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Durkheim's 'Dualism of Human Nature': Personal Identity and Social Links

Giovanni Paoletti

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Abstract:

The essay on the *Dualism of the human nature* (1914) is the last scientific work published by Durkheim. This circumstance, and the subject of the essay, have suggested to read it as the definitive exposition of his philosophical view of the human nature (*homo duplex*). But readers do not agree about the description of this view: which kind of dualism is Durkheim's? did he hold it throughout his work? The problem is that, in his essay, Durkheim gives different meanings to the doubleness of human nature, combining them in a complex model of explanation. Reconstructing this model can throw a new light on the real stakes of his text and the nature of dualism he endorsed at the end of his career.

Keywords: dualism, duality, consciousness, Durkheim, personal identity, social link

‘Il y a donc en nous d’autres hommes, pour ainsi dire, que ceux dont nous avons directement connaissance’ (Durkheim, *L’Évolution pédagogique en France*)

1

Multiplicity and plurality are words often used nowadays to describe the ‘new human condition’.* The demise of some traditional identities seems indeed to coincide with the rise of new subjectivities, weak and flexible, able to cross over different worlds and manage a range of values and attachments. On a cultural level, in fact, this debate on the theme of identity is not altogether new, arising as it does from the repercussions of a century in which the notions of the ‘I’ and of the ‘subject’ have been critiqued by many.¹ On the other hand – and this is another phenomenon that took various forms throughout the twentieth century – plural or weak subjectivities are often accompanied and threatened by the appeal exerted by strong and even archaic versions of identity, founded more or less consciously on the invention of traditions or on a sense of belonging to imagined communities. The decline of the old regime of roles and affiliations reveals its dark side as a powerful factor of ‘cognitive anxieties’ (Appadurai 2005) and of a tendency towards change which is very rarely ‘for the better’. In this perspective, the factor of identity or, more precisely, the way in which we conceive identity, both individual and collective, is considered a relevant element in the emergence of conflicts in our contemporary world, a cause of their virulence. According to Amartya Sen (2007: 17), there may well be a very close link between the illusion of a single identity, the illusion of destiny and resorting to violence to manage identity conflicts: ‘The illusion of unique identity is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse classifications that characterize the world in which we actually live ... The illusion of destiny exacts a remarkably heavy price’.

In this context, what can a hundred-year-old work by Durkheim say to us? The reference in its title to the old philosophical problem of human nature can overshadow the fact that one of the questions the essay raises, looking at it now with the benefit of hindsight, is actually that of defining identity itself. The essay was first discussed at the Société française de philosophie whose president was Xavier Léon, came out in 1914, and was the last scientific work published by Durkheim. But he had been interested for a long

time in the relationship between identity and attachment to a group, in the normal forms of this relationship and above all in those that are pathological, to which, indeed, he had dedicated his most important empirical study, *Suicide*.² He was also an expert in classifications, that is, in the social modes of bringing order and sense to the ‘plural and manifold’ multiplicity of experience. In the years following the crisis of French society during the Dreyfus Affair,³ notions of the pure and impure and of the sacred and profane had become for him fundamental tools to understand the social dynamics involved in the relationship between the I, the we and the others. From this point of view, the extra amount of thought that he gave to these topics, on the eve of the Great War, was not unexpected. Positioned ideally between William James’s *Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?* (1905) and Sigmund Freud’s *Metapsychology* (1915-17), ‘The Dualism of Human Nature’ actually represents, in its own way, one of the most intense documents of a philosophical period at the turn of the century in which the rethinking of notions such as the I, consciousness and the subject produced its first results and some of its most striking expressions.

2

Once these parallels have been established, which make Durkheim’s contribution look less eccentric than it might seem in regard to live issues of his own time and ours, the problem (and the centre of interest) becomes understanding the specificity of his point of view. What does it mean to associate study of the subject and of identity with the traditional philosophical category of dualism? In what sense is the human being ‘double’? Durkheim believed that his essay was opening new perspectives on the issue. In fact, the reactions of the majority of readers do not seem to prove him right. In the case of readers of the time, the meaning of his insights was on the whole not understood – ‘to our great surprise’, as he put it. In the case of readers nowadays, his theory of *homo duplex*, or the doubleness of human nature, is more often quoted in formulas than analysed or discussed. A repeated claim has been that the dualism revisited in a sociological key in his 1914 essay is merely a variant in a long tradition of philosophical dualism from Plato to Kant and a product of the inclination to grand yet not very well-founded theoretical syntheses supposed to characterize the last part of his career, in a quite common syndrome of which Freud is seen as another famous victim. Let us instead start, here, from two diametrically opposed hypotheses. The interest of Durkheim’s analysis is the distance that he introduces, on wholly conscious grounds, from the classic philosophical discourse of dualism. This distance depends on theoretical problems rooted in his own idea of the social link and social reality, much more than in a tendency to philosophical speculation.

Current interpretations of ‘The Dualism of Human Nature’ are based on readings that are more partial than incorrect.⁴ It is a fact, for example, that philosophical reflection on dualism is discussed at length in the essay. Along with a large number of indirect references, the only authors explicitly cited are three philosophers connected in various ways with dualistic ideas, Plato, Pascal and Kant. These are clearly exponents of a philosophical tradition with which Durkheim is interested in engaging in a dialogue. Yet does this mean that his own position can also be placed in the same line? Here is another example. By picking out expressions of the theme of *homo duplex*, it is possible to show how, far from being the final destination of Durkheim’s enquiries, it was already present in his early work.⁵ Yet is the presence of this theme enough to say that the theory, tied up with it, was also elaborated from the start and stayed unchanged through the years? The discourse developed in the 1914 essay is in fact quite complex and not always clear. But it deserves to be considered in its entirety, before drawing any conclusions.

3

The question is, first of all, how one should interpret doubleness. For ease of analysis, we shall distinguish a relational idea of doubleness, consisting of the primal, essential correlation of two terms, and a substantivist idea of doubleness, in which doubleness derives from the union of two components or two orders of reality that are self-standing and heterogeneous. With relational doubleness, the two terms do not exist independently from their relationship. With substantivist doubleness, a relationship is instead formed from the combination of two elements that also exist outside and before it.⁶ Following Durkheim's terminology, we shall refer to relational doubleness as 'duality', and to substantivist doubleness as 'dualism'.⁷ If applied to the relationship between the individual and society, which is after all the thematic background of the essay we are discussing, this alternative between logical forms of doubleness has rather different implications in the two cases. Do the individual and social dimensions of human existence constitute two heterogeneous realities, united in fact but distinct in essence? Or does the relationship between individual and society represent a primitive given? Personal identity itself, in this case, instead of preceding the relationship and permitting it, will in turn be considered as intimately relational. There will not really be any I without a relationship – however understood – with others.

In the 1914 essay, both conceptual models are present. But to which of these is human doubleness to be attributed? What complicates matters even more is that, when Durkheim talks about doubleness, he means various different things, namely a belief, a fact and an outcome to explain.

The *belief* in human nature's doubleness is, according to Durkheim, 'universal and permanent' and historically it has taken on two main forms, one religious and one philosophical. 'Everywhere, indeed, [man] has conceived of himself as formed of two radically heterogeneous beings' (1914a: 316, 315/t.36). On the level of belief, that is, the stress falls on heterogeneity and the mutual independence of human nature's components, which appear as 'substantially distinct' realities. What follows is that their often-conflicting union presents itself as the juxtaposition of two independent terms: we are dealing with the substantivist form of doubleness, or dualism. According to Durkheim, philosophical theories such as Plato's or Kant's adopt this representation of human doubleness and rationalize, but do not explain it. In this sense, they constitute another instance of belief in doubleness, within the special cultural tradition that is the philosophical tradition.

Dualistic philosophies at least have the merit, in his eyes, of recognizing the factual existence of doubleness, compared with other, monistic conceptions – absolute idealism and absolute empiricism – that seek to reduce the real or the human to a single dimension, and become caught in insoluble contradictions. But above all, monistic philosophies break one of the main hermeneutic rules of Durkheim's sociological perspective, namely, the impossibility that a universal and permanent belief (such as in doubleness) is mere illusion, that is, without a counterpart in reality.⁸ He implicitly places himself in this way within another family of modern philosophy, in the company of Vico, the theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, Montesquieu and Kant himself. For Durkheim, in fact, common sense is not simply an obstacle to knowledge but a reservoir of meaning, a possible interlocutor and an object of analysis. The significance of the potential truthfulness of common sense (of shared beliefs, of collective representations) is clearly defined by Durkheim through an implicit philosophical reference. What common sense ascertains is the existence of a thing (*quod*), even though it does not have adequate knowledge of that thing's nature (*quid*).⁹ Accordingly, in the case that concerns us, universal belief in doubleness can be considered good evidence of the very existence

of doubleness itself, even if it is then best not to take him literally when he describes it in dualistic terms.

In passing from belief in doubleness to the *fact* itself of doubleness, a new question arises. *What* is double, precisely? According to Durkheim, doubleness does not reside in experience.¹⁰ Nor is it in the real as a whole, an interpretation that he associates with the name of Plato. Nor is it even in human nature in general, made of soul and body, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. It is our interiority that is double: far from being simple, ‘*our internal life* has something like a double centre of gravity’ (1914a: 318/t.37, my emphasis). This means, unexpectedly for an author known especially for his insistence on the heterogeneity between individual and society, that human doubleness does not so much originate from *homo interior* as against *homo exterior*, from the inner dimension of the mind or the soul as against the external dimension of the body and of life in society. Rather, it consists of a gap, a chasm, which runs through the interior being, that is, the very field of consciousness.¹¹ It meant lodging inside the I the reality of the double. With this (partially, as we shall see) anti-Cartesian move, Durkheim insists on themes current in the psychology of the time,¹² especially studies of split personalities and *double conscience*.¹³ But he radicalizes their theoretical consequences, investing them with new problematics in two ways, involving the classic philosophical theme of personal identity, on the one hand, and his own theory of the social link on the other. Finally, we must note the form of doubleness that is now in question. In this case, it is not the one to do with dualism and belonging to the level of belief. It is the relational one to do with duality, that is, the duality of consciousness, constitutionally polarised around two different but inseparable ‘centres of gravity’:

When I talk about beings, I do not wish to say that inside us there are two substances, in the metaphysical sense of the term, but simply two circles of interior life, *two systems of states of consciousness* that, not having the same origin, do not have the same characteristics and do not orient us in the same direction. (1913b: 34; cf. 1912a: 453)¹⁴

The human subject is therefore not a reflexive identity, but a decentralized unity. The truth content of ontological dualism is relational duality.

4

Now, it is exactly this duality that needs to be accounted for. The way in which Durkheim presents the relationship between belief in dualism and the mental reality of duality is not without consequences for the definition of the third level of his analysis. What has to be considered at this point is doubleness as an *effect* to explain, not simply a fact to note. This strong explanatory requirement – demanding explanation in terms of causes, not lawlike regularities – is characteristic of the Durkheimian epistemological model.¹⁵ In this specific instance, and however it is assessed, it rules out seeing his position as an anthropology of doubleness. The property of ‘doubleness’ does not appear to him as an original given of human nature, but as an empirical element that needs to be accounted for rationally through a complex model of intelligibility, articulated on several mutually interactive levels of meaning: what people believe and what they think, the way in which they think and the way in which they form a social group.

The explanation consists in connecting doubleness as belief and as fact with its ‘social conditions’. In a certain way, the doubleness of human nature is linked to the fact that humans are, at the same time, social animals *and* beings characterized by a marked principle of individuation that makes them individual even in a group. It is possible to

have or to imagine collectives with a low level of individuation, as with the majority of animal societies,¹⁶ or to conceive of closed and self-sufficient individualities, for which the social relationship is derived and secondary.¹⁷ For Durkheim, the human dimension is instead located in an intermediate space between these two extremes. It brings about or creates ‘an antinomy’, something similar to what Kant had called ‘unsociable sociability’. The doubleness of human nature has something to do, therefore, with the constitutive relationship between individuals and society, between personal identity and social link.

Is this another instance of doubleness? And if so, what type? Like Marx, Durkheim sees the whole as greater than the sum of its parts. Association creates a reality *sui generis* with regard to the individuals who make it up (cf. Borlandi 1995). The author of *Suicide* has been most of the time attributed – and most of the time criticized for it – with a strong interpretation of this heterogeneity, according to which the independence of social reality from the individuals who make it up is supposed to be such that it culminates in a veritable ‘cult of the collective’ (Adorno 1967: 19). Seen in this perspective, the relationship between individual and society appears quite dualistic, arising from the immediate and radical opposition between the moral power of society and individual subjects or their body, between social regulation and the unruly and egoistic nature of impulses declined exclusively in the first person.

But the 1914 essay also authorizes another, more difficult and therefore less evident reading. Its premise is to take seriously the fact that the empirical reality of doubleness corresponds with a kind of duality. Now, if the fact to explain is duality, there is logically no need for its cause to be a dualistic substratum. It can be enough for it to be another form of duality. In addition to this, the ‘social condition’ of human doubleness to which the text refers is not in fact, immediately and in general, the dichotomy individual/society. It is a particular form through which the social link is revealed and is realized, namely, the ‘division of things into sacred and profane’ that Durkheim had placed at the basis of the theory of religion set out in *Les Formes élémentaires*. What is also involved is the conceptual isomorphism between the intellectual, explanatory duality and the categorical couple sacred/profane. The operation through which the group constitutes its own reality on a symbolic level, consecrating specific objects and placing them at the centre of a cult, is in fact a bilateral operation. At a stroke, it structures the real in two distinct and complementary regions. One includes the sacred things that are symbolic substitutes of its own identity as a group, the other all that is opposed to the sacred and that is defined by this very opposition – the profane things, which lie before and outside the temple (*pro-fanum*).

The division of things into sacred and profane accordingly represents an exemplary form of duality: the essential, primal correlation of two terms, which do not exist before and independently of their relationship and which entirely cover the subject they concern or the domain of reality they define. Moreover, the thesis Durkheim puts forward in this last phase of his thinking is that social symbolism, the sacred and the profane, do not just represent an accessory factor or one instance among others of social reality, but an essential element and indeed its general condition of possibility. ‘Social life, in all its aspects and at all moments of its history, is possible only thanks to a vast symbolism’ (1912a: 331). This means that the sacralization (which is also at the same time a ‘profanization’) of reality is not so much a genetic process as a structural form of the human condition. From this point of view, and unless as pure abstraction, there is no *undifferentiated* world where human subjects could move and live, alone or in society – a world to which at a certain point investment with the sacred would be added, like an image projected on a neutral screen. In such a world there would be neither social relationship nor individual personality in its proper sense. An

undifferentiated world, not criss-crossed by duality, is simply not a human world: ‘the animal knows only a single world’ (1912a: 602).

5

In the 1914 essay, therefore, the prevailing idea of doubleness is what we have called ‘relational’ doubleness, or duality, whereas doubleness as dualism in reality refers only to the most superficial layer of meaning, that of belief. This issue is worth considering for various reasons. A start can be made with the interpretation of Durkheim’s social theory, traditionally regarded as a form of sociological dualism. Instead, presenting the relationship between individual and society as a form of duality invites thinking about it in a non-reductive way, giving up on overblown ontological assumptions. From this point of view, the whole set of reflections culminating in ‘The Dualism of Human Nature’ constitutes something new in comparison with positions that Durkheim seemed to endorse in his first works, up to and including *Suicide*. On a historical-philosophical level, his intervention of 1914 occupies a somewhat eccentric position in debate of the time, which makes it even more interesting. In the general movement of critical reflection on the philosophical notion of the ‘subject’, the prevailing attitude in this period was rather monistic, especially in English speaking countries, but with significant developments in France as well. Durkheim’s stance can seem outdated, in the general turn-of-the-century ‘revolt against dualism’.¹⁸ On the contrary, his approach is highly targeted, coming, not by accident, at the same time that he was giving a university lecture course on the difference between pragmatism and sociology. From the criticisms of William James as well as Henri Bergson, Durkheim drew the lesson that classical forms of philosophical dualism are no longer sustainable (1955: 92–94, 97). On the other hand, the alternative of monism, examined at length in his lectures, also seemed unsatisfactory to him, both in its version as absolute idealism and as radical empiricism (ibid.: 85–86).¹⁹ The formulation of a theory of society and of human nature that tries to take seriously the concept of *duality* is moreover the upshot – quite original, and certainly not naïve – of this critical assessment. Finally, in a broader perspective, the theme of duality suggests some considerations on the problem of the monodimensionality of human experience and the human condition, on which, to a great extent, the most relevant issues at stake in Durkheim’s position depend – now as well as then. Where does the ‘very singular dualism’ (Karsenti 2006: 208), which Durkheim delineates in his last essay, lead to?

6

The relationship between the individual and the group is signposted, from the very beginning of the text, as a mutual implication. In itself banal, the statement that individuals are the ‘ultimate elements’ making up the group points to the very problem from which Durkheim’s research had started, to do with modern forms of sociality that paradoxically do not oppose individualism, but feed on and promote it. In the course of his thinking on egoism, altruism and individualism, Durkheim had increasingly sharpened his focus on how it is only in society that the social animal can draw apart, which is to say that the individual is also, at least to some extent, a social phenomenon.²⁰ On the other hand, social life does not develop without some anchorage in individual consciousnesses, that is, without interiorization, inside the self, of the image of the others.²¹ This seems to imply that a dimension of interiority in the individual consciousness already exists, to constitute in its turn an essential condition of the formation of society. That which makes us *persons* equipped with an ‘innerness’ (will, consciousness, conscience) – and neither automata nor mere undifferentiated individual beings – is a social dynamic. It involves the superimposition on to mere

physical individuality of a face that has meaning only for others: a ‘mask’ (*persona*, in Latin).²² In this sense, the interiority of the I, instead of pre-existing its social (intersubjective) constitution, in fact corresponds with the gap that opens up between the individual and their mask, an external space that appears internal to us only thanks to a sort of perceptive illusion, breaking through the surface in a way similar to the effect of pictorial perspective.

The social dimension – even though based on a material substratum – articulates itself in a type of universe that Vico would have called ‘poetic’, that is, a universe made of relationships with and between symbols, simulacra and substitutes.²³ Social space is therefore also, and singularly, a space that presents itself as non-real or unreal if measured against the level of a monodimensional actuality. The possibility of social representation and meaning opens up in the break from this never quite abolished actuality,²⁴ that is, in the distance from the hypothetical undifferentiated – and meaningless – world that precedes the separation of things into sacred and profane. The factitious world of masks and symbolism is however anything but a place where one is deceived and lost, the kingdom of an evil genius apparently acting under the borrowed clothes of the other. On the contrary, in this last phase of Durkheim’s thinking, insistence on the social genesis of the personality corresponds with how society in turn increasingly presents itself, in its deepest sense, as a society ‘of persons’. The idea of a society of persons maintains, in Durkheim, a strong Kantian tone. Being a person means being or becoming a centre of autonomy, entering into participation in that intelligible world, ‘*lieu commun des intelligences*’, which Kant had called a kingdom of ends.²⁵ For Kant, it is true, entering such a kingdom requires a splitting of the I in two, the ability to look at oneself from a point of view different from that of the ‘beloved I’, incurably selfish and empirical.²⁶ As against Kant, yet possibly without betraying his spirit, it is clearer in Durkheim that the prototype of a route out of the self, and therefore the condition of personality, is one that imposes or proposes relation with others. ‘We cannot give ourselves over to moral ends without moving away from ourselves [*nous déprendre de nous-même*]’ (1914a: 318/t.37).²⁷ In other words, the kingdom of ends is a social realm. The autonomy gained in entering it, instead of being achieved in the isolation of a *solus ipse*, is a product of the relation with others, as a form of the separation from the self.²⁸ In the words of Stanley Cavell (2004: 142), ‘you cannot enter the realm of ends alone’. Losing oneself in it means in fact finding oneself as a person.

7

This means, or at least can mean, there is no autonomy without relationship. It is obviously not to say that every form of relationship leads to autonomy, a point taking us back to the issue of the social link’s pathological forms. In earlier work, Durkheim had explained anomalous forms of association in largely quantitative terms, based on an excess or a lack of integration and regulation – his social link’s components – as against their ‘just mean’.²⁹ In the years leading up to the Great War, the theme of ‘social malaise’ had re-emerged in new powerful terms within the Durkheimian group, thanks especially to the work of Robert Hertz (1907), on the ritual and symbolic dynamics of the neutralization of evil. The aspect mostly analysed, however, remained that of an evil coming to society from outside, for instance in the shape of natural catastrophe or the death of a group member, rather than that of possible changes in the social link arising *from inside* society itself. The model of duality that Durkheim elaborates in some of his last writings, though grafted without radical breaks on to a line of reflection begun for some time, demands a reformulation of the problem.

It involves an implication consistent with duality as we have so far understood it, in which its core of meaning consists in the *relationship* between the terms that make it up, rather than in the terms themselves taken in isolation. The relationship, just to exist as such, requires between the two terms a gap and a difference impossible to eliminate. But in this case the bidimensionality of experience consists, not so much in the possibility of passing from one universe of meaning to another, as in living simultaneously in the two dimensions of experience itself while maintaining the gap. Duality, for Durkheim, bridges the plurality of universes of meaning theorized by William James (cf. Iacono 2005). In this context, the pathology of the social link is seen as stemming from elimination of dual relationships, whether in ecstasy and its annihilation of the self in the other, or, at the opposite extreme, in a radical individualism.³⁰ These represent case-limits of reduction of the two dimensions to one, that is, of dissolution of the link, behind which it is not difficult to detect an allusion to concrete phenomena typical of complex societies – massification or crowds, segregation or what Durkheim calls paradoxically the ‘grande solitude de la société’, for example, solitary and anonymous existence in a vast metropolis (Durkheim [1925: 284] 1992: 210).

The relevant point is that maintaining the gap essential to duality, rather than just being a ‘local’ problem of social dynamics, now appears more clearly to Durkheim as integral to human possibilities of thought and action. Ecstasy, that is, total immersion in the other, is at the same time alienation from thought: ‘To think, one must be, one must have an individuality’ (1914a: 319/t.37). This is also true of every collective representation, which, to be ‘representation’, must still be thought through an act over which individual consciousness retains titleship.³¹ Moreover, as Durkheim adds – echoing the theory of intentionality normally associated with Franz Brentano – consciousness is always consciousness of something, that is, the activity of thought entails reference to an object other than itself. ‘If, to think, one must be, one must also have things to think about’ (1914a: 319/t.37).³² The availability and richness of the contents of thought is therefore decisive for the social constitution of the personality: ‘a person ... is a consciousness with a content, and one is all the more a person the more this content is rich in elements’ ([1925: 82–83] 1992: 62). In short, Durkheim argues in a thesis recalling Spinoza that one is more a social being, that is, a person, the more one thinks.

To this must be added the fact that a person, as well as being a particular ‘individual subject’, ‘is, beyond this and above all, a being to whom is attributed a relative autonomy in relation to the environment with which he or she is in most direct contact’ (1912a: 388). What differentiates action in its proper sense from automatism and the stimulus-response continuum, what makes an action *a human action* and which pragmatists would not have understood, is the gap that separates stimulus from decision, the pause or suspension of action in time that allows persons to break away from the ‘degree zero’ constituted by their environment and by their own organism. One is a person, that is, a social being, not so much or indeed only in the fusion and effervescence of the crowd – a kind of association without duality and without consciousness – nor, at the other extreme, in isolated reflection or decision-making. These are ‘cold, colourless pleasures of the solitary life’, in which the individual is like a thinking reed and unable to resist the ‘cold, violent winds that sweep across immense social spaces’ ([1925: 267, 284] 1992: 197, 210). One is a person also, and above all, in the daily exercise of thinking about others and with others, in the type of autonomy that only such exercise allows (cf. Karsenti 2006: 208). The person is a perspective open to the world.

In the light of this theory of duality, historical and social phenomena linked with the monodimensional reality of man and of experience can be described as pathological processes of *reduction* – of persons to objects, of relationships between individuals to relationships between things, of the I to the crowd or the mass or the leader, of civilizations and culture to the nation and the Spirit of the people. The same goes, in Durkheim's view, for theories – gnoseological, ethical, psychological – that accompany such processes, giving them an illicit legitimisation on a conceptual level. What should also be included in the diverse family of monisms, which the 1914 essay briefly refutes, are those theories of imitation, suggestion and irrational crowd psychology³³ that tended to eliminate the component of representation, that is, the dimension of duality, peculiar to social thought and action.

Durkheim viewed his approach as that of a rationalist.³⁴ With this self-definition – and deliberately distancing himself from James, Nietzsche, Bergson³⁵ – he signs up to the Cartesian philosophical tradition, above and before the scientism and positivism with which he is too often exclusively associated. Yet it is also obvious that the Cartesian legacy seems to him impossible to follow literally, if only because Cartesian dualism gets in the way of interpretation of duality in a relational sense.³⁶ For Durkheim, this means trying to conceptualize a complex rationalism, that is, in his sense of the term 'complex', a rationalism able to come up with a common framework of intelligibility involving divergent and potentially antithetical elements of the real. This explains the attraction that some models of post-Cartesian philosophical rationality had for him, especially in the last phase of his research. Spinoza has already been mentioned, and it is indeed in Spinozan terms that Durkheim describes, in *Les Formes élémentaires*, totemic *mana* as the impersonal and immanent elemental form of divinity, that is, of society's symbolic transposition. From Pascal, Durkheim derives the idea that duality also means tension, opacity and drama, a form of unease that grows side by side with civilization, according to a thesis in line with the contemporary theories of Freud.³⁷ Finally, Leibniz is explicitly evoked in some crucial passages in *Les Formes*, including the one on the notion of person, which acts as a bridge between this work and the 1914 essay (cf. 1912a: 386–390). In Spinoza's immanent God or so-called psychophysical parallelism, in Leibniz's monadology, but also in Pascal's images of doubleness (the contradictory character of the I, habit as second nature), Durkheim looks for conceptual tools suitable for thinking about the relationship between individual and society – between a whole and parts, between levels of reality – not as a substantial distinction, but as a form of correlation, something conceptually not far from what Edmund Husserl went on to call 'immanent transcendence'.³⁸

The reference to Husserl is not by chance. Durkheim and Husserl, who were the same age and both Jewish, had shared part of their training – in Leipzig in the early 1880s, around Wilhelm Wundt's famous psychology workshop – as well as the trauma of losing a son on opposite sides during the Great War. Even so, they had very different starting points and paths, and were in many ways not comparable. Yet they ended up dealing, in the final period of their respective careers, with a problem that they approached in similar terms – the incomprehension of the duality of experience, the reduction of humans to things – and that they reacted to in a similar manner. This was to go back to the roots of philosophical modernity, though not, in a move that sometimes even became canonical in the twentieth century, to clear these away, but to re-read them in a new key. The path that Husserl chose for his *Cartesian Meditations* (published in 1932, though his research on the topic of intersubjectivity had begun in the 1910s) lies within modern subjectivism: he moves from the very essence and un-reifiable quality of the I, to arrive, through experiencing the other I, to the philosophical clarification of

‘common sense’ through a monadological model of ‘relational singularity’.³⁹ Instead, Durkheim’s starting point was from the outside: he moves from what in social processes goes beyond individual consciousness and resists it, to show how the symbolic realization of humanity goes through an original splitting – an experience of radical alterity that consists in making itself into things (the symbols, the sacred things) – before becoming, and in order to become, persons. Unlike the phenomenological approach, the elementary form of sociality does not consist in this case in a meeting between two subjects, but in symbolic alienation in a world of things and in the detachment from oneself (*se déprendre de soi*) that it entails. Alongside the impossibility of reducing consciousness to a mere object in the world, sociological rationality highlighted the irreducibility of consciousness, as socially determined, to pure subject, that is, freed from any residue of materiality or ‘thingness’, or to a mere unitary monad without space between self and self.

Afterwards, in French culture, phenomenology and Durkheimian sociology went on to follow for the most part parallel paths, occasionally coming together and missing many opportunities to do so. The first of these were the talks on Descartes that Husserl – invited by Xavier Léon, who was still president of the Société française de philosophie – gave at the Sorbonne. Durkheim had taught there for many years and can be imagined going along to hear him on the 23rd and 25th February 1929, on the eve of the ‘hourless night’⁴⁰ of European conscience.

Notes

- * This is a version of Giovanni Paoletti (2009), translated by Andrea Zhok and William Watts Miller in consultation with the author.
- 1. I dedicate this essay to students of the university of Pisa, with whom I have discussed and developed it; I am grateful to William Watts Miller, who wanted it to be accessible to students and scholars in other parts of the world.
- 2. See, on this, the essays in the collection edited by W.S.F. Pickering and Massimo Rosati (2008).
- 3. Durkheim had taken an active part in the Affair as a member of the League for Human Rights: see, especially, Durkheim ‘L’Individualisme et les intellectuels’ (1898c).
- 4. The most recent and important include Jean Manuel de Queiroz (1999), Anne Rawls (2004: 72–107) and Mark Cladis (2008).
- 5. At least as far back as *Suicide* – ‘if, as is often said, man is double, it is because physical man comes with the addition of social man’ (1897a: 228) – and then repeatedly from 1907 on. In a course on religion and its origins, and in discussing the notion of the soul: ‘this belief is not the product of a pure and simple illusion. It is quite true, in the end, that man is a double being, with two natures within him that are opposed like the profane and the sacred’ (1907f: 107). In an article later written up as the introduction to *Les Formes*: ‘It can thus be understood how reason has the power to go beyond the reach of empirical knowledge. It does not owe this to some mysterious virtue; it is simply that, as in a well-known formula, man is double’ (1909d: 750; cf. 1912a: 23). In a discussion at the examination of a thesis: ‘In short, there is a “we” subject to physical laws, and a “we” making the moral law: we are double’ (1909g: 372). Finally, in a paper at a meeting of the Société française de philosophie: ‘Just because he is social, man is double’ (1913b: 25).
- 6. Whether or not they then come to constitute a whole.
- 7. This is already at stake in a starting-point of interpretation. In French, the clearest semantic distinction between *dualité* and *dualisme* corresponds with that between

the *fact* of being double ('duality' or also just 'doubleness', *duplicité* having more the sense of 'double-dealing') and the *system of beliefs* or of thought founded on the coexistence of two opposed and irreducible basic principles ('dualism'). It remains the case that in Durkheim the occurrence of the two terms is very different. In the discussion of 1913 at the Société française de philosophie, *dualité* turns up sixteen times, *dualisme* only once, while in the essay of 1914 *dualité* is used seven times, *dualisme* three. From this point of view, the title of the essay of 1914 can give a misleading impression of the author's real concerns, at least if it is understood in a strict sense and in the following way: *belief in the dualism of human nature and its social conditions*.

8. 'It is an essential postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot be founded on error or deception: otherwise, it could not last' (1912a: 3).
9. See, on this issue, Paoletti (2002: 448).
10. In 1913 Durkheim wrote: 'the hybrid and contradictory beings who people the world of experience' (1913b: 33); in 1914 he modified this statement as follows: 'the hybrid and contradictory beings that we are' (1914a: 325/t.41). With the change, Durkheim specifically relates the duality to the human being, rather than to the world of experience as a whole.
11. In French eighteenth century philosophy, the Pauline and Augustinian couple, *homo interior/homo exterior*, had undergone a notable semantic transformation. It gradually came to designate, instead of the original theological opposition between innerness and 'world', a secular one between 'individual' and 'society'. Cf. Pierre Machérey (1987).
12. In the debate with psychology, signalled at the very start of the text, Durkheim now seems quite far from the polemical stance of the early part of his career, when the issue above all at stake was to mark out clearly the epistemological field of social science. Comparison with the paper of 1913, written for an audience of philosophers, shows how Durkheim had at some point articulated his own formulation in this direction. For example, 'two beings' (1913b: 71) became 'two groups of states of consciousness' (1914a: 318, t.37), while 'two contrary worlds' (1913b: 33) became 'two contrary forces' (1914a: 324, t.40). The relevance of this *psychological* foundation of belief in the dualism is underestimated by Rawls (2004: 72–107). Her account still homes in on the non-substantivist nature of the Durkheimian conception of doubleness. But it is through a general reading systematically slanted to emphasizing the factor of the 'practical' in the concerns with representation and symbolism at the core of the Durkheimian theory of social links.
13. Starting with the works of Eugène Azam – of which the best known, but not the first, was *Hypnotisme, double conscience et altérations de la personnalité*, published in 1887 with a preface by Charcot – it became a widespread theme and contributed to the general revival of the psychological theory of the personality, in which the studies by Alfred Binet and Théodule Ribot are among the best known texts. Ribot had been among the first to study the problem of the dual personality, in its pathological aspects but also in the case of a 'normal' split within the self. This was in a series of articles for the *Revue philosophique* in 1883 and 1884, then published as *Les Maladies de la personnalité* in 1885 and in its fifteenth edition by 1911. These studies – Ribot's in particular – were certainly in Durkheim's mind: in fact, his 1914 essay involves an implicit but precise confrontation with the theses developed by them on the personality and on psychological duality.

14. 'Circles' of interior life, consciousness, thought – *Gedankenkreiss* – is one of the expressions that Durkheim took over and transformed, in his account of doubleness, from the lexicon of scientific psychology of the time. Examples, in works certainly well known to him, can be found in Ribot ([1885] 1907: 166) and Wilhelm Wundt (1886: 391). They also include William James (1890): '*Every man has one group of ideas which relate to his own person and interests, and another which is connected with society. Each has his group of ideas, about plants, religion, law, art, etc., and more especially about the rose, epic poetry, sermons, free trade, and the like. Thus the mental content of every individual, even of the uneducated and of children, consists of masses or circles of knowledge of which each lies within some larger circle, alongside of others similarly included, and of which each includes smaller circles within itself*' (my emphasis). The metaphor, through the connotation of 'horizontal' that characterizes it, obviously takes on a particular sense in non-substantivist theories of consciousness, like those held by the authors just cited.
15. An epistemological model that on this crucial point broke away from Comte's, who had seen causal explanation as a metaphysical residue to eliminate in adopting a type of explanation in terms of laws.
16. The book on animal societies by Alfred Espinas (1877) had an exceptional influence on this topic as well as on Durkheim: but societies with low individuation would also be premodern ones with 'mechanical solidarity', which Durkheim had spoken about in his first book, *The Division of Labour* (1893b).
17. Applied to social theory, it amounts to giving the individual ontological priority and leaving association with the role of a derived phenomenon: it is the approach that Durkheim sees exemplified in the methodological individualism characteristic of contractualism or utilitarianism.
18. On Anglo-American debate about the dualism, see the classic work by Arthur Lovejoy (1929).
19. Durkheim's lectures explicitly addressed the radical empiricism of William James and the radical idealism developed in a work of 1907 by Octave Hamelin (1856-1907), who had been his friend and colleague at Bordeaux.
20. See, on the difference between the 'individual' and 'personal': 'We say our individuality and not our personality. Although the two words are often taken for one another, it is important to distinguish them with the greatest care. The personality is made up of essentially supra-individual elements' (1914a: 318, n.2/t.45, n.6). Cf. Rosati (2005: 30–33), and the translucent analysis of Philippe Steiner (2009).
21. 'Society cannot constitute itself unless it penetrates individual consciousnesses and fashions them in its "image and likeness"' (1914a: 314/t.35). Cf.: 'At the same time that it goes beyond us, [society] is inside us, since it can live only within and through us' (1906b: 79). Or again: 'even that which is collective in [truth] exists only through the consciousness of individuals: truth is realized only through individuals' (1955: 196).
22. The theme that Marcel Mauss went on to develop in his lecture on the person (1938).
23. In Durkheim's confrontation with materialism, a crucial turning point was the review (1897e) in which he discussed a work by Antonio Labriola.
24. Maintenance of a level of the objective and material profoundly differentiates Durkheim's 'sociological idealism' – that is, his analysis of the symbolic dimension of social reality – from theories of the image without reference or of the image's pervasion of everything.

25. The expression ‘*lieu commun des intelligences*’ is Durkheim’s (1912a: 622). Kant had talked of the kingdom of ends as ‘*eine Welt vernünftiger Wesen*’ (‘a world of rational beings’, [1785] 1948: 99). On these themes, see William Watts Miller (1996).
26. Kant ([1785] 1948. Cf.: ‘Because of this a rational being must regard himself *qua intelligence* (and accordingly not on the side of his lower faculties) as belonging to the intelligible world, not to the sensible one. He has therefore two points of view from which he can regard himself and from which he can know laws governing the employment of his powers and consequently governing all his actions’ (ibid.: 112–113).
27. A passage that follows on exactly from Kant.
28. On the social dimension of autonomy, the most important reference is the posthumously published course on moral education ([1925] 1992), based on a version of 1898-1899 (see Philippe Besnard 2003: 55–64).
29. Even if afterwards the issue is not so straightforward, given all the conceptual perplexities encountered on this topic between *The Division of Labour* and *Suicide* and brought to light by Besnard (1987).
30. See Durkheim 1914a: 319/t.37–38. On ecstasy, see also: ‘No doubt it is in the nature of the moral forces expressed by these [symbols] that they cannot have any powerful impact on the human mind without putting it outside itself, without plunging it into a state that can be described as *ecstatic*, provided the word is taken in its etymological sense (*έκστασις*); but it in no way follows that they are imaginary’ (1912a: 324). Mauss offers a different and more positive interpretation of phenomena of magico-religious ecstasy. This is in the way he attaches greater importance, in processes of the social link’s symbolic creation, to the ‘proliferation of instinct’, states of ‘emotive excitement’ and the ‘free play of imagination’: cf. Mauss (1904, 1908, 1924). The reference common to both authors is the book on ecstasy by Thomas Achelis, reviewed by Mauss (1903).
31. In his early works, in particular in *The Division of Labour*, Durkheim had taken up an idea of Espinas and Wundt to talk of a ‘collective consciousness’. The status of this concept in the ‘later Durkheim’ remains controversial. But it is clear that the formulation of the idea of ‘collective representation’ – developing into Durkheim’s preferred usage from the time of his article, ‘*Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives*’ (1898b) – comes with a change in the theoretical landscape.
32. Franz Brentano’s theory of the intentionality of consciousness was known to the French public and to Durkheim through Ribot’s account (1879). On the interrelation between the theory of representation, the intentionality of consciousness and rationalism in Durkheim, see Paoletti (2007).
33. From Gabriel Tarde – whom Durkheim repeatedly confronted in the early years of his career – to Gustave Le Bon.
34. ‘The only [characterization] we would accept is that of *rationalist*’ (Durkheim 1895a: ix).
35. Authors discussed by Durkheim in *Pragmatism and Sociology*.
36. It seemed to Durkheim that what characterizes the Cartesian tradition’s ‘*simplistic*’ rationalism is ‘a fundamental tendency to consider that what is real in the world is only that which is perfectly simple’ ([1925: 286] 1992: 212).
37. Especially, since so near in date, with Freud’s ‘*Civilized*’ *Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908).
38. And, on the other hand, compare with Durkheim: ‘and so, at the same that it is transcendent in relation to us, society is immanent within us and we feel it as this’ (1906b: 79).

39. The definition suggested by Natalie Depraz (in Lavigne 2008: 209). On this topic, see the collection edited by Jocelyn Benoist and Bruno Karsenti (2001).
40. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas ([1972] 1998: 70).

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