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Émile Durkheim between Gabriel Tarde and Arnold van Gennep: founding moments of sociology and anthropology

This article will situate Durkheim's work by revisiting two debates that influenced his attempt to define and give direction to sociology and anthropology: the debates between Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde and the debates between Durkheim and Arnold van Gennep. The battle between Tarde and Durkheim has in recent years been the object of several conferences and publications. This has happened alongside a much needed Tarde revival in sociology. However, Tarde was only one of Durkheim's opponents. For a long period, following Tarde's death in 1904, Arnold van Gennep represented the strongest critique of Durkheim's project. This 'debate' is little known among anthropologists and social scientists. The aim of this article is to situate Durkheim and the birth of the social sciences in France between both of these two figures. The aim is therefore also to bring together two disciplinary debates that for too long have been kept artificially separate in our understanding of Durkheim as 'founding father' of both anthropology and sociology. Arnold van Gennep and Gabriel Tarde opposed Durkheim independently from the perspectives of anthropology and sociology, but also from what can be reconstructed as a shared 'philosophy' of relevance still today. The article will discuss how so, and will highlight the convergences between the critiques of Durkheim offered by Tarde and van Gennep.

Key words anthropological theory, Arnold van Gennep, Émile Durkheim, Gabriel Tarde, individual/society, methodology, social theory

On pourrait se demander jusqu'à quel point la société, ce long rêve collectif, ce cauchemar collectif si souvent, vaut ce qu'elle coûte de sang et de larmes, si cette discipline douloureuse, ce prestige illusoire et despotique, ne servait précisément à affranchir l'individu en suscitant peu à peu du plus profond de son cœur son élan le plus libre, son regard le plus hardi jeté sur la nature extérieure et sur lui-même, et en faisant éclore partout, non plus les couleurs d'âme voyantes et brutales d'autrefois, les individualités sauvages, mais des nuances d'âme profondes et fondues, aussi caractérisées que civilisées, floraison à la fois de l'individualisme le plus pur, le plus puissant, et de la sociabilité consommée. (Gabriel Tarde, closing sentence of the 1895 preface to *Les Lois de l'Imitation* [Laws of Imitation])

In his book on Durkheim, Steven Lukes reminds us that Arnold van Gennep was Durkheim's most fierce opponent: 'The most devastating of Durkheim's anthropological critics was the great ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, who criticised *The Elementary Forms* on both empirical and theoretical grounds' (Lukes 1985: 524). Lukes equally discusses how from within sociology the most persistent and fierce criticism of Durkheim came from Gabriel Tarde.

This article wishes to bring together those two criticisms and point to their parallels. It argues that Tarde and van Gennep, taken together, identify weaknesses

and problems in Durkheim's approach to data, methodology and his understanding of society. However, the aim is not simply to signal weaknesses in the work of Durkheim, but also, and just as importantly, to point to the value of the alternative approaches taken by Tarde and van Gennep. The discipline of anthropology has now been through decades of self-criticism and ritual overcoming of 'classical anthropology'. This critique has gone together with a tendency to search for theoretical novelty among literary critics and post-structural theorists, overlooking what might be found in our own backyard. While we have been sharp in our critique of disciplinary forefathers, we have given much less credit to exactly those figures who recognised the limits of functionalism and 'naïve scientism', much before post-modernism or post-structuralism were invented. Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904) and Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) are two of these figures.

Tarde and van Gennep were both sidelined by the Durkheimian school, and the merit of their work is still awaiting a more thorough recovery. The argument that follows therefore does not endorse Steven Lukes' assessment that Tarde's explanatory framework was poor and superficial (Lukes 1985: 303) and that for Tarde 'everything stemmed from the individual' (1985: 303). This was Durkheim's (and also Bouglé's) critique of Tarde, one we can no longer afford to blindly reproduce. Nor does it share Lukes' assessment (1985: 524, fn 35) that Durkheim and his followers simply did not take Arnold van Gennep seriously. It is certainly true that van Gennep to a large extent was excluded from French intellectual life; he lectured at various universities, but never in France. However, based on the argument that follows it seems more plausible to suggest that this exclusion happened exactly *because* van Gennep's critique of Durkheim was well founded, precise and went straight to the heart of Durkheim's entire academic project of creating a solid social science based on empirical facts.

Recent years have seen a return to the work of Gabriel Tarde (Candea 2010; Latour and Lepinay 2010; Szokolczai and Thomassen 2011; Wydra 2012). This has involved a revisiting of the debates between Tarde and Durkheim. Part of this article will indeed refer to the main points of that debate, however it is beyond the limits of this argument to fully discuss its wider relevance to contemporary social theory. What I will try to demonstrate is that the Tarde–Durkheim debate can be understood and contextualised by another debate that is largely unknown to contemporary social theorists and that is in fact hardly known even within anthropology: that between Durkheim and Arnold van Gennep.

Van Gennep became known in Anglo-Saxon anthropology after 1960 with the translation of *Rites de Passage*. Rodney Needham and Edmund Leach, supported by Evans-Pritchard, inspired the translation of the most important classics by French anthropologists. The interest in French ethnology was very much due to the high status that Claude Lévi-Strauss and his structuralist approach had attained. Lévi-Strauss had recognised the value of van Gennep's early work in his book on totemism (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 4). In a short essay on ritual, Leach stated that 'van Gennep's schema has proved more useful than Durkheim's' (1968: 522). Lévi-Strauss' acknowledgement of van Gennep is not strange, for van Gennep always insisted that ceremonial patterns should be examined as wholes and that comparison should be based upon similarities in structure rather than upon content. Moreover, van Gennep paid great attention to systems of exchange, and may have inspired both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss more than has so far been realised. Chapter 3 in *The Rites of Passage* is entirely dedicated to ritualistic exchange of words, gestures, services, goods, slaves and wives. In an article from 1974,

Senn concluded that van Gennep ‘deserves a place as an early and significant structural folklorist’ (Senn 1974: 242).

Yet while on various occasions Leach, Needham (1967), and Evans-Pritchard (1960) started to question why van Gennep had not been held in higher regard within French anthropology (‘an academic disgrace’, as Needham put it; 1967: xi), they never went deeper into the question. Victor Turner’s discovery of van Gennep’s work, important as it was, mostly concentrated on rites of passage, without engaging with his larger anthropological project. The fact is that van Gennep is known outside folklore almost exclusively via *The Rites of Passage*. The Introduction to *The Rites of Passage* was written by Kimball; it has remained the only overall attempt to introduce Arnold van Gennep’s work to Anglo-Saxon anthropologists. This is perhaps unfortunate. Kimball identified van Gennep as a member of a generation of French sociologists inspired by positivism, and suggested that van Gennep be seen as an example of French scholars like Mauss, Hubert and Durkheim who were collectively developing a functionalist approach (Kimball 1960: vii). This contextualisation of van Gennep’s work is misleading: van Gennep was indeed inspired by ‘positivism’ and involved in developing a scientific approach, but it was not really ‘functionalist’, and it happened in a struggle *against* Durkheim. Therefore, while the publication of the book in English made van Gennep a ‘new classic’ with half a century of delay, Kimball’s Introduction certainly did not facilitate a proper reception. It bypassed how and why van Gennep had been ostracised by the academic world, and how his project differed from that of Durkheim and his followers. The Introduction does not place the book within van Gennep’s academic and intellectual trajectory. That trajectory has not even today been fully reconstructed,¹ while van Gennep’s career from the 1920s would remain reserved to the narrow circles of mainly French folklorists. Van Gennep’s work, just as Tarde’s, deserves more attention.

Tarde and van Gennep were not close friends or allies. They belonged to different generations and lived only a very few years in Paris at the same time, from 1901 when van Gennep returned from Poland to Paris until 1904 when Tarde died. Tarde and van Gennep were indeed Durkheim’s most insightful and important opponents, but not at the same time, and not in the same way. The Tarde/Durkheim controversy started in the early 1890s (with Tarde’s review of *Division of Labour*) and lasted until Tarde’s death in 1904. With some accidental precision, van Gennep ‘replaced’ Tarde, as he for at least a decade after Tarde’s death kept pointing out the problems in Durkheim’s approach. This happened as Durkheim, with and via Mauss, ventured further into anthropology and religion, which was van Gennep’s field of expertise. 1904 was indeed also the year of van Gennep’s first book publication. In his second book, published in 1906, and in subsequent articles and reviews, van Gennep would become very explicit and pointed in his critique of Durkheim. The situation, however, was very different: whereas Tarde engaged the debates with Durkheim as an established figure and authority, 15 years older than Durkheim, van Gennep was 15 years younger than Durkheim and never established himself in French academia. This is partly why van Gennep’s critique is much less known.

1 For the literature on van Gennep, one can refer to the work of Belmont (1974), Zumwalt (1982), Zerilli (1998a). For a discussion of the relationship between van Gennep and the *Année Sociologique* group, see Belier (1994). The complete works of Arnold van Gennep were assembled and introduced by his daughter, Ketty van Gennep (1964).

It should therefore be stressed from the outset that Tarde and van Gennep discussed Durkheim's work in different periods and from different perspectives, e.g. from the vantage points of their disciplines and their quite different areas of empirical research. Their critique was not simply 'the same'. Yet it is exactly *because* their critiques touch upon Durkheim's work from different angles (disciplinary and empirical) that they can profitably be read together. In what follows I will consider the Tarde/Durkheim and van Gennep/Durkheim debates together, and how they relate to the use of sources and data, questions of methods and methodology, a general attempt to capture society/sociability and the relationship between individual and society. I will argue that their critiques of Durkheim complement and enrich each other and invite us to reconsider the foundations of social anthropological theory.

The battle for positions: career and employment

In today's academic landscape, when intellectuals wage battles against each other (they do!), it normally happens from established positions within different departments or universities. The contemporary social sciences are indeed characterised by diversity and a multiplicity of schools of thought with diverging approaches to theory, methodology and the *raison d'être* of one's discipline. In France toward the end of the 19th century the situation was different. Sociology had not really established as a discipline yet and there was still no chair at any university carrying that name. The same was the case for anthropology. Therefore, the battles between Durkheim, Tarde and van Gennep were certainly also very direct and concrete attempts to secure a job and a position within the French university system, and from such a position being able to shape and direct the embryonic social science disciplines. Here Tarde and van Gennep's destinies differed diametrically.

Tarde (1843–1904) had a very successful career. He was born in Sarlat, in Dordogne, France where he became a lawyer and *juge d'instruction*, following in his father's footsteps. He observed that particular crimes appeared to spread in waves through society as if they were fashions. It was this interest in 'waves' and patterns that led him toward the social sciences. Tarde intuited that the epidemiological aspect of criminal activity might be just one instance of a more general feature of the social world. From this observation, and through the publication of a series of articles and books, and in particular his main work, *The Laws of Imitation* (first published 1890), he developed this idea and outlined a general research programme for sociology, one that differed on all salient points from that of Durkheim.

In 1894 Tarde was named 'Director of Criminal Statistics' at the Ministry of Justice in Paris, based on the excellence of his work within comparative criminology and law. It was a prestigious position, and it also gave Tarde ample space and time to continue his academic career. While Tarde and Durkheim were not always direct competitors (also due to the age difference) they most certainly cast their eyes on the same position at least once. From 1887 Durkheim held a chair of education and social science at Bordeaux. Durkheim had applied to the chair of social philosophy at the *Collège* in 1897, without luck. In 1902 Durkheim was named chair of education at Sorbonne, but he was not yet full professor when their debate became a public affair in 1903 (see Vargas *et al.* 2008). In 1900 Tarde was appointed chair of modern philosophy at the *Collège de France*, much to Durkheim's anger. Durkheim wrote a letter to Léon where he expressed his

view: 'I deeply regret, for both sociology and philosophy, both of which have an equal interest in remaining distinct, a confusion which shows that many good minds still fail to understand what each should be' (as quoted in Lukes 1985: 304). To Durkheim, Tardé was simply not able to differentiate sociology from philosophy. But while alive, Tardé was both older and higher positioned than Durkheim. The road into oblivion started only after his death.

Arnold van Gennep's (1873–1957) story is very different. As Zumwalt plainly states, 'van Gennep's position outside French academic life can best be understood against the background of Durkheim's struggle to build and fortify his sociology' (1982: 8). Van Gennep simply never got an academic position in France, despite his impressive list of publications: the bibliography compiled by his daughter contains 437 titles (van Gennep K 1964). The only academic position van Gennep ever held was the (first ever) chair in Swiss ethnography at the University of Neuchâtel, from 1912 to 1915.

Van Gennep's relationship to Durkheim and his students was tight and important before it suffered a final split. Marcel Mauss played a crucial role in these relationships, and it might be said that he was the main mediating figure. Returning to France in 1901, after several years spent in Poland as a high-school teacher, Van Gennep studied *sciences religieuses* with Léon Marillier. Upon Marillier's sudden death in 1901, Marcel Mauss took up the chair left vacant. He therefore also became van Gennep's teacher and mentor, and closely followed van Gennep in the work towards his first book, his 'thesis', *Tabou et Totémisme à Madagascar*, published in 1904. In 1903, Marcel Mauss proofread and thoroughly commented upon the work, and in the preface van Gennep reserves his final thanks to 'my friend Marcel Mauss' (Zumwalt 1982: 4). Van Gennep was clearly a promising scholar, potentially very close to the Durkheimians. In *Rites of Passage*, published in 1909, van Gennep frequently referred to the works by Mauss, Hubert and Hertz. Mauss certainly knew all of van Gennep's writings. He wrote a critical review of *Tabou et Totémisme*, but van Gennep reacted very positively to the critique, and duly thanked Mauss for having signalled his errors of interpretation (Zumwalt 1982: 4).

Mauss wrote a short, critical review of *Rites de Passage* in *L'année Sociologique* (Mauss 1910), blaming van Gennep for presenting a random myriad of ethnographic and historical facts, 'une randonnée à travers l'histoire et l'ethnographie' (as quoted in Belier 1994: 148). Members of the Durkheimian school had a general tendency to criticise works (including Frazer's) that sought to argue a theoretical stance on the basis of a diversified empirical material, 'running through history and ethnography'. Yet Mauss' assessment is not fair to van Gennep's book, still rightly considered a classic today. It is also, contrary to what Mauss' commentary indicates, very elegantly organised into chapters that deal with ritual passages from birth to death, in a variety of cultures; the narrative of van Gennep's book is structured as a life cycle into which the indeed very rich ethnographic data are placed – with analytical precision and conceptual clarity. Mauss himself would come to follow a very similar procedure in his later works on gift-giving (1990) and personhood. It is difficult to assess whether Mauss' critical 1910 review actually expressed Mauss' own reading, or whether he had felt forced into defending a Durkheimian position – a position that he himself would later start to question.

To some extent it was Mauss more than Durkheim who was in direct competition with van Gennep. They were of the same age, and had studied anthropology in the same period. They shared interest and engagement with British anthropology (including the work of Frazer), and their research interests were almost identical. In 1908 van Gennep created his own Journal, *La Revue des Études Ethnographiques et Sociologiques* (*Revue*

d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie from 1910), in which he published frequently, and which was an open competitor to *L'Année sociologique*, founded by Durkheim 10 years earlier. They were also direct or indirect competitors for the limited job market in Paris and France. They were competing candidates for a chair at the *Collège* in 1907 (Fournier 2006: 150) and when Van Gennep sought (in vain) nomination for a chair at the *Collège* again in 1909, Mauss' name was circulating as well.

In 1913, Mauss positively reviewed van Gennep's Algerian ethnography (Zumwalt 1982: 4). Mauss praised van Gennep for the incredible ethnographic effort and the analytical precision found in the work; this was exactly what van Gennep pointed out as fatal weaknesses in Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (hereafter EFRL). 1913 was also the year when van Gennep published his highly critical review of EFRL in *Mercur*, which was equally formulated as an attack on that Durkheimian school to which Mauss belonged (van Gennep 1913a). Yet while Mauss and van Gennep may have disagreed on a series of theoretical and methodological issues (see Zumwalt 1982: 4), they shared the same passion for ethnographic studies, and they seem to have never broken their dialogue in any final way. In the 1930s, when Mauss had become chair at the *Collège*, van Gennep was still fighting to secure some kind of stable income for his old age. Van Gennep would seek Mauss' support for the creation of a chair in French and comparative folklore at the *Collège* or solicit his help towards a position as director of study in religion or folklore (Fournier 2006: 300). These projects failed as well, but it seems safe to suggest that Mauss and van Gennep maintained a professional respect for each other throughout their life.

At the same time, from the 1920s onwards van Gennep had become a marginalised figure in French academia. *L'Année Sociologique* stopped reviewing his work, and to some extent van Gennep gave up the fight. By then, and after having for a while tried out a career in Southern France as a chicken breeder, van Gennep concentrated exclusively on French folklore. This was not an abandoning of anthropology. Van Gennep never perceived folklore and ethnology to be different disciplines. Rather, it was probably a recognition that this was the only way in which he could make at least a limited impact and get published in French. Without ever holding an academic position in France, van Gennep would later become known as the father of French folklore. His relevance for anthropology and sociology was practically annulled until Victor Turner 'discovered' van Gennep in 1963 (for further discussion see Thomassen 2009).

However, before van Gennep was definitively sidelined, he had indeed tried to influence French academic life and the establishment of ethnology/anthropology from within. Besides the creation of an academic journal, a second initiative indicative of van Gennep's aborted attempt to create a new ethnographical/sociological science was a major conference held at Neuchâtel in the summer of 1914. Van Gennep had started to plan this major event the moment he got his first (and only) academic position, in Switzerland in 1912. Around 600 social scientists attended the event from most corners of Europe, albeit with the conspicuous exception of British and American anthropologists (in his detailed reconstruction of the event, Zerilli indicates that the British stayed away intentionally; 1998a: 144). Van Gennep's intentions were evidently programmatic. The debate topics concerned basic conceptual and methodological questions as well as attempts to delineate boundaries with neighbouring disciplines, continuing thus the Tarde/Durkheim debates, but now with respect to anthropology. Marcel Mauss gave a paper on taboo among the Baronga as a leading member of one of the French delegations. On behalf of Durkheim, Mauss was, in that very period,

preparing a plan for ethnographic studies in France, and certainly understood the importance of van Gennep's project. Van Gennep's ambition was to establish the framework for a new disciplinary formation with an international reach. In this he failed. World War I broke out, and within a year van Gennep was once again without a job: in 1915 he was expelled from Switzerland after criticising the Swiss authorities for their pro-German attitudes and lack of neutrality. His Journal closed down as well. Realising van Gennep's outcast position in French intellectual life, yet well aware of his intellectual brilliance, his friends would come to know him as 'the hermit of Bourg-la-Reine' (Zumwalt 1982). He worked in solitude and as an independent scholar for most of his life.

The search for scientific data

Durkheim wanted to establish sociology as a scientific discipline. In his programmatic works he was very explicit about how this should take place (1951, 1982). The successful implementation of the project hinged upon the use of hard scientific data to support hypothesis and theory. In his empirical works, Durkheim searched for such data within two fields: suicide statistics in France and Europe and, later, ethnographic data on religion and totemism among the Australian Aborigines. The first set of data was used to write *Suicide* (published in 1897), which is routinely seen as the first scientific book in sociology, using data and clear-cut typologies to sustain theoretical explanation; the second source of data was used to write *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (published in 1912), Durkheim's mature work where he states his universal theory of both knowledge and religion, and still a main reference point for the study of religion today (Durkheim 1995). Let us shortly look at the facts in play within both areas.

Durkheim did not gather his own data on suicide: they were given to him by Tarde. There is every indication that Tarde was upset about Durkheim's extremely harsh treatment of him in *Suicide*. Tarde wrote an extensive commentary on the book in July 1897, shortly after its publication. For reasons we can only guess at, Tarde chose not to publish his response to Durkheim. The handwritten notes were transcribed and published quite recently by Besnard and Borlandi (see Tarde 2000). Durkheim had himself anticipated that he would engage in no further discussion with Tarde (see 1898 letter written to Léon quoted in Lukes 1985: 303–4), so no open debate followed. This only makes Tarde's comments more interesting to consider.

As Tarde noted, 'his [Durkheim's] last work seems directed against *me*' (Tarde 2000, 1–14). Tarde's first sentence says that this book is Durkheim's presentation of his general ideas and positions, but also, at the same time, an attempt to tear apart ('pulveriser' in French) Tarde's own work. And that is true. In *Suicide*, Durkheim attempts to give Tarde's entire approach a final blow. Whenever Durkheim cites Tarde, it is systematically in order to show why Tarde is so fundamentally mistaken. Durkheim thanked Tarde in his foreword and for a good reason: it was Tarde who as 'Chief of the Bureau of Legal Statistics' had given Durkheim access to the statistical material that made up the entire empirical case. However, in his substantial discussion, Durkheim sets up Tarde in a wholly negative way, and most explicitly in Chapter Four, 'Imitation' (Durkheim 1951: 123–43). This is the chapter that precedes Durkheim's own analysis: Durkheim considers 'imitation' a last 'obstacle' to overcome, one final psychological 'error' to brush aside. But here Durkheim raises the stakes. He is not only saying that

Tarde is wrong with respect to suicide: he decides that the study of suicide must be considered a test case for Tarde's entire approach. If imitation does not apply *here*, then it can hardly apply *anywhere*. And hence, after 'proving' imitation irrelevant to the study of suicide (mostly via a forcing of definitions and then a twisting of the empirical material that Tarde had submitted to him), Durkheim can state his more general conclusion that underlines the 'weakness of the theory that imitation is the source of all collective life' (Durkheim 1951: 141). The chapter then ends (p. 142) with a ridiculing of Tarde's ideas (here Tarde is not even mentioned by name, but the implicit references are clear to everyone) as untenable and 'metaphysical', representing the worst kind of non-scientific 'hypothesis' that serious social science needs no longer bother with. With Tarde thus eliminated, Durkheim starts again to erect his own analytical construct as 'proper science'.

Besides disagreeing with Durkheim's basic understanding of imitation ('an absurdity', says Tarde), in his written notes Tarde also denounces Durkheim's set up: why on earth would Durkheim choose as a 'decisive' test for Tarde's theory a case study that Tarde himself had never really discussed? Why not test it against the social phenomena that Tarde himself *had* in fact indicated as strongly imitative (crime, language, art, religion)? Durkheim's critique was in a very real sense not fair. The degree to which subsequent commentators have rehearsed the Durkheim/Tarde 'discussion' on this false premise is startling indeed.

So what about Durkheim's own treatment of the data? Tarde is not entirely dismissive of Durkheim's work. However, he does raise a series of very serious question marks. Was Durkheim not pressing the data into his 'theory', rather than letting them speak their own language? How can Durkheim so easily bracket off imitative suicides in the military as a 'different case'? Tarde admits that he has no expertise in the specific field. But he finds that Durkheim forces the numbers into geographic units and typologies that seem questionable. Tarde is far from convinced about Durkheim's 'proof' that suicides have nothing to do with imitation. And here of course it must be stated very clearly, albeit with the privilege of hindsight, that Durkheim was simply *wrong*: suicides do sometimes come in 'waves' that cannot simply be reduced to shared social circumstances. Moreover, in these internet times, Tarde's intuition that the way in which suicides or crimes were reported in the press, achieving media attention, could cause contagion and influence especially young people has hardly ever been more relevant (see Phillips *et al.* 1992 for a review of literature and data on the 'Werther effect' as linked to media reporting).

A parallel critique of Durkheim's treatment of sources and data would be launched against Durkheim by van Gennep some years later, this time with reference to *EFRL*. For readers who know little about van Gennep, two factors must be mentioned. First, and in a very general sense, van Gennep possessed an amazing and perhaps unrivalled knowledge of ethnographic data in the early 20th century. In his many publications, including *Rites de Passage*, van Gennep showed an intimacy with the theoretical and empirical literature on religion and society in all major European languages, including French, German, English, Russian, Italian, Polish and Flemish (and other of the 18–20 languages that he mastered). Besides having a natural talent for languages, and being raised in what was probably a bi- or tri-lingual family environment, van Gennep also developed truly impressive linguistic skills via his non-academic jobs. At a young age, van Gennep joined the diplomatic service, and from 1897 to 1901 he occupied a teaching

position at a Polish *lycée*. In the examination process for the job, van Gennep translated from both Latin and Greek into Russian. From 1901 to 1908 van Gennep was head of translations at the French Ministry of Agriculture, and to supplement his income he translated foreign-language works into French. Translation and publication were van Gennep's main source of income for much of his life. Van Gennep was interested in linguistics also at the theoretical level. Like Tarde he paid attention to etymology. Van Gennep was truly passionate about ethnographic details, real living details, artefacts, art techniques, paintings, beliefs, rites, production techniques, legends. He published widely on highly specialised topics, from weaving techniques to pottery making, and animal and property markings.² He read everything available to him, in every existing anthropological and ethnographic journal he could get access to. Belmont (1974: 68) probably goes too far when he states that, prior to 1914, Arnold van Gennep was the *only* real ethnologist in France – but he was certainly one of Europe's leading ethnologists. Van Gennep (again in contrast to Durkheim) conducted several rounds of fieldwork in Algeria (for a contextual analysis see Siboud 2004). Moreover, much of his nine-volume work on French folklore built on ethnographic data he gathered meticulously while travelling France (van Gennep 1958).

Second, van Gennep held expertise in exactly the empirical field that Durkheim pretended to master in EFRL. Van Gennep had in 1906 published (in Paris) a book on Australian religion, entitled *Mythes et légendes d'Australie*. Moreover, EFRL carried the subtitle *Le système totémique en Australie*, and van Gennep had in 1904 published his first book on exactly totemism, *Tabou et Totémisme à Madagascar*, proofread by Mauss, and containing a theoretical discussion of totemism (a theme that van Gennep would return to in his 1920 publication, *L'état actuel du problème totémique*, where he distinguished 41 theories of totemism and restated his own position). It was van Gennep who had translated Frazer's book on totemism into French. Quite astonishingly, in EFRL Durkheim 'forgot' to discuss van Gennep's work.³ In Book I, Chapter 5, where Durkheim undertakes 'a critical examination of the theories' [of totemism] van Gennep is not even mentioned in a footnote. Book III of EFRL attempts to outline 'The Principal Modes of Ritual Conduct'. In 1909 van Gennep had published *Rites de passage*, proposing a universal typology of rites and beliefs and arguing for the centrality of ritual. Given the aims of EFRL, it would have been most natural to at least make mention of that book – not a word. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this omission was related to academic power politics. It is a qualified guess that Marcel Mauss (who had

2 In one of van Gennep's short publications in *Man* (1909), he provides a one-page response to a question raised by a woman who had found a highly peculiar netting technique (netting without knots) among the Bushmen, asking the readers of *Man* whether similar techniques were to be found elsewhere. It becomes clear from van Gennep's response that in order to understand the peculiarity of the technique, he had emulated the netting technique with a rope in his home apartment. It is also clear that van Gennep happened to possess an encyclopaedic knowledge of net making.

3 Van Gennep is dismissively mentioned in a footnote to Book II, Chapter 2, with a reference to an article he published in 1908 on totemism and the comparative method (Durkheim, p. 136); van Gennep's book *Tabou et Totémisme* is mentioned (but not discussed) once, in a footnote to Book III, Chapter 1 (Durkheim, p. 324) as one of several works that document the contagiousness of the sacred. Durkheim does not consider how van Gennep further developed this point in his larger classification of rites undertaken in *Rites of Passage*. Moreover, even when Durkheim in Book II goes into some detail about myths and legends that underpin Australian totemic beliefs, *Mythes et légendes d'Australie* by van Gennep is not once referred to.

gained much knowledge of the Australian case via van Gennep's work) must have felt very perplexed about the whole situation.

So what did Van Gennep think about Durkheim's work on religion? In his review of *EFRL* (van Gennep 1913a), he plainly stated that Durkheim's views of primitive peoples and simple societies were 'entirely erroneous' (van Gennep in Zumwalt, 1982: 6). Van Gennep also said that Durkheim demonstrated a lack of critical stance towards his sources, collected by traders and priests, naively accepting their veracity. Van Gennep knew the sources, for he had used the same ones for his 1906 book (that Durkheim never quotes). Durkheim interpreted freely from dubious data. In other words, van Gennep was quite fundamentally challenging Durkheim on his empirical data and technical knowledge. This was no minor issue, since Durkheim's project and his very academic identity rested upon a reputation of being 'scientific' and empirically founded. What Durkheim knew of ethnography he mostly had from Mauss. Van Gennep, better than anyone else, was in a position to spot Durkheim's lack of expertise in ethnography, and Durkheim's tendency to press the ethnography into a prefabricated theoretical scheme. Durkheim's insistence upon using 'facts' and 'observable social phenomena' for theory building was simply not followed up in his own work.

Van Gennep was not alone in this critique. In August 1912 Radcliffe-Brown (who also knew the ethnographic material very well) wrote a letter to Mauss where he expressed his disappointment with Durkheim's superficial and erroneous treatment of the ethnographic data. Radcliffe-Brown, although praising the general approach taken by the Durkheimian school, wrote quite plainly 'that he [Durkheim] has misunderstood the real nature of Australian social organization'. Furthermore, Durkheim has also 'exaggerated the importance of the clan-emblem' (Radcliffe-Brown in Lukes 1985: 527). It should be remembered that Durkheim's book essentially argues how social organisation is the foundation of religious classification and cosmology; Durkheim's central notion of religion as 'self-worship' furthermore derives very directly from his analysis of the clan-emblem. Well, according to Radcliffe-Brown he was wrong. In his friendly letter to Mauss, Radcliffe-Brown expressed a wish that Durkheim's general ideas will start to spread in England, as they are either unknown or misperceived, but then adds: 'It is to be hoped that the new book will do something to cater this, but I am sorry, for that very reason, that it should contain much that I cannot help but regard as misinterpretation of the real facts' (in Lukes 1985: 528). So much for Durkheim's science built on solid facts. This authoritative statement came, not from an opponent, but from Durkheim's closest follower in Anglo-Saxon anthropology, and indeed the person who more than anyone else would establish Durkheimian functionalism as dominant paradigm in anthropology. In fact, this was a critique that Durkheim could not drown in silence. Durkheim wrote two letters to Radcliffe-Brown thanking him for sharing his views on science; Durkheim added that Radcliffe-Brown's critique made him realise that he should have a second look at the ethnographic data and reconsider his interpretation of it. That never happened (see Lukes 1985: 528–9). Despite the fact that part of van Gennep's critique was near-identical to that of Radcliffe-Brown, Durkheim never bothered to respond in that direction. Mauss had contributed significantly to Durkheim's book, and yet he mostly shied away from the debates that followed its publication. Mauss would later reveal that he himself had been unconvinced about some of Durkheim's positions (Fournier 2006: 162).

Methods and methodologies

The questions pertaining to sources and data evidently connected to issues of methods and methodology. Here the contrast between Tarde and Durkheim was the most salient one. As is well known, Durkheim kept accusing Tarde of being a ‘metaphysicist’, admittedly with literary skills but with a flawed understanding of empirical reality, and following a methodological approach narrowly and erroneously focused on the ‘individual’. These accusations have been reproduced in social science circles for now a century. How then, one might ask, could a ‘literary individualist’ end up as chief statistician at the Ministry of Justice, in France, Europe’s most ‘scientific state’? Now, the fact of the matter is of course that Gabriel Tarde was a statistician, and quite a sophisticated one. It was *exactly* as a statistician that Tarde managed to develop an approach that did not drown the individual in statistical ‘averages’. It is beyond the limits of this article to go into any detail here (see here Latour 2010; Latour and Lepinay 2009); suffice to say that while Tarde certainly possessed literary talent (his novel *The Underground Man* is quite an exceptional piece of work, and was introduced in laudatory terms by H.G. Wells in its English translation), and while he certainly developed a holistic philosophy of man and nature, his methodological approach was essentially quantitative. Tarde’s project was to link statistics to an analysis of social phenomena without reducing events and individualities to bodiless ‘aggregates’. Tarde indeed elaborated a scientific quantitative method, but without succumbing to the perennial temptation of emulating the methods of the allegedly ‘superior’ natural sciences. Durkheim’s own position is ambivalent: on the one hand he wants to borrow and implement the scientific method from the natural sciences; on the other hand he wants sociology to cut its ties completely from biology and physics. Tarde’s position is the reverse: ‘for him there exist only societies. Human societies are but a particular subset of these societies because they exist in so few copies. But since human societies are accessible through their most intimate features, social scientists have no need to let natural scientists dictate what their epistemology should be’ (Latour 2010: 147). As Tarde put it himself: ‘In social subjects we are exceptionally privileged in having veritable causes, positive and specific acts; this condition is wholly lacking in every other subject of investigation’ (1903: 1).

In fact, Tarde’s approach helps us to identify a serious shortcoming in Durkheim’s entire work, namely the still pervasive tendency to establish ‘norms’ from statistical averages – ‘external’ to the individual, *naturellement*. It is from this view that ‘pathologies’ become ‘normal’ from a Durkheimian perspective, as they actually serve to solidify (at least if kept at a certain level) norms. For Tarde this cannot be so. Norms must come from within, they must be felt, and this was exactly what he had argued about imitation in *Laws of Imitation*: imitation is not a mindless copying, but starts from the *soul*, moving from the inner to the outer.

In the debates with Tarde, one larger methodological question (arguably *the* major question) was how sociology should relate to other disciplines. Durkheim’s views are well known and he was very clear about them: sociology/anthropology had to establish their scientific status by totally decoupling themselves from surrounding disciplines, erecting their own edifice from scratch. For Durkheim, the main ‘adversaries’ were biology, philosophy, psychology and history. As Durkheim would stress again and again, ‘social facts need social explanations’. The relationship between sociology and its

neighbouring disciplines was the opening question to the famous Tarde/Durkheim duel in 1903: 'sociology's relationship to other sciences and disciplines'. It followed upon the 1902 theme on the relationship between sociology and psychology.

Durkheim started the debate by attacking Comte's sociology for its speculative, general and philosophical character (Tarde 1969: 136–40; see also Vargas *et al.* 2008). Tarde, however, was never a close follower of Comte. His entire approach was rather critical of Comte's evolutionary thinking. So Durkheim, instead of tackling directly the ideas of Tarde, rhetorically constructs a straw man which he then duly demolishes. At the same time, Durkheim himself offers in change a combination of pretty standard Comtean positivism and neo-Kantian philosophy. He starts by reasserting the extreme complexity of the social world, reiterating a call for studying only segments at a time – sociology 'must study each category separately', and thus 'approach the concrete realities via special research' (Tarde 1969: 137). Durkheim does not refer to the eventual need of bringing together these specialised studies. Thus, Durkheim indeed separates sociology from a wider field of knowledge and human experience.

In presenting his own ideas, Tarde did something quite different from simply reiterating the perspective of abstract philosophising that Durkheim attributes to Comte and his disciples. He starts by explicitly asserting that sociology should be a *science*, and not a philosophy, of social facts. However, this does not imply a radical polemic with philosophy, where scientific positivism overcomes metaphysical speculation. Sociology as science should be based on the comparative method; in fact, it should be a kind of meta-discipline, a 'comparison of comparisons' (Tarde 1969: 138; for further discussion see Szakolczai and Thomassen 2011).

Tarde also tackles Durkheim's stress on the move towards ever more specialised, separate studies. Tarde argues that while specialised studies are certainly necessary, sociology also should move at the same time towards unification, convergence and synthesis. Therefore, to Tarde sociology could not be separated from what he sometimes called the 'great tree of life'. Durkheim accepted the need for a synthesis, but came up with the standard self-justificatory positivistic argument that in the current state of science more special studies are needed, pushing the eventual synthesis into the indefinite future. This misses the point that Tarde continuously stressed in his methodological approach, namely that central to any genuine scientific investigation is a proper *rhythm* and *balance* between analysis and synthesis. Durkheim's position can serve, as it indeed did, as a justification of ever more narrow and myopic specialisation.⁴

Capturing the social

Clearly enough, the methodological debate here relates not only to how sociology and anthropology should relate to other disciplines: what was at stake was the very vision of the social, and therefore also belongs to questions of epistemology. It is on this point that Tarde and van Gennep come even more strikingly close to each other.

Arnold van Gennep's larger anthropological project is not widely known, and that is certainly also due to the fact that it shipwrecked. Van Gennep never became a

4 It was exactly this ritualism of specialised scholarship that van Gennep had exposed with much humour in *Les Demi-Savants*, published in 1912 (the English version appeared in 1967, translated by Needham as 'The Semi-gods').

founder of anthropology. But as indicated above, he did try. In many ways the project shared affinities with that of Durkheim and his students. Van Gennep wanted to create an empirical social science focused on the systematic, in-depth study of material and symbolic culture among living peoples (this was the definition of ethnology provided in van Gennep 1913b). In order to establish such a terrain, van Gennep found it necessary to free ethnology and ethnography from physical anthropology, and also from the study of history, or 'cette manie horrible de subordonner l'étude de présent à celle du passé' (van Gennep quoted in Zerilli 1998b: 152). For van Gennep, as for Durkheim, cultural and social practices could not be derived from their historical 'origin', but had to be placed in their present reality.

Like other writers of his generation, van Gennep also saw definition, classification and systematic comparison as crucial. He paid an almost manic attention to ethnographic facts. A new social science had to be both systematic and empirical. Exactly like Durkheim and Mauss, van Gennep lamented that the social sciences still needed to build up a rigour and systematic approach that would give them the prestige and applicability of the natural sciences. Yet van Gennep was also quite sceptical about certain usages of scientific positivism, and he strongly criticised the Durkheimians on exactly these lines. Van Gennep was highly critical of Durkheim's comparative method, which, according to him, failed to compare like with like. He instead proposed a social science methodology inspired by biology, 'une biologie sociologique', as he would call it. The 'biology' to which van Gennep referred was not simply an allusion to the authority and objectivity of natural science, but most of all a stress on the importance of *direct observation*, and systematic gathering of data leading, step by step, to theory building: van Gennep wanted social scientists to deal with *living facts*, rather than 'dead' and abstract social facts.

The differences between Durkheim and van Gennep become salient when comparing EFRL to *Rites de Passage*. In EFRL Durkheim established *a priori* categories as the units of his taxonomy, while van Gennep inferred these units from the structure of the ceremonies themselves. With respect to the larger role of ritual, Durkheim simply stressed the way in which rituals served to tie together individuals in mechanical social solidarity. For Durkheim, ritual represented the function by which individuals became socially determined as acting and thinking beings. This was the view that Radcliffe-Brown would adopt and that Turner would later react against. Durkheim distinguished between religion as collective and magic as private. Durkheim here missed the argument about rites that van Gennep stressed in *Rites of Passage*, namely the way in which they may act simultaneously at the individual and collective levels. Moreover, while neophytes undergo a process of undifferentiation as they are 'annulled' as persons in the separation rituals, ritual passages are clearly also crucial moments for a process of *differentiation*, of age groups, of genders, of status groups and of *personalities*. The use of specialised languages in ritual was to van Gennep a clear sign of this 'differentiating procedure' (1960: 169). In Durkheim's analysis, individuals simplistically dissipate into the social body.

Moreover, although not as explicitly as Tarde, van Gennep refused to radically 'branch off' the study of society from 'nature'. The point is implicitly present in *Rites of Passage*, and is embedded in the very closure of the book, worth quoting at length:

Finally, the series of human transitions has, among some peoples, been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the planets, and the phases of the moon.

It is indeed a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe. (1960: 194)

Here again the contrast to Durkheim is categorical: for him, human beings bestow order on the universe via social classifications of their own making, a clearly Neokantian position that Durkheim even tries to extend toward an empirical/social grounding of knowledge. To contrast, in *Rites of Passage* Van Gennep grounded the similarities in ceremonies in the very fact of *transition*. Transitions from group to group or from one social situation to the next are a ‘fact of existence’ (1960: 194). ‘The universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity’, said van Gennep (1960: 194). This rhymes perfectly with Tarde’s discussion of regularity and repetition.

It is useful here again to refer back to Tarde’s analysis of imitation. Tarde is certainly not saying that human beings are simply aping each other; Durkheim’s critique that ‘imitation’ is merely a psychological triviality and not a social fact is simply off the mark. However, Tarde is insisting that imitation is a process that *does* connect us to ‘nature’ and its regularities. Indeed, Tarde’s epistemology (1903: 1–13) starts from the notion of ‘regularity’ and ‘repetition’, in contrast not only with Durkheim, but also with ruling approaches in social philosophy and sociology that follows Kant’s cognitivism, including, of course, contemporary social constructivism. Kant argued that the world outside is hopelessly chaotic, and the real nature of things, the *Ding an sich*, is not accessible to our knowledge. All we can do is to create some concepts in our mind, in conformity with the presumed categories of the ‘transcendental mind’, and through these impose order on this confusing external reality. Tarde’s perception of things could not be more different. The social world, just as nature, is dominated by regularities, and the task of science is not to impose order on phenomena from the outside through abstract, mental, cognitive operations, rather to *recognise* the character and principles of this order. In doing so it is helped by the fact that the nature of this order is very similar in the diverse orders of reality: it is based on regularity and repetition. In the inorganic world repetitiveness is based on periodic and vibratory movements like waves; in living beings on heredity and genetics, while in social life on imitation (Tarde 1903, Chapter 1). These repetitive regularities are the basis of both order and change.

Imitation as a social form is only one mode of a universal phenomenon of repetition and rhythm that unites nature, material bodies, the alternations between light and dark, and ultimately the succession of life and death. The various orders of reality are built one upon the other, and do not simply replace and cancel each other. At the very start of his 1895 Preface to the second edition of *The Laws of Imitation*, Tarde claims that the assumption of an absolute separation between nature and culture, or the conscious and the unconscious, simply goes against the very spirit of science.⁵ However, Tarde

5 Tarde’s first sentence in his 1890 preface reads as follows: ‘In this work I have endeavoured to point out as clearly as possible the purely social side of human phenomena, as distinct from their vital and physical characteristics. It just happens, however, that the point of view which is helpful in noting this distinction is the very one which presents the greatest number of the closest and most natural analogies between the facts of society and the facts of nature’. He restates this synthetically in the second preface (1895) as an answer to criticism launched between the two editions: ‘I desired to unfold the purely sociological side of human facts, intentionally ignoring their biological side, although I am well aware that the latter is inseparable from the former’.

is *not* trying to model social science on biology or deducing from the biological to the social. He had indeed been fighting for decades to overcome exactly such attempts to explain the social by reference to biological features.⁶ Tarde suggests quite the opposite strategy: as we ourselves are part of human societies, it should actually be *more* simple to gain knowledge about the human social world than about any other aspect of external reality. Here the contrast with Durkheim, who explicitly defined social facts as those that are external to individual human beings, could hardly be greater.

The individual and the social

Durkheim saw 'individualism' as both an epistemological and a methodological 'enemy' to combat, always arguing for the primacy of society.⁷ Just as Tarde refused to accept an absolute distinction between nature and society, so he refused an absolute distinction between individual and society. This was another fundamental question where Tarde and van Gennep converged, although from different starting points.

Durkheim and Tarde confronted each other on various occasions debating exactly this central point. It is again not possible to go into full detail here. One occasion was provided by their discussion of Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Durkheim's own thesis, published in 1892, proposed a distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity; and much like Tönnies, Durkheim exemplified this division by considering two diverging types of punishment. Durkheim had reviewed Tönnies' work in 1889, and very critically so (Tönnies and Durkheim 1972). At the same time, Durkheim's ideas and concepts could be argued to rely quite heavily on the work of Tönnies. The debate over Tönnies' work was taken up again in 1895, where Tönnies' thesis was discussed by both Durkheim and Tarde in the same issue of *Revue Philosophique* (where Durkheim had also published his 1889 review). The book by Tönnies clearly held a central importance to both thinkers: its larger aim was to lay out the foundations of sociology as a science; its methodology relied upon statistical analysis and its interpretation; the entire argument had to do with a general grasp of social life, and the transformation of power and social relationships within a larger process of urbanisation and 'modernisation'.

The Tarde/Durkheim commentary centred on the relationship between the human 'will' and society, the individual and the social. Durkheim stated his position in a short article, 'Crime and Social Health', while Tarde made his positions clear with an almost identical title, 'Criminality and Social Health'. For Durkheim, 'social facts' were both independent from and exert influence upon the individual consciousness, not the other way round; for Tarde things were a little bit more complex, and he failed to see how sociological concepts could exist in total isolation from psychological factors. Given the fact that sociology textbooks still today position Tönnies as standing close

6 Tarde had voiced such critiques for example towards Lombroso and the entire Italian school of criminal anthropology, which was then trying to identify criminals on the basis of physical features. Crime, Tarde insisted, was a social phenomenon.

7 Belier (1994) argues that this difference in viewpoint was the reason why the Durkheimians could so easily disregard van Gennep. However, as also Marcel Mauss would come to realise, Durkheim's collectivist position was itself untenable. Rather than effectively sociologising 'Western individualism' (as Belier suggests), Durkheim simply transposed the 'closed self' to the level of society, replacing one extreme with another.

to Durkheim's sociology (and his notions of mechanical and organic solidarity), it is worth mentioning Tönnies' own reaction to the Tarde/Durkheim commentary.

Tönnies concurred with Durkheim that 'social facts' (a term that Tönnies considered identical to his own concept of 'social wills') are somehow independent from, and have a certain force over, individual consciousness. But, on the other hand, Tönnies said, Tarde 'is absolutely right when he calls sociological concepts which are released from all psychological foundation, frivolous and fantastic. In Durkheim, indeed, the psychological foundation is entirely missing' (Tönnies quoted in Deflem 1999: 103). Therefore, Tönnies situated himself between the extremes of 'sociologism' and 'psychologism', but in real fact he came very close to Tarde's position. Tönnies argued that the 'force' of social life over individuals, so stressed by Durkheim, is only an extreme case and not at all the general rule: 'the general is the reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) between, on the one hand, the individuals, and, on the other hand, a social will which is looked upon by them, conceived as substantially, and, therefore precisely, *created*' (in Deflem 1999: 103). Tönnies' position on the relationship between human will and social formations is almost identical to Tarde's focus on interdependencies and reciprocity, a search for a harmonious balance between 'potent individualism and consummate sociability'; and rather than positing the social as a given, they both agreed that what we need to explain is exactly the *formation* of the 'social will'.

In his later critique of Durkheim, van Gennep argued along the very same lines. Van Gennep insisted that individuals make choices and affect social situations in *any* kind of society, and this even so among the Australian clans discussed by Durkheim in EFRL. Van Gennep had critiqued Durkheim on this very point in the preface to his 1906 publication on Australian religion: 'In reality, just as with us, in the Australian tribes it is the individual who invents and proposes modifications... ' (van Gennep in Zumwalt 1982: 5). Van Gennep saw Durkheim's abstract and reifying tendency as an opponent to his own 'biological sociology'. His 1913 review of EFRL provided van Gennep the opportunity to restate his position. Durkheim, said van Gennep, claimed to have found the 'foundations of society' from a single religious institution (totemism), without realising that this was just *one* very specific type of classification (and hardly the 'first' or most elementary, even in an evolutionary sense), peculiar to this not-so-simple society. For the purposes of his theoretical construct, Durkheim had artificially reduced Australian society to a monocellular organism, devoid of agency:

Not having the sense of life, that is to say the biological and ethnographic sense, he makes phenomena and living beings into scientifically dissected plants, as in an herbarium (van Gennep in Zumwalt 1982: 5).

Conclusion

Starting from Durkheim's dubious treatment of sources and empirical data we have now, via the critiques of Tarde and van Gennep, entered the heart of the problem with Durkheim's sociology – and indeed perhaps of much contemporary social theory. Durkheim simply failed to capture exactly what he himself argues that sociology and anthropology should be about, namely the collective level and 'collective representations'. Where do such representations come from? How are they established?

How are they passed on? How do they interrelate with the individual? The parallels between the Tarde/Durkheim and the Durkheim/Arnold van Gennep debates are both strong and important here. Both thinkers saw the extent to which it was Durkheim himself, against all his proclamations, that had turned society into a 'metaphysical entity'. They were equally aware of the problematic dismissal of historical individuals as agents of society and social change. On this point, it might be better to give the last word to one very important 'Durkheimian', namely Marcel Mauss.

In his analysis of the Bolshevik revolution written between 1923 and 1925, Mauss argued that his assessment was of the Bolsheviks, but even so of his own Durkheimian analytical starting point: 'Would our dearest, most laboriously acquired and most ardently advocated ideas be proved or disproved in the process?' (Mauss 1992: 172). Disproved they were, and bloodily so (for further detail, see Thomassen 2012). But Mauss equally realised that Durkheim's ideas had somehow entered effective history. Mauss' startling conclusion was that there was a direct line of influence from Durkheim to Lenin. Durkheim's collectivist approach had indeed inspired leading socialists and revolutionary syndicalism around Europe (also via the mediating influence of Sorel). By the mid 1930s, Mauss had fully realised the 'tragic irony' involved. We, the founders of the theory of collective representation, Mauss wrote, 'were satisfied with a few allusions to crowd states, when something *quite different* was at stake' (see Mauss' 1936 letter to S. Ranulf in Gane 1992: 214–15, emphasis added).

Not only could Durkheim not really explain the very existence of collectively shared ideas and practices, he also had no tools to address the politically dangerous appeal implicit in his neo-Kantian positing of the social a priori. Imitation at a mass scale was spreading like fire exactly as Durkheim declared the role of imitation irrelevant to the social sciences. Mauss realised that what he himself had established as a 'Durkheimian position' was in fatal error. That great modern societies, emerging from the Middle Ages, could be made 'to turn around like children in a ring' was something that he and Durkheim simply had not foreseen.

The methodological and epistemological shortcomings of Durkheim therefore had a political relevance that Mauss would watch unfold with dread in the interwar period. Perhaps Mauss was thinking back, now and again, on Tarde's and van Gennep's earlier critiques. The problematic political aspects of Durkheim's collectivism had indeed been anticipated by Arnold van Gennep, and Mauss knew it. In the Introduction to his 1906 book on Australian religion, and referring to Durkheim's reductionist stance that simplified everything as a 'need of society', van Gennep wrote that 'It is by an identical procedure of *animation* that they speak to us of "the call of the fatherland", or "the voice of the race". M. Durkheim anthropomorphizes, even if this is what he is defending himself from' (van Gennep 1906: XXXV, emphasis and inverted commas in the original; my translation). Tarde called this for Durkheim's tendency to dangerously construct society as a 'divine Being', sacrificing the individual at its altar.

Gabriel Tarde and Arnold van Gennep did not become founders of sociology and anthropology. This, of course, was not only Durkheim's fault. They created no schools, established no dogma that any student could slavishly follow, and erected no absolute boundaries to other disciplines or approaches. They both insisted that the social sciences must remain *life* sciences, not neo-Kantian skeletons of lifeless, arid dogma. In a period of discipline formation and intellectual power politics fighting to establish the social sciences within nation-states that were just as aggressively pitted

against each other, their approaches, and perhaps also their rebellious personalities, did not find fertile terrain. And so they were forgotten, while Durkheim and his followers managed to shape and define educational reform and discipline formation, in France and beyond.

Tarde and van Gennep refused to disentangle sociology and anthropology from 'nature' and from a larger holistic philosophy of becoming, of the eternal return of life, death and rebirth, of the rhythms and regularities that pervade the universe, even if we were not here to participate in its mysterious reality. Henri Bergson, who succeeded Tarde at *Collège de France*, called Tarde a writer and a poet. Van Gennep was an expert ethnologist and folklorist (and that also as a founder), and therefore he always kept a vivid interest in history, mythology, language, literature and art. He was an expert on Homer. His first publications were on numismatics and animal branding. His interest field involved everything man-made, and much like Tarde he knew how to express himself poetically. Could it be that these 'shortcomings' are the very reasons why we, today, must return to these two figures?

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