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### **Citation**

Pels, D. (1984). A fellow-traveller's dilemma: sociology and socialism in the writings of Durkheim. *Acta Politica*, 19: 1984(3), 309-329. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3452445>

Version: Publisher's Version

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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## A fellow-traveller's dilemma: sociology and socialism in the writings of Durkheim

Dick Pels

La sociologie sera socialiste ou ne sera pas. (Enrico Ferri).

Le socialisme sera sociologique ou ne sera pas.

(Alfred Fouillée).

### Definitions and Scientific Capital

If we wish to exploit a fruitful metaphor, the sociological project of Durkheim presents a telling example (quite comparable, in this respect, with the project of Freud and the Freudians) of the 'original accumulation' of scientific capital<sup>1</sup>. Scientific capital is formed and reproduced by the concurrence of two different but related knowledge claims. First, 'property' is claimed of a distinct theoretical territory: boundaries are drawn, differences are established, and the geography of the disciplinary world is accordingly reworked. The demarcation and institution of the new scientific domain grounds the claim to originality and intellectual priority of its discoverers, legitimating their professional existence as explorers of the new field, their rivalries with other claimants and their efforts to gain admittance to key institutions. The identification of the 'object' of a new discipline (Durkheim's identification of the *règne social*) therefore easily includes a claim to dominate; especially when – as Durkheim's 'synthetic' sociology overtly sets about to do – the claims staked out are meant to cover the greatest possible territorial expanse.

Next to an empire, however, a scientific discipline must also have a method; apart from a distinct territory it also needs a box of tools with which to plough the infrastructure of reality. Method makes the new field accessible to co-workers, who, while lacking their master's genius, are still promised respectable and continuous results. Method, in turn, may become a tool of domination to the extent that promises of certainty are derived from a naive theory of correspondence – such as that implied in Durkheim's wish that 'abstractions arrange the facts according to their natural distinctions'<sup>2</sup>. Territorial claims and certainty claims are naturally supportive of one another. If theoretical enclosures and their subdivisions ('fields', 'levels' or 'instances') are conceived as unmediated articulations of the objective structure of being, as reflective of reality's own compartmentalization, professional farming of them can depart from secure and certain

beginnings. If method, in turn, offers knowledge believed to be objective and compelling, the new arable may be exploited by reliable procedures of fact-gathering and puzzle-solving; guaranteeing good harvests which may provide many intellectual yeomen with a decent living. If method guarantees reliable and truthful knowledge, moreover, it promises to lay a scientific basis for moral and political action; thus adding materially to the scientific capital already formed.

Knowledge capital, therefore, is very largely a matter of credit and credibility: it rests upon the imputed justice and successful enforcement of particular truth-claims and territorial claims. These constitute the symbolic resources which are capitalized upon in the course of controversies, organizational battles, and battles for recognition by and access to established institutions. It goes without saying, of course, that definitions, concepts, and distinctions are not simply intellectual 'by-products' of struggles for the institutionalization of a discipline; but they often carry an unrecognized surplus meaning which is functionally related to these struggles. Definitions and distinctions may to a variable degree be 'empowered' by an underlying 'project' – which is intellectual, but also emotional, political, and organizational in character.

Hence the strategic (indeed: 'capital') importance of rigorous definitions and clear-cut distinctions in an intellectual system such as Durkheim's. It is by means of the initial definition that a scientific object is constituted and profane, structureless data are promoted into 'social facts'. Definitional rules are there to ensure that the sociologist 'prend immédiatement pied dans la réalité'. For a definition to be objective, Durkheim says, it must express the phenomena 'en fonction, non d'une idée de l'esprit, mais de propriétés qui leur sont inhérentes. Il faut qu'elle les caractérise par un élément intégrant de leur nature, non par leur conformité à une notion plus ou moins idéale'<sup>3</sup>. The Definition thus enhances the formation of scientific capital by a dual process of 'objectification': first, by carving out the object itself, and second, by embodying the objectifying rules of sociological method; resulting in nothing less than a legitimate monopoly of force within a given (scientific) territory.

Alpert has perhaps been the first to note this all-important function of definitions in Durkheim, and also to consider it 'one of the weakest parts of his methodology'. In Alpert's view, this weakness is traceable to Durkheim's failure 'to appreciate the vital part played by initial hypotheses and *a priori* assumptions in scientific reasoning ... Thus, his theory of definition ignores the crucial role of the definer, and seems to imply that somehow or other things define themselves'<sup>4</sup>. This is indeed the gist of Durkheim's 'politics' of definition. The theorist is tempted to hide himself behind his

own inventions; effacing himself before them, he simultaneously lets himself be glorified by their commanding impersonality<sup>5</sup>.

In the following I hope to show that Durkheim's definition of *socialism* is such a 'capitalizing' definition, and moreover, that it adds less to the intellectual capital of 'socialism' than to that of Durkheim's own reformist sociology. Therefore, although this definition found approval in the eyes of both Guesde and Jaurès, if Marcel Mauss praised it as a 'careful and classic' one, if Robert Nisbet took it for granted, and even Durkheim's most recent biographer called it 'a bold attempt to seize the essential of a historically specific ideology'<sup>6</sup>, we need to adopt a more sceptical attitude. In the basket of red herrings which forms the history of sociological theory, Durkheimian definitions and distinctions already occupy a uniquely prominent place; but few among them appear to be so much the product of bad faith (or let us say: false consciousness) as the definition of socialism and its dual separation from both communism and social science. Durkheimian sociology, if looked at irreverently, is considerably less scientific, but also considerably more socialist than its author would have liked to admit. The methodical distinction between sociology and socialism, and the refusal to admit the latter's scientific content, are not precisely what they seem to be: they are moves in a complicated game of *double entendre* and diversion, in the course of which Durkheim attempts to rationalize and 'objectify' his own aloofness from the various socialisms of his day, but at the same time involuntarily succumbs to their manifold attractions.

His principled separation between social science and socialism, in other words, must not be taken at face value: it results from a 'splitting' rhetoric which serves to exile personal and political concerns from the realm of scientific consideration; thus laying the ghost of ambiguity which rises from Durkheim's repressed ambition to *appropriate* and *improve* socialism, to lay the foundations of a socialism which is non-proletarian, non-egalitarian, and non-revolutionary, and, in consequence, (thought to be) uniquely scientific. The definitions of both sociology and socialism, however rationally controlled they may appear, thus partly exhibit the irrational paraphernalia of the Durkheimian will-to-intellectual-power: the desire to draw sharp boundaries vis-à-vis rival doctrines and their rejection as unscientific ones, the carving out of a new 'domain', the ritual institution of a new nomenclature, and the quest for an unshakeable methodical foundation. Hubert Bourgin, the Durkheimian turned fascist, has rightly remarked of his former master that, even at the time when the sociological school 'counted only one individual, its creator, it was already a school'<sup>7</sup>. *Chef d'école* before the fact, and doctrinaire by intellectual constitution, Durk-

heim involuntarily suffused his definitory inclusions and exclusions with the politics of domianal conquest and methodical certainty; tailoring them in advance to inspire and promote a 'cause' – the institution and legitimation of his new science of sociology. This project of legitimation necessarily included both a sharp *distantiation* from socialist ideology and an *appropriation* of it in sociological terms; so that, in large measure, Durkheim's project was to invent another 'scientific socialism'.

### Sociology vs. socialism

That Durkheimian definitions hide at least as much as they reveal becomes evident as soon as we examine his views on the relationship between socialism and social science in some more detail. It is science's job, Durkheim claims, solely to describe and explain what *is* and *has* been, not to speculate about the future. Socialism, on the contrary,

is entirely oriented towards the future. It is above all a plan for the reconstruction of society, a program for a collective life which does not exist as yet or in the way it is dreamed of, and which is proposed to men as worthy of their preference. It is an ideal<sup>8</sup>.

It is good to recall, at this point, that the *Sollen/Sein* criterion is employed by Durkheim as a *general* vehicle of intellectual demarcation: it confidently circumscribes the 'alien' whenever sociology's own identity and calling need to be secured<sup>9</sup>. In the 1887 *Cours* the realism of Comte is favourably contrasted with the ideal constructions of classical political economy which, like those of traditional political philosophy, are repeatedly dismissed as hybrids of social science and 'art politique'. Political economy, it is said, does not occupy itself with observing reality but with constructing a more or less desirable ideal picture of it<sup>10</sup>. Demarcating sociology from 'political science' in an early review, Durkheim restates that his own science 'is not interested in the future'<sup>11</sup>. Sociology, it is concluded in the *Règles*, is not a practical doctrine: it is not individualism, communism, or socialism. It denies these scientific value 'puisque'elles tendent directement, non à exprimer les faits, mais à les réformer'<sup>12</sup>.

On balance, however, Durkheimian sociology has itself been too fond of its own particular mixture of 'art' and science to merit this self-proclaimed criterion of distinction. Let us note that Durkheim did not distinguish judgments of fact and judgments of value as a matter of epistemological principle, comparable to the stringency with which Max Weber voiced his own postulate; 'speculative' and 'practical' doctrines are not divided by an

unbridgeable chasm. While formally doubting the feasibility of a scientific socialism, Durkheim never denied the possibility, nor did he renounce the expectation of positively grounding both morality and politics. As Bourgin commented, socialism was meant to be 'the social and political art which complemented the social and political science constituted by sociology'<sup>13</sup>. Commentators such as Lukes, Aron, Birnbaum, and Filloux have all repeated Bourgin's observation.

The point of Durkheim's distinction therefore appears to be that the practical doctrines of his age *insufficiently* express 'what is or what has been', and do not base their attempts at reform on laws which are discoverable by means of sociological observation. His basic conviction is not so much that a scientifically based socialism is epistemologically impossible, but rather that existing socialist systems are unscientific, and that sociology may rightfully take their place. Above all, the socialist solution is dismissed as a *premature* one; socialism has simply *not taken the time* to conduct a careful investigation of reality:

It aspires to a complete remolding of the social order. But in order to know what the family, property, political, moral, juridical, and economic organization of the European peoples can and ought to be, even in the near future, it is indispensable to have studied this multitude of institutions and practises in the past, to have searched for the ways in which they varied in history, and for the principal conditions which have determined these variations. And only then will it be possible to ask oneself rationally what they ought to be now – under the present conditions of our collective existence. But all this research is still in its infancy ... The bases for a rigorous prediction about the future, especially one of such breadth, are not established<sup>14</sup>.

And since science cannot be improvised, the social sciences 'are still much too young to be able to serve as bases for practical doctrines'. The distinction, as phrased by Durkheim, exhibits an appreciable measure of opportunism: the modesty with which sociology adorns itself goes some way towards dissimulating a rather immodest territorial claim. Criteria of distinction thus serve as intellectual weaponry in a drive for doctrinal expansion, in the course of which Durkheim invades and conquers territories which are already densely populated.

If the *Sein/Sollen* criterion is factually inoperative, another one is silently substituted for it. Socialism, the hasty science, is seen to precipitate itself towards radical conclusions, whereas sociology is expected to maintain its reserve and circumspection in the face of a reality which it concedes is largely unknown. Calmness and moderation, in short, are the scientific virtues *par excellence*; and to all appearances, socialism is not so much

rejected because it is a theory of reform, but because its statements are *categorical* and its ambitions are *totalist*; in other words, because it is a theory of *revolution* and its underlying sentiment is revolutionary. This is where the true accent falls: socialism tends to be identified with a *complete* remoulding of the social order and is seen as *entirely* poised towards the future; whereas sociology's sentiment is basically reformist and forbids one to rush to conclusions<sup>15</sup>. However, this sentiment is preferably deduced from the 'nature of things' or the 'nature of science' rather than being recognized for what it is.

Closely related to this, is Durkheim's idea that socialism is a matter of preconception and prejudice and not a detached expression of fact – a conviction which is generously extended to political economy and political philosophy. Socialism, Durkheim thinks, is above all a product of passion, of feelings of justice, moral sympathy and the like: 'it is a cry of grief, sometimes of anger, uttered by men who feel most keenly our collective malaise'. Socialism (like individualism) is 'above all a ferment which affirms itself, although it may eventually ask Reason for reasons with which to justify itself'. That is why socialism cannot be taken at its word, and should be looked upon as a *symptom* of social illness, not as an adequate diagnosis of it; doctors, Durkheim's metaphor runs, should not accept 'the groans of a sick man' as scientific truths. Being a 'cry of collective anguish', socialism should itself be considered as a *fact*, not as a scientific formulation of facts. If it is not a product of science, it is an object of science<sup>16</sup>.

The sociologist and the socialist are thus immediately cast in the roles of doctor and patient. The recurrent metaphor of health and disease, of course, is Durkheim's major tool for the scientific adjudication of right and wrong, good and bad. It therefore assumes as a self-evident prior judgment that socialist theory is *wrong*, that it distorts the facts as they really are; an assumption which is only logically justifiable if the methodical premises of sociology itself are already taken for granted. In addition, if socialism is a bunch of 'prénotions' elevated into doctrine, the rhetorical implication must be that sociology is *not*, and is therefore uniquely reliable as a body of knowledge. But of course, Durkheimian sociology was less angelic and innocent than this; being in large measure a rational justification of preliminary intuitions, which were inspired by the moral fervour and missionary will of its author. This was also sensed by Hubert Bourgin. Having long been under the spell of the 'Durkheimian imperative'<sup>17</sup>, he left us the following memorable, though perhaps exaggerated portrait of Durkheim as religiously devoted to his mission of creating and instituting the science of sociology:

Durkheim, aujourd'hui connu, et vanté, et aussi utilisé, exploité, comme le fondateur et le principal ouvrier de l'école sociologique française, était sociologue par raison morale plus encore que par raison scientifique: la sociologie était pour lui le moyen, unique et sûr, de reconstituer la morale, dissoute par les conditions mêmes de la vie de nos sociétés trop vastes et trop distendues. Tout son être physique, toute sa personne morale l'attestaient: il était prêtre plus encore que savant. C'était une figure hiératique. Sa mission était religieuse... De même que le sociologue était armé, et seul armé, contre l'indiscipline des mœurs, de même il était, et lui seul, contre l'anarchie. Cet érudit et ce prêtre était donc, comme ceux du Saint-Simonisme, en qui il se reconnaissait aussi des devanciers, un législateur. Les lois, les lois modernes, lui seul, avec les siens, était capable de les concevoir et de les formuler, puisqu'avec la doctrine sociologique il tenait l'unique inspiration, le moule unique. Et c'est pourquoi, et c'est en ce sens, qu'il était socialiste<sup>18</sup>.

In *Le socialisme universitaire*, which, like the earlier work, was mainly written to justify his defection from what he called 'socialo-sociologie' as well as from socialism, Bourgin was quick to range Durkheim with Herr, the young Péguy, and Jaurès as his principal seducers. The importance of the socialist and reformist 'prejudice' of Durkheim and his disciples is reaffirmed as follows:

Le socialisme réglementaire, universel, mais évolutionniste et réformateur de Durkheim n'a pas été l'aboutissement d'une sociologie construite sans idée préconçue; il a été, au contraire, l'idée préconçue qui a déterminé, sollicité, engendré la sociologie durkheimienne<sup>19</sup>.

Thus (pre)conceived, Durkheim's methodical injunction to consider socialism as a *fact* or a *thing* appears to rest upon an unacknowledged *petitio principii*. To consider something as a 'fact', of course, is Durkheim's favourite way of saying that we must *detach* ourselves from its outward appearance or our acquired notions about it, and that we must turn it into an *object* of our inquiry: 'We must face socialism as we do a *thing we do not know*, as a type of unexplored phenomenon...'<sup>20</sup>. However, this methodical distantiation is only possible as soon as *disbelief* has arisen concerning socialism's manifest content, and thus logically presupposes the provisional truth of the rival doctrine of sociology; that is also why Durkheim methodically fails to apply this method self-reflexively to his own science. To label certain theoretical phenomena as 'social facts' is one strategy to separate the ideological from the scientific, without really accounting for the criteria which steer the operation. The complacent ease with which socialism is assigned to the realm of 'social facts' thus only repeats the high-handedness with which it was earlier dismissed as a 'cri de douleur'.

Throughout his discussion, Durkheim holds fast to a rather primitive

distinction between 'chose' and 'idée', 'facts' and 'notions vulgaires', 'definitions de chose' and 'definitions de concept'. As in the 'Note' from 1893, the will to certainty and objectivity is all-pervasive; the quest for an impersonal definition assuming the proportions of a mild obsession. But once again, the pathos of realism provokes a sharp contrast between the alleged arbitrariness of socialism and the non-arbitrariness of sociology, by prophesying for the latter a state of direct communion with the 'things' themselves.

### Conceptual manoeuvres in the dark

However, Durkheim's search for an impersonal grounding of 'abstractions' leads up, not to a representation of the uncontaminated facts themselves, but instead to a forceful presentation of his own particular conception of them. The problem of the definition of socialism is solved by a curious piece of circular rhetoric, the outcome of which is to introduce Durkheim's own preconceptions as logically and scientifically inescapable. Thus he commits the very mistake for which he criticized Belot in the early *Note*: presenting his personal idea of socialism as the 'quintessence' of it<sup>21</sup>.

The first step in this circular detour is a general rejection of 'subjective' or 'individual' notions, and a stoical distinction between 'what we personally understand socialism to be' and 'what it actually is'. 'What right', Durkheim asks, 'would I have to impose on others my own personal way of seeing socialism, and what right have the others to foist theirs on me?'

'... Let us forget for the moment the idea that we have of the object to be defined ... Instead of looking within ourselves, let us look outside; instead of questioning ourselves, we will question things'<sup>22</sup>.

But soon afterwards it appears that he wishes to supersede a merely individual and 'partial' standpoint precisely because it lacks the solidity which an *imposing* definition requires; clearly, Durkheim is unwilling to settle for less. But of course, there is no hard-and-fast line between 'questioning ourselves' and 'questioning things'; and Durkheim's initial sacrifice of self-oblivion quickly materializes into a solid 'right' to impose on others.

The second step is constituted by a rejection of 'commonly accepted' notions of socialism, because these are inconstant and contradictory, and only 'wedge themselves between us and things'. To be sure, Durkheim's primary target is not so much the 'common' or 'average' notion in a literal

sense, but rather the existing scientific and political definitions *other than* the one which he is about to propose. Doubt is cast upon at least three of these 'common conceptions', and they are found wanting on both logical and empirical grounds. The idea of socialism as a *negation of private property*, to begin with, is thought too broad, because 'our economic organization' itself already works towards restricting absolute property rights; and also because the elimination of inheritance, far from constituting a denial of the idea of private ownership, instead embodies its full realization. Secondly, the idea of socialism as a 'narrow *subordination of the individual to the collectivity*' is rejected because, in one sense, this subordination is characteristic of all community life; moreover, it is not characteristic of all socialist doctrines – anarchism being the most notable exception. Thirdly, Durkheim rejects the idea of socialism as a movement to *better the condition of the working class* by way of introducing *greater equality* into economic relations. Equality, he argues, is not a prerogative goal of socialists, since economists have also concerned themselves with it. In addition, the pursuit of equality is more radically announced in communist systems, which cannot be regarded as a simple variant of socialist ones. And finally, socialism 'goes beyond the workingman's problem', being only of secondary significance in systems such as those of Saint-Simon or those of the 'academic socialist'<sup>23</sup>.

This is one of those arguments by elimination which recur throughout Durkheim's writings, and which automatically privilege the conception which is ultimately left standing<sup>24</sup>. But the procedure of ratiocination itself is decidedly partial and coolly subservient to the desired end result – which is nothing but the preconceived idea with which the argument originally began. Though on the face of it leading up to an impartial definition of socialism, it serves in fact to introduce a number of proviso's which enables Durkheim ultimately to *defend* socialism as he conceives it – without having to illuminate this political motive. If socialism is not definitionally tied to the liquidation of private property, if it is not consonant with collectivism but leaves room for the individual, if it is not proletarian or geared to the attainment of economic or political equality, it is adding up to something which sociology might look upon with sympathy.

Taken by themselves, of course, Durkheim's consecutive arguments against these objectionable forms of socialism seem rather inept. The socialist case against private property may indeed be a highly ambiguous one; but this hardly suffices to exile it from the definition of socialism in the summary manner which Durkheim permits himself; the same applies to socialism's proletarian character and its egalitarian strivings. Scientific morality, in addition, prompts Durkheim to look for characteristics that

are common to *all* socialist systems; but, by a curious feat of coincidence, the features which Durkheim eliminates because they do not *generally* occur are also the features to which he *morally objects*. Wishing to base his own definition upon 'a socialism which is common to all the particular socialisms and which envelops them'<sup>25</sup>, Durkheim thus successfully provides himself with a double epistemological insurance. Indecisively hovering between an appeal to the 'factual' and an appeal to the 'general', Durkheim effects a double escape from the uncertainties of his own individual conviction.

But the detour is not yet complete. The rejection of selected 'average conceptions' is followed by a brief outline of the 'facts' upon which the new definition of socialism may trustfully rest; an account which, once again, is pre-set to produce conclusions which are long before prepared. His short description, in the Course on Socialism, of the anomie which unbalances modern 'liberal' society focusses entirely upon the incongruence and absence of contact existing between a hypertrophied state and the unruly multitude of diffuse and unorganized economic functions. Presupposing his own idea of functional solidarity in the 'normal' state of society, Durkheim concludes without effort that economic activity takes place *outside* of the collective consciousness as it is represented by the state-implying, all along, that this situation is 'abnormal' or 'undesirable'.

After so much intellectual and emotional preparation, the definition itself may come as an anti-climax:

We denote as socialist every doctrine which demands the connection of all economic functions, or of certain among them, which are at the present time diffuse, to the directing and conscious centers of society<sup>26</sup>.

Although the definition artificially bows before the demands of scientific generality ('all the doctrines ordinarily called socialist agree on this claim'), Durkheim's own preferences are immediately apparent. First of all, it is obvious that the comprehensive character of the definition is only saved by the demotion of possibly divisive contrasts – such as that between 'mediate' and 'immediate' connection – to a secondary position – a strategic move which goes unargued. The wish to re-connect economy and state does not imply, he proclaims with some emphasis, that every action should come from the latter. On the contrary, it is natural that it receives from it as much as it gives it. The idea of continuous communication between the 'social brain' and the economic functions is therefore at once qualified towards the *ideal of equal* interchange, and thus tends to single out the *mediate* or *corporatist* form of connection as the preferred one.

The addition of the qualifying clause 'or of certain among them' expresses a similar purpose. As Filloux has remarked, the covert significance of this clause is that only *some* economic functions are to be attached to the state, whereas others revert to secondary centres (*i.e.* the corporations). Here as elsewhere, Durkheim 'takes implicitly as a given what needs to be established' and lends his own general notion a connotation that corresponds with his own particular vision of society<sup>27</sup>. Underscoring the necessity, or naturalness, of a fundamental *reciprocity* between state and economy (the key concept of organic solidarity is itself strongly infused by this norm of reciprocity), Durkheim rules a centralized state socialism out of court: 'Socialists do not demand that the economic life be put into the hands of the state, but into contact with it'<sup>28</sup>.

Furthermore, as is evident from Durkheim's own commentary here (as well as from his subsequent reviews of Richard and Merlino), the very definition is designed as a piece of *defence*. Since all the various socialist schools are animated by the same general spirit – a 'fact' which Durkheim's definition is meant to reflect – it can no longer be seriously brought against socialism that it offers the confusing spectacle of a 'multitude of irreconcilable Churches'. His early adoption of Schaffle's corporatist socialism, and its defence against the views of theorists such as Fouillée or Belot (who thought of socialism as the *opposite* of individualism, and as necessarily centralist and despotic), shows a similar partisanship<sup>29</sup>. It also underlies his distinction between socialism and *communism*. For some part, this distinction is meant to combat the 'confusion' entertained by orthodox economists who unknowingly equate socialism with a resurrection of primitive communism and feel free to reject it on that count. But according to Durkheim

loin d'être un retour en arrière, le socialisme, *tel que nous l'avons défini*, paraît bien plutôt impliqué dans la nature même des sociétés supérieures<sup>30</sup>.

But the discussion of communism also repeats the eliminating argument and the 'splitting' rhetoric with which we are already familiar. Once more, Durkheim puts aside selected elements and characteristics in order to clear the field for his own definition, and thus to isolate desired from undesired forms of socialism. Communism, he proclaims, looks upon private property as the major source of social evil and selfishness, and strives for its complete abolition; whereas socialism 'touches private property only indirectly, to the degree required to change it so that it may harmonize with the economic arrangements ...'; likewise, the *abstract* and *totalizing* character of communist thought is unfavourably contrasted with that of socia-

lism. Thus, egalitarian and revolutionary socialism stands condemned, while meritocratic and reformist socialism is quietly incorporated in the project to which sociology holds the key<sup>31</sup>.

Socialism, to Durkheim, is therefore 'essentially a movement to organize' or a 'process of economic concentration and centralization'; it aims at the conscious pilotage of economic forces by the 'knowing and managing organs of society'. Neither the revolutionary class struggle, nor the proletariat, nor for that matter, the idea of equality appear in the definition. As before, Durkheim's technique of intellectual seduction includes slight, almost unwilling sacrifices to the idol of scientific generality. Amelioration of the workers' fate, he says, 'is only one goal that socialism derives from the economic organization it wants, just as class war is only one of the means by which this reorganization could result, one aspect of the historic development producing it'. Durkheim's own moral conviction, of course, is that class conflict is unfortunate and abnormal, and that the workers' problem is secondary and derivative, and must be differently solved. The crux of the issue, as Durkheim sees it, is the inability on the part of workers 'to do business directly with society' as a result of their immediate dependence upon the capitalist class. The working class is not properly integrated, it does not enjoy full citizenship rights, and its social value is accordingly not sufficiently recompensed. The only means of tempering this subjection is to moderate the power of capital by the introduction of another force of equal or superior strength – which can only issue from the state:

This is to say that the capitalist class under these conditions must disappear, that the state fulfill these functions at the same time as it is placed in direct relation with the working class, and in consequence must become the centre of economic life. The improvement of the workers' lot is thus not a special objective; it is but one of the consequences that the attachment of economic activities to the managing agents of society must produce<sup>32</sup>.

While Durkheim goes so far as to entertain the possibility of a complete suppression of the 'medium of the capitalist', the working class, on the other hand, is forbidden to take its own interests in hand. Presumably, the working class itself and the institutions that represent it, such as political parties and unions, are not sufficiently devoted to the general interest to be quite trustworthy – whereas the State embodies it as a matter of definition. What workers desire, Durkheim thinks, is 'to be no longer kept at a distance from the centres presiding over collective life but be bound to them more or less intimately'. Material changes, therefore, are only one form and result of this projected *rapprochement* of working class and state,

and greater equality in economic relations is conceived as secondary to and resultant from greater organization. To put it briefly, socialism is not to be conceived along the lines of Louis Blanc's old formula of *l'organisation du travail*: it is organization *tout court*.

The definition of socialism, Durkheim concludes, embraces two different types or currents, which are in fact varieties of the same genus. There is a socialism 'from below' (workers' socialism) which reaches towards the highest regions of society, and a socialism 'from above' (state socialism) which reaches downward. At root each is only an extension of the other: they imply one another as different aspects of the same need for organization. But, by now, we are sufficiently forewarned to notice that, once again, Durkheim's bow to the exigencies of definitional generality smoothes over a strong identification with the etatist variant. State socialism, as it were, presents itself as the most congenial and logical expression of the genus of socialism itself. Durkheim himself offers to explain the different attraction of either type of socialism from the different 'place occupied by the theoretician'; but he gives himself away by the terms of his specification: the point being 'whether (the theoretician) is in closer contact with workers, or more attentive to the general interests of society'. Durkheim sights a distinction where Marxists would observe a virtual coincidence.

In one sense, the reversal of Marxism could not be more complete: it is not the state which is bound to wither away as soon as private property is abolished by the working class' revolutionary effort; instead the State circumscribes private ownership, vanquishes the capitalist class, and draws the proletariat into its orbit. There is a switch of historical agents: not the proletariat, but the State is now celebrated as the demiurg of socialism. On another level, however, the opposition is not as neat as clarity would wish; since the Durkheimian scenario substantively follows the Marxian theory of economic concentration and centralization up to something like state entrepreneurship of the major means of production, leaving out the improbable revolution which would signal the end of human pre-history.

Still, it would be to misrepresent Durkheimian socialism if all emphasis would be laid upon the etatist project. Rather, what emerges from his writings is a case for a managerial, technocratic and corporatist socialism, which envisages a restoration of the *corps intermédiaires* between individual and state, and a dual concentration of important economic and political competences in their hands. While proposing an 'organic' division of labour between the State and 'society' as organized in professional corporations, the division of powers between the two levels must express the basic norms of reciprocity, interdependence, and social solidarity. As P. Lapie wrote as early as 1894, Durkheimian socialism was in fact grounded



in the solidarist project which lay hidden in *De la division du travail social*; a book which not simply presents a scientific account of the historical emergence of organic solidarity, but simultaneously includes a political plea to 'institute it'<sup>33</sup>.

### Fellow-Travellership and the Functions of Ambivalence

Our salvation lies in socialism discarding its out-of-date slogans or in the formation of a new Socialism which goes back to the French tradition. I see so clearly what this might be! Durkheim to Léon, 1915.

Thus, Emile Durkheim has not been the anti-socialist thinker that interpreters such as Parsons, Nisbet, Coser, Zeitlin, or Therborn have made him out to be<sup>34</sup>. All of these writers have largely taken for granted Durkheim's own demarcation of sociology from socialism – although they have done so for various, and often conflicting reasons. The myth of the conservative origins and pathos of Durkheim's thought has been able to unite both conservative sociologists, conflict theorists and Marxists, all of whom have invested in this demarcation – either to justify a particular conception of sociology, or to defend a specific form of socialism.

For Talcott Parsons, Durkheim's sympathetic attitude towards socialism must largely be classified as a juvenile sin. In his exposition of the 'four main stages' of Durkheim's theoretical development the subject of socialism is not even mentioned. Parsons' discussion of corporatism and socialism is as meagre as it is deficient; while his suggestion that, on his own terms, Durkheim was 'a communist rather than a socialist' is rather frivolous and absurd<sup>35</sup>. Robert Nisbet devotes five pages to a discussion of Durkheim's treatment of socialism and communism, and off-handedly concludes that his heart was not in it: '... it can hardly be said that the subject was one of either great interest to him personally through most of his life or of significant consequence in the totality of his work'<sup>36</sup>. Instead, as I have argued, Durkheim's heart was perhaps *in it too much*: the effort to *sociologize* socialism forced him into quite troublesome exercises in re-conceptualization. It is also simply incorrect to hold, as Coser does, that Durkheim rejected socialism; or to oppose Durkheim's 'abiding conservatism' to the attitude of 'the liberal or radical thinker' who 'contrasts an ideal state with a real state'<sup>37</sup>. While many Marxists are trained to attach the 'conservative' label to anything which falls short of their own revolutionary spirit, conflict theorists readily apply it to those among their adversaries who –

they say – emphasize 'order' over and above 'change'. But Durkheim's reformist sociology simply does not fit these labels.

Interestingly, Alvin Gouldner's views on Durkheim are peculiarly unsettled and contradictory: they represent a kind of transition towards the more properly Marxist standpoint adopted by Zeitlin or Therborn. His 1958 Introduction to Durkheim's *Socialism* notes the 'tendency to overemphasize Durkheim's Comtean heritage' (especially due to the interpretation of Parsons), thematizes the polemic *against* Comte and the convergences with Marx, and ends up by conceiving of Durkheim's work as an effort to mend the rift between Marxism and Comteanism – a compromise which leads him back to Saint-Simon. In *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970) however, the rise of Durkheimian functionalism is associated with a 'loss of historical imagination' and a curtailment of the future-oriented perspective of early sociology that corresponds to the 'mature entrenchment of the middle class'. The 'qualified', critical functionalism of Saint-Simon is favourably contrasted with the unqualified functionalism of Comte, Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and Parsons – a tradition which has as its perduring theme 'the need for social order and moral consensus'. Gouldner thus substantially repeats the list of 'radical' prejudices about Durkheim which Coser had already formulated; going so far as to debunk Durkheim's critique of inheritance – which in the 1958 Introduction is still marshalled as proof of Durkheim's 'Marxian' leanings – as being *not really* 'dangerous to the present'. It looks as if Gouldner had first wanted to save Durkheim from Parsons in the early article, in order to recruit him to his own project of synthesizing Functionalism and Marxism; whereas in *The Coming Crisis* Durkheim is discharged without honour and instead held responsible for some of the more flagrant of Parsons' sins<sup>38</sup>.

A different picture emerges as soon as Durkheim's own efforts to mark off sociology from socialism are bracketed, and his reformist spirit and socialist leanings are taken more seriously as a result. His boundary-drawing exercises are then more usefully seen as expressing a deep and unresolved ambivalence<sup>39</sup> towards socialist theory and socialist practice. This is also Filloux's view. Durkheim, he says, could hardly be neutral in front of *this* particular object. While his 'sociology of socialism' was on the one hand designed to mark the distance between the reformist political project of sociology and the revolutionary changes which were implicit in socialist doctrine, socialism had also stood at the origin of the sociologist's vocation and of his project: it was 'le compagnon de route, l'allié concurrent mais naturel'<sup>40</sup>.

Durkheim's social and political theory might therefore be characterized

as a species of 'academic socialism' that closely approaches the (near-) contemporary revisionist efforts of party- and movement-bound socialists such as Jean Jaurès, Eduard Bernstein, and Hendrik de Man. It is an outwardly detached, 'sociological' presentation of some of the main themes discussed in works such as Jaurès' *L'esprit du socialisme*, Bernstein's *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus* or de Man's *Au delà du Marxisme*. The revisionist theme is perhaps most central and explicit in Durkheim's 1899 review of Merlino's *Formes et essence du socialisme* – although, to be sure, he only repeats some of the convictions arrived at as early as 1886 while reading Schäffle's *Quintessenz des Sozialismus*, which anticipated the revisionist critique of orthodox socialism by almost two decades. In the Merlino review Durkheim re-states his ambition to liberate the 'socialist idea' from a number of contestable and obsolete hypotheses which compromise it, and to bring it into harmony with the recent advances made by 'science'. Among these *impedimenta* are ranged the doctrine of historical materialism, the Marxist theory of value, the iron law (of wages), the primordial significance of class conflict, and the notion that the social question is equal to the question of the proletariat. Following Merlino's rhetorical distinction between a *socialisme des socialistes* and a *socialisme des choses* – which neatly harmonizes with his own distinction between 'ideas' and 'things' – it is laid down by Durkheim as a matter of principle that this 'objective' socialism of things has nothing to do with the spirit of revolution:

Il ne saurait donc être question de raser l'organisme social dans un jour de révolution et d'en édifier un autre, à nouveaux frais, sur les ruines du premier. Ce qu'il faut, c'est développer et augmenter ce qui existe ... Le rôle du socialisme est de hâter et de diriger cette transformation, non de faire un oeuvre destructive qui briserait les instruments mêmes de sa réalisation<sup>41</sup>.

This reformist *socialisme des choses*, then, is the socialism of one who still prefers to be known as a sociologist. As the reminiscencies of Marcel Mauss bring once again into focus, Durkheim's attitude towards socialism always remained ambivalent. Mauss notes that the young Durkheim arrived at his socio-political point of departure 'through personal inclination and in an atmosphere animated by political and moral interests' and that he never lost his fascination for the 'social question'. His early contributions to the *Revue philosophique* revolve around the subject of socialism; in that period, we find Durkheim consistently defending Schäffle's 'socialisme autoritaire' against mistranslations and misinterpretations. The 'Note' from 1893 was expanded into the lecture course of 1895–96 on Sismondi, Saint-Simon, and the Saint-Simonians; it would have been

supplemented by courses on Fourier and Proudhon (which Durkheim prepared for the academic year 1896–97), and courses on Lassalle, Marx, and German *Kathedersozialismus*. The project was abandoned in 1896 when Durkheim founded *l'Année sociologique*, but he always regretted the interruption.

Although the topic itself is therefore irrepressible in his writings, Durkheim chose to subject socialism to a 'scientific' ideology-critique from a quite early date. The original plan (1881) of what would finally be published in 1893 as *De la division du travail social* was called 'Rapports entre l'individualisme et le socialisme', being a little later changed into 'Rapports de l'individu et de la société'. As Mauss reports, Durkheim, while writing the first draft of *De la division*, gradually came to see that the solution of the 'abstract' problem of the relationship of individualism and socialism 'belonged to a new science, sociology'. Thenceforth, Durkheim tended to consider the doctrine of socialism 'from a purely scientific point of view, as a fact which the scholar should look upon coldly, without prejudice, and without taking sides ...'; for Durkheim, it was a question of 'explaining an ideology'<sup>42</sup>.

However, the change of subject title, and the dropping of the -isms reflected not so much a change of interest or subject-matter as a change of intellectual *tactic*. The move from a politically motivated comparison of *rival ideologies* to a scientific appreciation of *social facts* was to some extent diversionary, since the relationship – and possible synthesis – of both isms remained a lifelong preoccupation of Durkheim; whose strategy appears rather aimed at *upgrading* his original problematic (and *concealing* it) by presenting it as both more original and more scientifically detached. Hence, it would be well to inquire whether Durkheim's early distanciation was perhaps a matter of personal and political *temperament* rather than a disinterested application of cold method; whether, in short, the scientific attitude should not rather be seen as a rationalization of the prejudicial and embarrassing situation of not-being-able-to-take-sides in well-demarcated terrain. Mauss records that, in spite of his sympathies for socialism, Durkheim nevertheless 'never gave himself to it', being repelled by organized socialism's 'violent nature, its class character – more or less purely workingmen's – and therefore its political and even politician-like tone'. Though defiantly carrying *l'Humanité*, the socialist paper founded by his friend and admirer Jaurès and by pupils such as Lévy-Bruhl, Simiand, and Mauss, to his lecture courses at the Sorbonne; though publishing in socialist journals (such as the *Notes critiques-sciences sociales* published by Herr and Simiand), and being generally seen as 'a certain kind of socialist, with a particular allegiance, that of the Jaurèsian reformists'<sup>43</sup>, Durkheim remai-

ned at most a fellow-traveller, a 'politician without party', who always refused to submit to 'a party of political discipline'.

Nevertheless it would be to misread and misjudge Durkheim if we adapted his own view that this commitment was nothing but a scientific one. As Mauss writes, the course on Socialism satisfied not simply an intellectual, but also a *moral* demand. Durkheim 'sought to take a stand and to justify it...'; undertaking these studies to 'justify himself in his own eyes, in those of his students, and one day in the eyes of the world'<sup>44</sup>. Whereas Lukes derives this need for self-justification from the 'contentious political climate of the time' and Durkheim's 'personal sense of intellectual responsibility'<sup>45</sup>, it also no doubt answered to a less exalted, more mundane need for emotional security and political righteousness, and to a craving for intellectual distinction and scientific certainty. For Lukes, as for Mauss, underlying motives such as these appear only to have influenced the *giving* of the course, not to have determined its method, or its dual 'political' objective of scientific demarcation between *and* imperialist absorption of socialism by sociology. In this respect, they remain obedient to Durkheim – who precisely managed to muffle wordly motives such as these in the bag of unbiased science. The lecture course of Socialism, instead, represents a sustained attempt to justify a personal and political decision to remain aloof from *existing* socialism by the impersonal means of science, without having to relinquish the ultimate ambition to establish an improved version of it.

There is thus good reason to see Durkheim's ambivalent distinction between sociology and socialism as an episode in the 'original accumulation' of (Durkheimian) scientific capital; establishing at once a 'property' claim concerning a distinct theoretical terrain and an exclusive certainty claim vis-à-vis the produce of its cultivating labours. A great many of the contradictions, detours, and diplomacies in Durkheim's pattern of argumentation become more intelligible as soon as this dual, quasi-political motive of appropriation and 'certification' is held in view. Durkheim's commitment is not simply to 'science' but to an underlying moral and political project (what Filloux and Lacroix have called his *project originnaire* or *vocation originelle*) which is dressed up as science in order to serve the creation and solidification of intellectual and professional capital. The existential plight of the fellow-traveller, the sympathetic but reticent outsider, is rationalized into a posture of scientific detachment, and skilfully converted into the fiduciary coinage of originality and objectivity. The outsider's commitment, however, is not the abolition of partisanship but only a different form of it. The difference is gradual, not polar. Durkheim refrained from joining the socialist camp because he felt that his priorities

were differently arranged: his was a will to gain *intellectual* or *academic* rather than *political* power, a will to found a *school* rather than a *state*. Or at least he felt that the school should be founded *first*<sup>46</sup>.

## Notes

1. For theories of 'cultural' and 'scientific' capital see Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1979; Pierre Bourdieu, 'The specificity of the scientific field and the social conditions of the progress of reason', *Social Science Information*, XIV-6, 1975; Raymond Murphy, 'The Struggle for Scholarly Recognition. The Development of the Closure Problematic in Sociology', *Theory and Society*, Vol 12, No. 5, Sept. 1983. An earlier interpretation of Durkheim's project along these lines is to be found in Dick Pels, 'The Project as Object. Durkheimian 'Politics of Knowledge' As Seen By a Relativist', Dutch version in *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift*, 10:1, mei 1983. This interpretation owes much to Paul Roazen, *Freud and His Followers*, New York, 1975. It also agrees with Steven Lukes' important remarks on Durkheim's 'politics of theory' in his Introduction to the new translation of *The Rules of Sociological Method*, MacMillan, London and Basingstoke, 1982. Interestingly, the 'economic, vocabulary of 'cultural capital'-theory and the 'political' vocabulary of 'politics of knowledge'-theory (which is also employed by Foucault) are virtually interchangeable. For a perspective on this issue see my forthcoming dissertation *Property or Power? A Study in Intellectual Rivalry*, University of Amsterdam, 1984.

2. Emile Durkheim, 'La sociologie et son domaine scientifique', in *Textes I. Eléments d'une théorie sociale*, Minuit, Paris, 1975, p. 16.

3. Emile Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, PUF, Paris, 1973, pp. 34-36.

4. H. Alpert, *Emile Durkheim and His Sociology*, New York, 1961 (1939), pp. 114ff. Lewis Coser substantially agrees with Alpert: Durkheim's definitions 'may not give us ... a "firm foothold on reality"', but they can give us a kind of privileged access to his own cast of mind', 'Durkheim's Conservatism and Its Implications for his Sociological Theory', in K. Wolff (ed.) *Emile Durkheim 1858-1917*, Ohio, 1960, pp. 219ff. Cf. also Steven Lukes, 'Introduction', *op. cit.* and Anthony Giddens, 'Durkheim, Socialism, and Marxism' in *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*, MacMillan, London and Basingstoke, 1982.

5. It is a prime example of what Bourdieu would describe as a 'strategy of distinction' – which is especially profitable because the strategy itself is not 'lived' as a strategy but as a disinterested journey towards truth: 'Le profit de distinction est le profit que procure la *différence*, l'écart, qui sépare du commun. Et ce profit direct se double d'un profit supplémentaire, à la fois subjectif et objectif, le profit de désintéressement: le profit qu'il y a à se voir – et à être vu – comme ne cherchant pas le profit, comme totalement désintéressé'. Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, p. 10.

6. Marcel Mauss, 'Introduction to the First Edition', Emile Durkheim, *Socialism*, ed. Alvin W. Gouldner, Collier-MacMillan Ltd., London, 1958. Robert Nisbet, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim*, New York, 1974, pp. 152-54. Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim. His Life and Work*, Harmondsworth, 1975, p. 249. It is noteworthy that Lukes, who so carefully records Durkheim's closeness to socialism and other contemporary ideologies, does not extend this into a critical analysis of his theoretical views on socialism or his 'politics of definition' with regard to it. This is partly redeemed by his discussion in the Introduction to *The Rules* (1982), which, in my view, does not so much read as an articulation of views already implicit in his earlier biography, but rather as a move towards a more consistently critical view of Durkheim's theories as a whole.

7. Hubert Bourgin, *De Jaurès à Léon Blum. L'Ecole Normale et la politique*, Paris, 1938, p. 215.

8. Emile Durkheim, *Socialism*, 1958, pp. 39, 51-2.

9. Cf my 'Het Project als Object', 1983, pp. 57ff.

10. Emile Durkheim, 'Cours de science sociale', *La science sociale et l'action*, intr. et prés. de J.-C. Filloux, PUF, Paris, 1970, p. 85 (referred to in the following as SSA).

11. 'Les études de science sociale', SSA, p. 225.

12. *Règles*, pp. 140; 26.

13. Hubert Bourgin, *Le socialisme universitaire*, Paris, 1942, p. 73.

14. *Socialism*, p. 40.

15. Cf also 'Socialisme et science sociale', SSA, pp. 236ff.

16. *Socialism*, pp. 41-2.

17. Bourgin, *De Jaurès à Léon Blum*, p. 470.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-220.

19. Bourgin, *Le socialisme universitaire*, p. 78.

20. *Socialism*, p. 55 (my emphasis).

21. Emile Durkheim, 'Note sur la définition du socialisme', SSA, p. 227. The point was also made by Fouillée in *Le socialisme et la sociologie réformatrice*, Paris, 1909, p. 21. There is an extraordinary parallelism between this book and Durkheim's courses on socialism, which were then largely unknown.

22. *Socialism*, pp. 51, 45.

23. *Socialism*, pp. 57ff. This thesis is repeated in Durkheim's 1899 review of Merlino's *Formes et essence du socialisme* (1898), in Emile Durkheim, *Textes III*, ed. Victor Karady, Paris, Minuit, 1975, p. 169: 'Ce serait notamment un progrès considérable, et dont tout le monde profiterait, si le socialisme renonçait enfin à confondre la question sociale avec la question ouvrière. La première comprend la seconde, mais la déborde ...'

24. Cf. Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, pp. 31ff; also Melvin Richter, 'Durkheim's Politics and Political Theory', in Wolff (ed.), p. 189.

25. 'Note sur la définition du socialisme', p. 234.

26. *Socialism*, pp. 54, 56.

27. Jean-Claude Filloux, *Durkheim et le socialisme*, Genève, 1977, p. 267.

28. *Socialism*, p. 56. The earlier definition which is found in the 'Note' (1893)

presses another of Durkheim's preferences upon the reader: 'Le socialisme est une tendance à faire passer, brusquement ou progressivement, les fonctions économiques de l'état diffus, où elles se trouvent, à l'état organisé' (my emphasis). (SSA, p. 223). Again, Durkheim's urge for maximum generality interferes with his wish to promote his own moral favourite. Durkheimian sociology/socialism is squarely reformist, and abhors brusqueness and intemperance.

29. SSA, pp. 266, 179.

30. Note, p. 235.

31. *Socialism*, p. 72; Filloux, p. 283.

32. *Socialism*, p. 60.

33. P. Lapie, 'La définition du socialisme', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1894, pp. 199-204; commenting upon the Belot-Durkheim polemic, Lapie also concluded that the latter was 'géné dans ses recherches par une idée préconçue'. Cf. also J. E. S. Hayward, 'Solidarist Syndicalism: Durkheim and Duguit', *Sociological Review*, 1960, pp. 17-36 and 185-202, idem, 'Solidarity: The Social History of an Idea in Nineteenth Century France', *International Review of Social History*, IV, 1959, pp. 261ff.

34. Robert Nisbet, *op. cit.*; Lewis Coser, *op. cit.*; I. Zeitlin, *Ideology and the Development of Sociology*, New Jersey, 1968; Göran Therborn, *Science, Class, and Society*, NLB, London, 1976.

35. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*, The Free Press, 1968, p. 310 n. 1. Cf. Giddens' remark that Parsons, in this respect, 'seems entirely wide of the mark', *Profiles and Critiques*, p. 119.

36. Robert Nisbet, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

37. Lewis Coser, *op. cit.*, pp. 216, 214.

38. Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, Heinemann, London, 1970, pp. 107, 113, 117-18.

39. Also suggested by Melvin Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

40. Filloux, pp. 259-60, 304ff.

41. Emile Durkheim, *Textes III*, pp. 163, 165, 169.

42. Marcel Mauss, 'Introduction', p. 33.

43. Hubert Bourgin, *Le socialisme universitaire*, pp. 75-76; cf. Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, ch 17; H. P. M. Goddijn, *Sociologie, socialisme en democratie*, Boom, Meppel, 1973, pp. 94ff.

44. Mauss, p. 35.

45. Lukes, p. 248.

46. Emile Durkheim, 'Cours de science sociale', in SSA, p. 110.