for this reason too, Durkheim says, that Wundt places such great emphasis on society relative to the individual—for *it is only within the community* that people can achieve greater senses of individualized relevance.

Then, commenting on Wundt's "excessive denigration of the individual," Durkheim acknowledges the pleasures that people may experience on their own [albeit still as socialized beings]. Nevertheless, Durkheim (*E&SM*:120-121) says, it is because the infinite is so nebulous and discouraging that people need to have some sense of direction or at least that they are going somewhere. Thus, while societies do change over time, there still is a sense of continuity. Indeed, Durkheim observes, new societies do not suddenly emerge out of nothingness but inevitably build on the residues of the societies they replace.

It is with this notion in mind (*E&SM*:121-122) that Wundt claims that there are more singular, enduring religious and moral ideals (oriented towards an overarching image of humanity) of which all communities represent tentative approximations.<sup>16</sup> Still, it

<sup>16</sup> As Durkheim later observes, Wundt is making a teleological assumption here—that there is a single, rational morality to which all humanity consciously and unconsciously strives. This does not invalidate the exceptionally potent sociological quality of Wundt's earlier analysis but draws attention to some

is because of the more distinctive nature of religion and morality among civilized peoples that these more sharply delineated variants represent instructive departure points for subsequent observation and analysis of religion and morality as social essences.

Nevertheless, Durkheim notes, there are as many moralities as there are peoples and that the moralities of all peoples are to be recognized as viable relative to their own place and time. Likewise, each community sets its own goods or ideals to which it strives until changes occur and community moralities are readjusted as new ideals to be approximated. [Although Durkheim ends his portrayal of Wundt's *Ethics* on a rather vague note, his analysis of ethics and German "pragmatism" is far from complete.]

#### **Part IV: Conclusion: A. H. Post**

Durkheim (*E&SM*:123-127) begins his conclusion to the set of essays embedded in his (1993 [1887]) statement by referencing John Stuart Mill's (1806-1873) distinction between "intuitive ethics" and "inductive ethics." Those employing intuitive ethics assume an a priori truth as a starting point and then proceed to derive more specific applications from this fundamental principle. Those engaged in inductive ethics claim to derive their primary principle from experience. Noting that the former is based on some notion of "the good" or "obligation," Durkheim says that inductive ethics in Mill's terms revolves around conceptions of utility.

of Wundt's more presumptive, more prescriptive, much less pluralist sociological directions encountered in Volume III. While Durkheim also tries to maintain a consistent pluralist, process-oriented scientific analysis, he clearly at times (especially in *Division of Labor* and *Suicide*) falls into the same trap.

Further, although the actual principles emphasized in the rationalist approaches of Kant and other intuitivists differ from those of Mill and the utilitarians, Durkheim says that both rely extensively on deductive methods. As well, since pure logic can make no claims whatsoever about content, both the rationalists and the utilitarians *invariably build on some notions of experience*. In these respects, the differences between the two are not as great as might first seem.

Still, the more central failing of both sets of approaches, Durkheim stresses, is that they are *not* scientific. First, it is not apparent that ethics can be reduced to a simple motivating concept or principle. Likewise, pure logic (reasoning on its own) cannot establish ethical principles. Relying on external inferences, both sets of claims failed to examine the actualities, diversities, and complexities of social life.

If one is to acquire viable knowledge of people's ethics, *it will be necessary to examine the particulars in highly sustained detail*. It is not adequate to build on observations of more superficial sorts and it is *entirely inappropriate to apply deductive logic to more complex phenomena*. Because of the sheer complexity of moral phenomena, deductive reasoning is entirely inappropriate. Reason simply cannot substitute for sustained observation.

Continuing, Durkheim (*E&SM*:127-128) says that it is precisely because of the failings of the prevailing approaches to ethics that the German school, with its *genuinely inductive method*, is so consequential.

Providing an alternative to the transcendental logic of the Kantians that ignores scientific observation, as well as vague Utilitarian references to experience,

the German (realist) school approaches ethics not only as a distinct field on its own but also one that is to be *empirically investigated*.

Elaborating further, Durkheim says that ethics has its own subject matter and, like other fields of scientific inquiry, is to be built on observations, analysis, and progressive comparisons in the quest to inductively arrive at a general set of principles. Further, because of its subject matter, Durkheim adds, ethics is **not** to be viewed as a simple extension of psychology or sociology but is to be established as an independent discipline in the social sciences.

Referencing two other sources (a British historian Leslie Stephen [1832-1904] and a German economist and political scientist Lorenz von Stein [1815-1890]) who also have contributed to this emergent German tradition, Durkheim (*E&SM*:128-129) briefly, but directly engages "evolution" as a community-oriented concept.

Observing that all of those he has identified with the German school envision morality as developing in evolutionary terms, Durkheim says that it is essential to recognize that they are working with a very different conception of evolution than that associated with evolution as a biological process. It is necessary, he says, to be mindful of the limitations of the biological analogy and not presuppose, as the (Italian) criminologists have done, that matters of morality can be explained in biological terms.

Instead, Durkheim (*E&SM*:129-130) insists, morality is to be approached as an independent field of study, as those in the German school have done. Nevertheless, he states, their methodology requires sub-

stantial modification. Thus, despite the conceptual insights generated by the German school, their theory is still too general. Also, like the Kantians and Utilitarians, the German school is still preoccupied with the quest for an overarching moral principle.<sup>17</sup>

Stating that none of the prevailing sciences can be reduced to a single principle or problem, Durkheim says that it is necessary to approach the study of morality in more explicitly open, inquisitive, detailed terms. Indeed, he says, it is premature to seek out overarching principles when there is so much to be learned about morality as a phenomenon. Likewise, it is to be recognized that *morality is not a science* in itself, but instead is to be approached as the subject matter of scientific inquiry.

Although conceding that some of the German scholars he has referenced have embarked on more sustained studies of the sort he is encouraging, Durkheim (*E&SM*:131-132) references Albert Hermann Post (1839-1895), a Justice of the Courts of Bremen, as an exemplar of the agenda that he has in mind. *Adapting a comparative analytic approach to the detailed ethnological study of transformations of law*, Durkheim envisions Post's work as offering a more desirable methodology.

Saying that he is unable to summarize Post's work in the present statement, Durkheim (*E&SM*:132-133) distinguishes historical approaches more generally from those that are more appropriate for the study of morality. Thus, he observes that most historians, in tracking the more particular developments within a single con-

text, not only lack the resources necessary to develop adequate analytic comparisons but typically become so engrossed in fitting the details of their situations together that they forego interest in moving beyond their more immediate frames of reference.

As a result, it will be the task of the moral theorist to develop analytic comparisons by building on these materials. Noting that this will be a demanding role to pursue in more comprehensive terms, Durkheim says that these scholars still may be able to develop a more limited set of comparisons at any time. Indeed, this seems necessary given the more idiographic, self-serving approaches adapted by most historians.

Durkheim (*E&SM*:134-135) concludes his statement by stating that the "science of morality" is only in a rudimentary state and will require patience, as well as perseverance for its fuller development.

After noting that some people are apt to find it disconcerting to realize that matters of morality have an emergent, often obscure quality that defies rationalism (presumably of both Kantian and Utilitarian sorts) and related applications of deductive logic, Durkheim says that the moralities that particular peoples have developed are to be appreciated for achieving a wisdom that surpasses that of the greatest genius.

Then, stating that we are a long way from knowing enough to define and regulate human morality (and that it is childish to suppose otherwise), Durkheim says that it is by drawing on the lessons of history that we may arrive at more viable, more informed conceptions of human morality. Indeed, morality is to be understood within the parameters of human history.

<sup>17</sup> It is here that Durkheim most directly parts company with Wilhelm Wundt who, later in Volume III of *Ethics*, foregoes some of his more purely scholarly standpoints and becomes more intent on establishing an overarching moral order.

## In Perspective

Although generally unknown in academic circles—notably including sociology, Emile Durkheim's (1993 [1887]) "La Science Positive de la Morale en Allemagne" represents an essential cornerstone for more adequately comprehending Durkheim's sociological productions, as well as for more fully appreciating his emphasis on sociology as a distinctively consequential realm of scholarship.

Durkheim seems likely to have had only a comparatively short time to learn about, absorb, and develop the materials he presents in this 1887 statement. Nevertheless, his (1885-1886) encounter with German pragmatism, and especially Wilhelm Wundt's *Ethics*, would have a profound impact on Durkheim's subsequent scholarship.

This influence is much less evident in Durkheim's best-known works (1947 [1893]; 1951 [1897]; 1958 [1895]), wherein he adapts more pronounced rationalist and structuralist emphases. Thus, the continuities of Durkheim's thought with that of Wilhelm Wundt and the other German scholars that Durkheim acknowledges in "the scientific study of morality" would be only partially sustained as Durkheim pursued aspects of his earlier career as a French scholar. Relatedly, there is much in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1947 [1893]), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1958 [1895]), and especially *Suicide* (1951 [1897]) that would appear to support the claim that Durkheim learned about sociology from Auguste Comte, Charles Renouvier, and some other French academics. Still, it is evident that his learning about sociology does not stop there. Indeed, Durkheim's 1887 statement has a very distinctive pragmatist emphasis and is of great consequence

for comprehending the overall flow and directions of Durkheim's subsequent sociological scholarship.

On returning to France after his study leave in Germany, Durkheim appears to have encountered considerable criticism for his interest in German social realism. In addition to French rebuffs associated with long-standing Franco-German tensions and hostilities, Durkheim would have been accused by some as placing undue emphasis on history, religion, and inductive reasoning in the midst of the French emphasis on rationalism, scientism, quantification, and deductive reasoning. While achieving success as a French academic, Durkheim most likely was troubled by aspects of his early texts (1947 [1893]; 1951 [1897]; 1958 [1895])—even as he worked his way through these materials and endeavored to accommodate the paradigmatic structuralist/pragmatist discrepancies.

Still, as a young scholar intensely pursuing an academic career and dependent on his associates for confirmations thereof, Durkheim's challenge would be one of acceptably fitting his work into mainstream French social thought while sustaining essential intellectual continuities with the (pragmatist) sociological framework he outlined in 1887. By contrast, most of his later (1902-1914) materials exhibit a pronounced attentiveness to pragmatist social thought.

It is worth noting, as well, that in his 1902-1914 works Durkheim seldom acknowledges the existence of the 1893, 1895, 1897 texts for which he is still best known in sociology. Instead, consistent with his 1887 paper, Emile Durkheim (1902-1914) contends that the principal methodological resources of sociology are *history* and *ethnography*.



Relatedly, there is the more explicit emphasis on attending to the flows of community life, envisioning activity and interchange as meaningful, socially interconnected sets of processes to be best comprehended through sustained comparative analysis. Durkheim will emphasize the centrality of the group throughout his career, but in his later works (as with his 1887 paper), it is the community as consisting of developmentally interfused arenas of meaningfully engaged activity and interchange (*not* abstracted sets of factors or variables) that he defines as particularly consequential.

Even though references to Wilhelm Wundt and the other German social realist theorists Durkheim discusses in his 1887 statement are notably absent in his later works, it appears that Wilhelm Wundt has been Durkheim's (and hence also our own) long-term intellectual companion.

Albeit inadvertently, in developing his 1887 paper, Durkheim also helps establish the links between classical Greek thought and our own time (Prus 2004; 2007a; 2015; 2017). Durkheim seems largely inattentive to the Greek (predominantly Aristotelian) foundations of German social realist thought, even as he explicitly builds on Wundt's historically informed analysis of the study of morality (*Ethics*). Thus, whereas Wundt makes direct reference to Aristotle in developing *Ethics*, Durkheim has focused more exclusively on the processes by which morality takes shape and (relatedly) approaches the study of morality as denoting emergent sets of social processes that are essential for comprehending all realms of community life.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> It may be observed that Durkheim makes explicit reference to the centrality of Aristotle's *Categories* for human knowing and acting (and survival) in developing *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

Nevertheless, Durkheim has absorbed much of the intellectual tradition that Wundt articulates in *Ethics*. Moreover, later, in tracing the developmental flow of education and scholarship from the classical Greek era to his own time, Durkheim's (1977 [1904-1905]) *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (also see Prus 2012) very much parallels the intellectual odyssey on which Wilhelm Wundt (in *Ethics*) had embarked in his study of the analysis of morality.

Likewise, despite the remarkably extensive analysis that Durkheim develops in his (1915 [1912]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, those familiar with his 1887 paper will find much in Durkheim's 1912 text that resonates with Wundt's analysis of religion in *Ethics*. Indeed, even though Durkheim does not reference Wilhelm Wundt in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and this rather massive text goes well beyond the materials that Durkheim discusses in his 1887 paper, the conceptual base of Durkheim's 1912 text seems centrally indebted to Wilhelm Wundt and the German social realist/pragmatist tradition. *The material presented in his 1887 statement, thus, represents the key for understanding Durkheim's longer-term contributions to pragmatist sociology as the study of human group life.*

Whereas one encounters some insights consistent with Durkheim's exposure to the social realists even in his more structuralist texts (*The Division of Labor in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, and *Suicide*), the intellectual tradition that Durkheim encountered in Germany served as a highly consequential conceptual and methodological base for the much more notably humanist or pragmatist position he develops in *Moral Education* (1961 [1902-1903]), *The Evolution of*

*Educational Thought* (1977 [1904-1905]), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915 [1912]), and *Pragmatism and Sociology* (1983 [1913-1914]). By examining Durkheim's (1993 [1887]) statement on German realism, we begin more fully to appreciate the foundations of his later (1902-1914) "sociological pragmatism" along with its implications both for reorienting the sociological venture more generally and extending pragmatist (and interactionist) scholarship more specifically.

This latter (1902-1914) set of materials indicates the remarkable potency of Durkheim's pragmatist scholarship and provides a valuable set of conceptual resources for the revitalization of sociology as *the study of human knowing and acting*. These texts also represent an important means of injecting greater realism into the philosophy of knowledge. Still, there is another side to the humanist/pragmatist sociology Durkheim addresses in his 1887 text.

Like Wilhelm Wundt, who prior to adapting a historical, pragmatist approach had experienced considerable success as an experimental psychologist, Emile Durkheim was unable to subsequently redirect the flows of sociological analysis as much as he (1887, 1902-1914) had intended. This appears to have reflected (a) the long-standing rationalist, structuralist emphases of the broader academic community, (b) the more mechanistic, ahistorical scientific emphasis of most 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century social theorists, and (c) the ever-present quest for solutions to the "social problems of the day" and the associated academic positions and resources available to those who could more effectively *make claims* to facilitate scientifically informed solutions.

As indicated in his 1890s texts, Emile Durkheim also became caught up in this latter set of emphases—and the cross-pressures of maintaining pragmatist sensibilities regarding the centrality of human lived experience amidst the rationalist, structuralist, and social problems-oriented approaches of his day.

Like other traditions in community life, academic realities are resilient to change (as both Wundt and Durkheim emphasized in their later works). Still, it is through the efforts (more intense, as well as more partial at times) of a corpus of dedicated, community-oriented scholars such as Wilhelm Wundt and Emile Durkheim that we have been able to sustain a focus on the study of human knowing and acting amidst the traditions and allures of rationalist, structuralist thought and the pressures to imitate the physical sciences (through an emphasis on factors, variables, and quantitative inquiry) in the social sciences.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Whereas Durkheim (1915 [1912]; 1961 [1902-1903]; 1983 [1913-1914]) is openly critical of rationalist and structuralist approaches because of their artificiality and simplicity relative to the actual, enacted humanly experienced nature of community life, readers are also referred to Blumer (1969), Prus (1996; 1999), Prus and Grills (2003), Grills and Prus (2008) for some sustained, notably parallel interactionist critiques of contemporary rationalist, structuralist thought and variable analysis.

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