Recovered Goods:

Durkheimian Sociology as Virtue Ethics

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Emile Durkheim envisioned sociology as a "moral science." Today, this phrase jars the ear. Among sociologists, at least, it is apt to elicit bewilderment, bemusement, denial or dismissal. "What could Durkheim have possibly meant by it?" "Durkheim was a little wooly-headed, wasn't he?"Aren't ethics and science two quite different enterprises?" "Frankly, what use we post-moderns have for 'morality' anyway?" "What nonsense! You can't derive an ought from an is!" Yet that is precisely what Durkheim proposed to do – at least sometimes. His goal was not just to study morality scientifically – a goal that at least some contemporary sociologists would still endorse; in his bolder moments, he also proposed to put morality on a scientific footing – a goal that most contemporary sociologists would be uncomfortable with. The orthodox view is that sociology can and should be "ethically neutral" (Weber), and various antinomies have been advanced in order to establish and secure that neutrality: fact vs. value, knowledge vs. faith, objective vs. subjective, material vs. ideal, interests vs. beliefs, and so on. The purpose of this essay is to determine what Durkheim could have meant by this unsettling phrase and whether the project it implied is a defensible one.

What was the inspiration for Durkheim's vision of a moral science? Was it Kant? Several of Durkheim's teachers were neo-Kantians and many Durkheim scholars have noted that Durkheim's theory of morality was strongly influenced by Kant's.[1] But Kantianism was not the inspiration for Durkheim's vision of a moral science. Nor could it have been. Kant did of course propose a *rational* morality, free from theological presuppositions, which could and did provide one starting point for a *secular,* non-theistic morality, a project that Durkheim strongly supported.[2] But he certainly did not propose a *scientific* morality, based on empirical observation. On the contrary, moral rationality – in Kant's terms: "practical reason" – was utterly distinct from scientific rationality. Practical reason inhabited the ineffable world of the "noumena" and was experienced subjectively as "moral duty." Scientific rationality – in Kant's terms: "pure reason" -- was oriented outward, towards the observable world of the "phenomena" that were governed by objective laws of causality.[3] Thus, while Durkheim may have found Kant a helpful ally in fending off the churchmen and creating the space for a secular – and republican -- morality , Kant was of little use when it came to combating the nihilists and laying the foundations of a scientific – and sociological – morality.

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[1] Emile Durkheim and Anthony Giddens, *Emile Durkheim; Selected Writings* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1972), 3.

[2] Immanuel Kant and Mary J. Gregor, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[3] Immanuel Kant, Paul Guyer, and Allen W. Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Was utilitarianism then the inspiration? Certainly, no one has ever accused Durkheim of being a utilitarian. And for good reason. But it is important to note that utilitarianism does provide one possible path towards a scientific morality. If "society" is really just an aggregation of individuals, and "good" and "evil" are just religious mumbo-jumbo for "pleasure" and "pain", then "morality" is nothing more or less than "the greatest good of the greatest number." Or so Bentham and others would argue.[4] This path is by now a well-trodden one. It leads to neo-classical economics and libertarian ideology. But it is a path that Durkheim resolutely rejected not only as un-sociological but also as un-republican, that is, for scientific as well as political reasons.

So, what *was* Durkheim's inspiration, then? The principal thesis of this paper is that Durkheim's vision of "moral science" was largely inspired by Aristotelian ethics and that it anticipated many of the ideas of virtue ethics and related schools of thought and research. Insofar as it makes "human flourishing" (*eudemonia*) the aim and the measure of moral and social life, Aristotelianism opens the door to a social *science* of morality informed by empirical observation. Variations in human well-being, after all, are something that one can systematically study, and which the contemporary psychologists *do* study, within the sub-field of "positive psychology." Further, insofar as it assumes that human flourishing is strongly influenced by institutional arrangements, Aristotelian ethics points in the direction of a *social* science of morality, which goes beyond psychology. Finally, insofar as it assumes that political liberty and civic friendship are essential aspects of human flourishing it also underwrites a *republican* sociology of morality. For all these reasons, Aristotelian ethics was much better suited to Durkheim's purposes than were Kantianism or utilitarianism.

If there is such a strong connection between Aristotle and Durkheim, though, then why has it gone essentially un-noticed, even by careful and sensitive readers of?[5] The obvious answer would seem to be that Durkheim himself did not much emphasize the connection and that his interpreters were not primed to see it, since they are sociologists, rather than philosophers. And this is no doubt part of the answer. But this answer also raises further questions. If Durkheim was so strongly influenced by Aristotle, why did he mention him so infrequently? As we will see, there are a number of reasons why Durkheim might have wished to downplay the Aristotelian connection. He may even have done so consciously and strategically, though that would be difficult to prove.

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[4] Jeremy Bentham and ebrary Inc., "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation." (Kitchener, Ont.: Batoche, 2000), http://site.ebrary.com/lib/yale/Doc?id=2001956; Philip Beauchamp and Jeremy Bentham, *The Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003).

[5] Durkheim Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge, 2005); Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim; His Life and Work, a Historical and Critical Study*, [1st U.S. ed. (New York,: Harper & Row, 1972). Emile Durkheim, *On Morality and Society; Selected Writings*, The Heritage of Sociology (Chicago,: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Mark Sydney Cladis, *A Communitarian Defense of Liberalism : Emile Durkheim and Contemporary Social Theory*, Stanford Series in Philosophy (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univerisyty Press, 1992); Ernest Wallwork, *Durkheim : Morality and Milieu* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972). The one important exception to this is Douglas F. Challenger, *Durkheim through the Lens of Aristotle : Durkheimian, Postmodernist, and Communitarian Responses to the Enlightenment* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1994). Challenger's book anticipates many of the arguments of this paper, though I am not wholly in agreement with his interpretation. In particular, unlike him, I do not regard Durkheim's attempt to reconceive eudemonia in terms of normality as successful.

As a result, the philosophical roots of Durkheim's sociology were rendered invisible. They are to be found in an intellectual tradition that Durkheim himself regarded as proto-sociological, namely, what is today called "political philosophy", and, more specifically, the "civic republican" strand of that tradition, stretching from Aristotle and Cicero through Machiavelli and Harrington to Montesquieu and Rousseau. Reinserting Durkheim into that tradition, I will argue, not only helps us to better understand the Durkheimian project of a "moral science"; it may even provide us with the intellectual resources to revive it, by showing us a way beyond the hoary distinctions between "fact" and "value" or "ideals" and "interests", distinctions that Durkheim himself employed in his own academic and partisan battles, to the detriment of his intellectual project. Central to this project, I will argue, is recovering a robust notion of the good, which can serve as the ethical foundation for a post-secular social science.

I. The Aristotelian Connection

Today, it is common to distinguish three main schools of ethical thought: deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics. Deontological ethics is premised on the notion of moral *duty* (Greek: *deon*). The seminal formulation of this position is contained in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* where Kant first articulated his "categorical imperative": "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law".[6] For Kant, then, to be moral was to make choices that conform to universalizable principles of right. As the moniker implies, consequentialist ethics focuses on the consequences of an individual's acts for the general good. The seminal formulation of this position is the classical utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and Henry Sidgwick.[7] In utilitarian interpretations of consequentialism – which now compete with a host of others – the general good can in principle be calculated. In Bentham's famous formula, it is simply "the greatest good of the greatest number." While deontological and consequentialist ethics are both the offspring of the Enlightenment, virtue ethics traces its lineage back to Ancient Greece (and also to Ancient China, where it arose independently). It remained the dominant school of moral philosophy in Latin Christendom until the Enlightenment. It emphasizes responsibility not simply for one's moral acts but also for one's moral character.[8] Accordingly, it stresses the role of moral education and political liberty in the promotion of practices of moral virtue. Virtue ethics had gone into eclipse by the early 19th century but was revived during the mid- to late 20th century by Anglo-American philosophers such as G.E.M. Anscombe and Martha Nussbaum.[9]

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[6] Immanuel Kant and Mary J. Gregor, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[7] John Stuart Mill and George Sher, *Utilitarianism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2001); Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, [7th ed. (Chicago],: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[8] David Carr and J. W. Steutel, *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*, Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education 5 (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999); Stephen D. Carden and ebrary Inc., "Virtue Ethics Dewey and Macintyre," In *Continuum studies in American philosophy*. (London ; New York: Continuum, 2006), http://site.ebrary.com/lib/yale/Doc?id=10224799.

[9] Richard Taylor, *Virtue Ethics : An Introduction*, Prometheus Lecture Series (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002); Roger Crisp and Michael A. Slote, *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Durkheim's career coincided with the period of eclipse. But there can be no doubt that he was intimately familiar with Aristotle's thought, and that he was deeply influenced by it. His youthful preparations for the admissions exam for the *École normale* would have involved extensive reading of the Greek and Roman classics, as would his subsequent studies at the *École normale* itself.[10] Nor can there be any doubt that Durkheim engaged with classical philosophy during these years. One of Durkheim's second-year-papers at the ENS was on the Roman Stoics[11], and his favorite teachers there were Fustel de Coulanges, an ancient historian, and Émile Boutroux, an expert on ancient philosophy. Nor did the engagement with the ancients end in Paris. In his first teaching post at Bordeaux, Durkheim became close friends with Georges Rodier, an Aristotle specialist, and himself gave special lectures (alas, now lost) on the *Nichomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* to help prepare philosophy students for their final examinations.[12] It was during these years at Bordeaux (1897-1902) that Durkheim penned his French dissertation, *The Division of Labor in Society*. Its first footnote, given in the original Greek, was to the *Nichomachean Ethics*.[13] In English translation, the passage read as follows: "When people associate with one another for the purpose of exchange, however, this kind of justice – reciprocity in accordance with proportion, not equality—is what binds them together, since a city is kept together by proportionate reciprocation."[14] Those familiar with *The Division of Labor* will instantly recognize that the cited passage is not just an ornament; it actually anticipates the core claim of the book – that simple societies are integrated by means of "mechanical solidarity" while complex ones are held together by "organic solidarity." Perhaps it was even the main inspiration for *The Division of Labor.* Durkheim himself emphasized the profound influence of Aristotle's thought on his vision in a letter to the editor of the *Revue néo-scolastique* towards the end of his life, where he explained that: "I owe it to my mentor, Monsieur Boutroux, who at the *École Normale Superieure* often used to repeat to us that every science must explain according to 'its own principles', as Aristotle states: psychology by psychological principles, biology by biological principles. Very much imbued with this idea, I applied it to sociology."[15] From the beginning of his career until the end, then, the Aristotelian influence on Durkheim is quite clear.

The question at hand, however, is not whether Durkheim was influenced by Aristotle's philosophy in general, but whether he was influenced by Aristotelian *ethics.* To be clear: by "Aristotelian ethics", I mean not only the *Nichomachean Ethics,* but also the *Politics*, since Aristotle understood these works to be continuous with, and complementary to, one another; for him, there was no distinction between "moral philosophy" and "political philosophy." I will make the case for influence in two ways:

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[10] Terry Nichols Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 22, 39; Antoine Prost, *L'éCole Et La Famille Dans Une SociéTé En Mutation* ed. Louis-Henri Parias, 4 vols., vol. 4, Histoire GéNéRale De L'enseignement Et De L'éDucation En France (Paris: Nouveau librairie francaise, 1968).

[11] Lukes, *Émile Durkheim; His Life and Work, a Historical and Critical Study*, 53.

[12] Ibid., 104-6.

[13] Emile Durkheim and W. D. Halls, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 1st American ed. (New York: Free Press, 1984), 7, n. 1.

[14] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 89; 1133a.

[15] Emile Durkheim and Steven Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 1st American ed. (New York: Free Press, 1982), 259.

1) positively, by identifying parallels between Durkheim and Aristotle and 2) negatively by demonstrating divergences between Durkheim and, say, Kant or Bentham. I begin with the positive case, noting echoes of Aristotelian principles in Durkheim's writings.

One hallmark of Aristotle's ethics is the principle of the mean. In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle argued that each of the virtues is "a kind of mean", specifically, "a mean between two vices, one of excess, the other of deficiency."[16] For example, "[i}n fear and confidence, courage is the mean", while "[i]n giving and taking money, the mean is generosity."

Durkheim often reasons in this way as well, most notably in *Suicide,* where he argues that "[n]o moral idea exists which does not combine in proportions…egoism, altruism and a certain anomy."[17] Durkheim's central concern in this work is not with individual well-being, however, but with collective well-being. The suicide rate serves primarily as a social indicator, with high rates indicating social pathology and low rates indicating social well-being. His central argument in *Suicide* is that a good society is one that achieves the right levels of social regulation and social integration, that is, a society that sets sufficient but not excessive limits on human freedom and human autonomy by means of formal and informal social rules and ties. In other words, *Suicide* extends the principle of the mean in ethics to society as a whole. A good society is one that has neither too much integration and regulation, nor too little, with the actual mean being definable only in relation to a given society.

A second distinguishing feature of Aristotle's ethics is his emphasis on *eudemonia*, typically translated as "happiness" or "human flourishing", and the particular conception of human nature on which it is premised. As the ambiguity of the translation suggests, *eudemonia* in Aristotle's sense is not quite the same thing as "happiness" in the modern, colloquial sense. To flourish is not simply to "feel" happy, to experience many moments of positive emotion; rather, it is to be happy in a particular way and for the right reasons. More specifically, it is to excel in, to be virtuous at, those things that set humans apart from beasts, particularly reason and speech. These are the things that constitute *human,* as opposed to animal, nature. The life of virtue, Aristotle argues, is therefore a life in accord with nature. Since human beings differ from animals in two respects, there are two paths to a virtuous life. One is the life of contemplation, which employs reason. The other is the active life of politics, which employs speech. Aristotle also identifies a third path in life, the life of pleasure, which can perhaps lead to happiness in the modern, colloquial sense but certainly not to flourishing in the specifically, Aristotelian sense. For example, the "happy" person in Aristotle's sense may in fact experience considerable pain, but s/he does so for the right reasons – in the form of shame over misdeeds, say -- but not for the wrong ones, such as the progress of age, the blows of fate or other events beyond her control. For Aristotle, it should be noted, the virtuous life is only possible within human society and, indeed, within a very particular form of human society, as we will see shortly. On his view, a happy life cannot be lived in isolation.

Durkheim, too, rejects the life of mere pleasure and argues that genuine happiness requires the regulation and reordering of our initial nature and of our inner life. "[T]he most essential element of character" he argues is the "capacity for restraint…which allows us to contain our passions, our desires,

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[16] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 30-31.

[17] Emile Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1951), 321.

our habits, and subject them to law."[18] Here, he sounds a Kantian note. For Durkheim, however, mere restraint, however, is not enough; it must be melded with a desire for, and an attraction to, the social good of social interaction and social solidarity.[19] Here, he sounds more like Aristotle. In combining Kant and Aristotle, he again applies the principle of the mean. Virtue, he implies, is a mean between the right (law or duty) and the good ("charity" and "energy"). Only human society can supply us with such restraints and desires. Thus, it is only in human society that human beings are fully human: "deprive man of all that society has given him and he …becomes a being more or less indistinct from an animal. Without language, essentially a social thing, general or abstract ideas are practically impossible, as are all the higher mental functions."[20] To live outside of society, or to live as if one were not a part of society, he contends, is "contrary to nature."[21] For Kant, there was no conflict between ethical virtue and social isolation – least of all in his own life. For Durkheim, however, they were fundamentally at odds. Like Aristotle, he regarded human beings as inherently social creatures.

A third hallmark of Aristotle's ethics, and another area where we see notable parallels with Durkheim, is the notion of "practical wisdom" (*phronesis*) and the resulting concern with moral education. Practical wisdom is not be confused with theoretical knowledge. The meaning of *phronesis* is aptly conveyed in the famous metaphor of the expert bowmen. "In all the states of character we have mentioned", Aristotle says, "there is a sort of target, and it is with his eye on this that the person with reason tightens or loosens his string."[22] Virtue is like archery in that it is: i) an embodied capacity developed through ii) training and habituation that leads to iii) a heightened probability of "hitting the target" – i.e., achieving the mean as it is iv) defined in that context (i.e., the nature of the target). It involves body as well as mind, emotion as well as reason, and attentiveness as well as knowledge. Virtue can and must be learned, and the inculcation of virtue was in fact the principal goal of education for Aristotle; the acquisition of vocational skills or formal knowledge was strictly secondary.

Here, too, we find a number of striking parallels between Aristotle and Durkheim. The most obvious is the shared concern with moral education. Good republican that he was, Durkheim espoused the view, widespread amongst French intellectuals at that time, that the Third Republic needed a "secular morality" that could sustain public virtue, and he lectured on this subject before thousands of would-be school-teachers over the years. These lectures were eventually published as a book, his little-read treatise on *Moral Education.* Though he did not explicitly characterize moral knowledge as "practical wisdom", he did open these lectures by insisting that moral education was neither a science, nor an art, suggesting that it was something in between, in other words a form of practical knowledge.

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[18] ———, *Moral Education; a Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* ([New York]: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 46.

[19] Ibid., 96.

[20] ———, *Sociology and Philosophy* (Glencoe, Ill.,: Free Press, 1953), 55.

[21] ———, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction (Glencoe Ill.,: Free Press, 1958), 60. Careful readers will notice that Durkheim's language mixes Aristotelian terms ("character", "the good") with Kantian ones ("law" and "duty"). However, his use of a function argument – the claim that the human good involves the realization of human nature, defined as that which sets humans apart from animals – and his emphasis on human sociality put him squarely in the neo-Aristotelian camp.

[22] Durkheim, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, 103; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*.

And he said much the same about morality itself, warning that it did not involve the application of a general principle that transcended place and time, as Kant implied, but consisted rather of concrete maxims that could be quite specific to particular societies and periods, and even to particular groups and organizations. The morality that governs the family, for instance, is quite different from that which is appropriate to political society or a business enterprise. He was, moreover, quite clear that moral education could not be taught in a purely formal or theoretical way; rather, it required repetition and habituation.[23]

The principle of the mean and the concepts of *eudemonia* and *phronesis* distinguish Aristotle's ethics, not only from modern systems of ethics, such as Kant's or Bentham's, but also from other ancient systems of ethics, such as Plato's or Epictetus'. There are further aspects of Aristotle's system, however, which are found in many other ancient systems as well – and which are also echoed in Durkheim's. One is the principle of "balance", which is common to many versions of ancient political philosophy, both Greek and Roman. For the ancients – and for civic republicans in general -- "balance" is a fundamental principle of constitutional architecture that is essential to a well-constructed and durable system of republican government. On this account, a good polity – a republican polity that preserves liberty – requires a balanced constitution. The "balance" in question is between opposing groups or principles, typically, the one (monarchy), the few (aristocracy) and the many (democracy). In this view, liberty emerges and endures only if these groups are relatively equal in social power and political representation. Where one is particularly strong or predominant, there will be no restraint on its passions or interests, resulting in widespread decadence and self-seeking – what the ancients referred to as "corruption"; this, in turn, provokes a counter-reaction by the other groups, and the formation of "factions" which seek only the good of their own group. Once they take hold, it was argued, corruption and faction lead to instability, decline and, eventually, dissolution.

Durkheim did not accept the theory of balance in its traditional formulation in terms of the one, the few and the many; instead, he attempted to re-construct it and adapt it to modern conditions. Like the republican political philosophers of Greece and Rome, and in marked contrast to liberal contractarians such as Hobbes or Locke, Durkheim argued that polities were constituted by and through familial and social groups, rather than by rights-bearing, property-holding individuals in a "state of nature."[24] However, he rejected the classical view that these groups consisted of "the one, the few, and the many." The industrialized nation-states of 19th century Europe were more "complex" and "differentiated" than that. To overcome what he saw as the disorganized and unjust character of economic life, which allowed the few to exploit the many, he proposed a system of "corporatism", specifically, the promotion of labor unions, employers associations and occupational groupings that would balance one another within economic society and also serve as the nucleus of a strong civil society as well. The corporations, in turn, would be balanced against the state, so that neither would gain excessive control over the individual. Like the ancients, then, he envisioned two forms of balancing, one social, the other political, but with corporate bodies, rather than social classes, as the basic building blocks. This dual system of balances would address the problems of "anomy" and "egotism" which he saw, not only as a threat to the legitimacy and durability of the Third Republic, but as the principal sources of the moral crisis of modernity *tout court*.

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[23] Indeed, the analysis of ritual and religion contained in *The Elementary Forms* suggests that embodied morality is actually prior to codified morality, both phylogenetically and phenomenologically, and that moral conviction is effective only to the degree that it is undergirded by collective emotion.

[24] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, 45.

Another thing which Durkheimian sociology shares with ancient political philosophy is a republican conception of liberty.[25] In this conception, liberty has at least three dimensions: non-dependence, self-government, and political participation. Since this conception is so different from the modern, liberal conception first popularized by Hobbes[26], it requires some explication. For the ancients, the opposite of "liberty" was "slavery." Within the republican tradition, the idea of slavery could be understood rather broadly to include, not only chattel slavery *strictu sensu*, but all relations of servitude. On this accounting, a king's courtier was as much a slave as a domestic servant and, indeed, anyone who was without a political voice. To be free, in this sense, was to be independent of the arbitrary will of another human being. There was also a second sense of slavery as well: slavery to one's own passions. On this account, a powerful person who is ruled by his emotions is not free. To be free means to subjugate the passions to reason or, more precisely, to transform them through reason. The third and final precondition of republican liberty was collective self-governance. There can be no liberty under a tyrant, even a benign or enlightened one. (It is in this regard, that the republican conception is most radically at odds with the Hobbesian.) Within the Anglo-American version of liberalism, by contrast, liberty comes to be associated mainly with non-interference and negative rights – with the freedom to "do as one pleases."

Given the influence of republican thought on the French Revolution, and of the Revolution on French political culture, it is perhaps not surprising that Durkheim's conception of liberty was more republican than liberal. Durkheim flatly rejected the liberal view that a strong state endangered individual rights. Indeed, he argued that a strong state was necessary to protect individual liberties from the "repressive influences" of powerful groups.[27] He similarly repudiated the view that individual liberty consisted in doing as one pleases. "Liberty is the fruit of regulation", he argued, and "theories that celebrate the beneficence of unrestricted liberties are apologies for a diseased state."[28] "Self-mastery", he insisted, "is the first condition…of all liberty worthy of the name."[29] His embrace of the republican conception of liberty is undoubtedly one reason why liberal readers have often (mis)characterized him as a "conservative."

I now turn to the negative side of my case.

That Durkheim was hostile to utilitarianism is old news. Still, it is instructive to examine his criticisms of utilitarianism. They bear an unmistakably Aristotelian and republican imprint. The theories of the utilitarians and the "classical economists", he argues, are founded on "an impatience with all

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[25] Philip Pettit, *Republicanism : A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford Political Theory (Oxford

New York: Clarendon Press ;

Oxford University Press, 1997); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[26] Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[27] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*.

[28] ———, *Moral Education; a Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*, 54.

[29] Ibid., 45.

restraint and limitation" and "the desire to encourage unrestrained and infinite appetite."[30] Such an ethos, he contends, is "contrary to nature", because "man is a limited being", with certain reserves of "vital energy", and a "part of a whole", both social and natural, whereas "the egoist lives as though he were a whole."[31] The utilitarian egoist can never achieve true happiness because s/he lives "in a state of unstable equilibrium" (Durkheim 1961). What is more, the egoist is a threat to society because society is impossible without a certain degree of "moral discipline."[32] Nor is a lack of moral constraint to be confused with genuine power or freedom. Invoking a commonplace argument from classical philosophy, Durkheim asks us to: "Imagine a being liberated from all external restraint, a despot still more absolute than those of which history tells us…Shall we say, then, that he is all-powerful? Certainly not, since he himself cannot resist his desires. They are masters of him, as of everything else."[33] Anticipating modern critiques of consequentialism, Durkheim further warns that utilitarianism is a threat to republican government and human rights as well because "it can admit of individual liberties being suspended whenever the interest of the greater number requires that sacrifice."[34] Nor are his criticisms of utilitarianism and classical economics "merely" moral and political. They are also methodological and ontological as well. Rightly sensing the turn towards mathematical formalism – and away from empirical research – initiated by the "marginalist revolution" in fin-de-siècle economics, he argued that economists are no longer interested in "what occurs in reality or…how stated effects derive from causes" but only in mentally combining "purely formal notions such as value, utility, scarcity, supply and demand", in this way removing their moral premises from empirical scrutiny.[35] He also criticizes their individualist and materialist ontology (which he correctly traces to the atomism of the Epicureans) on the grounds that it ignores the emergent properties and causal powers of "synthetic entities" such as social groups, collective representations and, for that matter, the individual psyche itself.[36]

Durkheim's attitude towards Kant's moral philosophy was more ambivalent. On the one hand, he agreed with many of Kant's premises. He agreed that "duty" is one element of morality, and that we experience it as rationally compelling insofar as we are rational beings. But Durkheim's agreement was also qualified, insofar as he believed that duty is only one element of morality, and that it is often not a sufficiently compelling motive for action, because we are not *just* rational beings. "[W]e are not beings of pure reasons", he argued, but "have sensibilities that have their own nature and that are refractory to the dictates of reason." In other words, we are also "emotional creatures."[37] And because we are emotional as well as rational beings, we are compelled by particular attachments as much as by universal principles. Hence, a realistic theory of morality must include attention to the good as well as

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[30] Ibid., 36.

[31] Ibid., 51, 71.

[32] Ibid., 69; ———, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, 10.

[33] Durkheim, *Moral Education; a Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*, 44.

[34] ———, *On Morality and Society; Selected Writings*, 46.

[35] Durkheim and Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 179.

[36] Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, 1-30.Here, Durkheim's position anticipates that of contemporary "critical realists", such as Andrew Sayer, Roy Bhaskar, and Margaret Archer.

[37] ———, *Moral Education; a Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*, 109.

the right, because "for us to become the agents of an act it must interest our sensibility to a certain extent and appear to us as, in some way, desirable [and] it is this *sui generis* desirability which is commonly called good."[38] "Thus, we must admit a certain element of *eudemonism* and one could show that desirability and pleasure permeate the obligation."[39] Here, too, the imprint of Aristotelian ethics is unmistakably conveyed by Durkheim's introduction of the concepts of eudemonia and the good.

The difference in their visions of morality also leads to a difference in their stances towards moral education. One of the central premises of Kantian ethics is that all normal individuals possess an inherent capacity for moral behavior. And one of the central premises of Kantian political philosophy is that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to secure the negative rights of the individual against encroachment by other individuals. From this perspective, "A state that employs the instruments of right for purposes of a politics of virtue and moral education…oversteps the boundaries of legitimate lawful regulation."[40] Durkheim, by contrast, was a forceful advocate for a "politics of virtue" and indeed the chief architect of the system of "moral education" established under the Third Republic. While Kant and Durkheim both claimed to be republicans, they clearly understood republicanism quite differently – Durkheim in a more classical fashion, Kant in a more liberal one. Durkheim also found Kant's method of transcendental deduction unsatisfying and for much the same reasons as he found the mathematical formalism of the classical economists unsatisfying: because it is unempirical and a-historical.[41] Durkheim did find Kantian moral philosophy to be empirically accurate insofar as it captured a key historical development, namely, the sacralization of abstract individuality which Durkheim saw as the distinguishing feature of modern morality. However, it was not empirically grounded and it mistook a historical moment for a moral universal. His criticism of Kantian ethics is therefore quite similar to the criticism of Kantian epistemology that he develops in *The Elementary Forms*: it represents a historically-developed capacity as a transcendentally-deduced faculty. But the most fundamental error in Kant's approach to morality, in Durkheim's view, was its attempt to seat morality in an abstracted and pre-social "subject." For Durkheim, the abstract morality of moral philosophers was not to be confused with the practical morality of social actors, nor was the source of morality to be found in the transcendental faculties of the individual but in their embedded social relations. For Durkheim, morality was social through and through. Durkheim was quite far from being an unvarnished neo-Kantian; indeed, one could claim that he is better categorized as a neo-Aristotelian *avant la lettre* -- or perhaps as a crypto-Aristotelian.

II. The Connection Denied?

Having established the connection between Durkheim and Aristotle, we can now reflect on why it has received so little attention. The most obvious reason, as noted earlier, is that Durkheim did not much emphasize it himself, which is not to say that he suppressed it altogether. Aristotle is mentioned by name at least once in all four of Durkheim's "canonical" works (i.e., *The Division of Labor*, *Suicide,*

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[38] ———, *Sociology and Philosophy*, 36.

[39] Ibid., 44-45.

[40] ———, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, 345; Wolfgang Kersting, "Politics, Freedom, and Order: Kant's Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[41] Durkheim and Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 179.

Rules, and *The Elementary Forms*) though less frequently than Kant or Comte, if also more frequently than, say, Rousseau or Montesquieu.

But why was Durkheim so loathe to acknowledge his debts to Aristotle, and why have his interpreters been so slow to recognize them? To answer the first question, we must put Durkheim's life and work back into context, the context of both academic and party politics during the Third Republic. To answer the second, we must put Durkheim's work into the context of its reception in mid-20th century America.

In 1879, when Durkheim was (finally) admitted to the *Ecole normale*, "sociology" and "social science" were present in public discourse and in some private research institutions, but they were not yet institutionalized in the French system of higher education. Durkheim spent much of his life ensuring that they were and in the form that he envisioned. To accomplish this end, he had to battle on two fronts: first, against academic traditionalists and conservatives within the faculties of letters, particularly philosophers, such as his arch-rival, Henri Bergson; and second, against representatives of competing visions of sociology and social science, such as Gabriel Tarde and Frédéric le Play. Of course, these battles were largely "political" and even bureaucratic ones over policies and posts; but the weapons were often intellectual. In order to secure the organizational autonomy of sociology, it was necessary for Durkheim to demonstrate the empirical reality of the social, and to defend his own conception of the social. All of Durkheim's early works can be read as strategic "moves" in this game. This is not the place to replay that game in its entirety, move by move. For us, two aspects of it are of particular interest: his strategies vis-à-vis his two chief rivals, namely, academic philosophy and Catholic sociology.

His first "move" vis-à-vis philosophy was his Latin dissertation, translated as *Montesquieu and Rousseau: Forerunners of Sociology.* Durkheim opens by reclaiming "social science" as a French enterprise, rather than an English or German one, and then by tracing its origins, not to Saint-Simon or Comte, but to Montesquieu and Rousseau.[42] In this way, he sought to soothe nationalistic insecurities, which were particularly deep following the defeats of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1), and particularly sensitive as regards philosophy, a field the Germans clearly dominated, while laying claim to a more respectable pedigree, by disowning the would-be father of French sociology, Auguste Comte, whose excesses and eccentricities were well-known, even notorious, in favor of other better-behaved and more legitimate founders. But if sociology was in the same lineage as Montesquiieu and Rousseau, then how was it different from philosophy? If there was so much continuity, then where was the break? To mark this difference, Durkheim deployed the distinction between "art" and "science." "Even Aristotle, who devoted far more attention than Plato to experience, aimed at discovering, not the laws of social existence, but the best forms of society."[43] To secure the autonomy of sociology, then, Durkheim played a double game. On the one hand, he sought to legitimate the new discipline by inserting it into a more honorable lineage, the tradition of republican political philosophy from Aristotle to Montesquieu. On the other hand, he sought to demarcate the new discipline by arguing that sociology was concerned with "the laws of social existence."

This double game led to certain difficulties. The distinction between science and art was useful for bounding sociology's jurisdiction off from philosophy's, but it was threatening to Durkheim's vision

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[42] Emile Durkheim, *Montesquieu and Rousseau: Forerunners of Sociology* (Ann Arbor,: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 1.

[43] Ibid., 4.

of sociology as a "moral science" in the strong sense, that is, as a diagnostic and even prescriptive science of social morality, which was concerned precisely with "the best forms of society." How did Durkheim resolve this tension? In truth, he didn't. Instead, he simply flip-flopped back and forth between the strong and the weak versions of his program as the (political) context required. When the context demanded a clear distinction between sociology and philosophy, he adopted the weak version of his program, as in this passage from an essay from the year 1900 on "Sociology in France in the Nineteenth Century": "The fact is that art, even methodical and reflective art, is one thing and science is another. Science studies facts just to know them, indifferent to the applications to which its ideas can be put. Art, on the contrary, deals with them only in order to know what can be done with them."[44]. In the weak program, social sciences was a pure science without practical application. By contrast, when the context demanded a clear assertion of the public relevance of social science, he invoked a different metaphor, that of the diagnostician or pathologist, as in his 1904 essay on "The Intellectual Elite and Democracy." "Just as a great physiologist is generally a mediocre clinician, a sociologist has every chance of making a very incomplete statesmen" . In the weak version of moral science, then, sociology completely abstains from practical recommendations; in the strong version, on the other hand, it simply abstains from political leadership, though not, it should be emphasized from party politics *per se*. It is "good that intellectuals be represented in deliberative assemblies", Durkheim contends, because "their culture permits them to bring to deliberations elements of information which are not negligible" (ibid).

While Durkheim sometimes preached the weak program, the truth is that he mostly practiced the strong program.[45] With the exception of *The Rules of Sociological Method,* all of Durkheim's major works contain practical prescriptions for the morals ills of French society as he diagnosed them. *The Division of Labor* proposed organization of, and cooperation between, employers' associations and labor unions as a remedy to the lack of economic regulation (the "anomic division of labor") which Durkheim saw as the root cause of the economic volatility of French capitalism, a proposal that he elaborated further in *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* proposed the establishment of "civic cults", national rituals and holidays that would sustain social solidarity. *Moral Education* outlined a practical program of…moral education, that would create the virtuous citizens the Third Republic required.

However, Durkheim never entirely succeeded in setting forth a coherent justification for his strong program of moral science as a diagnostic and prescriptive science. His most sustained effort in this direction is to be found in Chapter III of the *Rules,* where he seeks to ground the strong program in a distinction between "health" and "sickness" and "the normal" and "the pathological." "For societies, as for individuals, health is good and desirable; sickness, on the other hand, is bad and must be avoided. If therefore we find an objective criterion, inherent in the facts themselves, to allow us to distinguish scientifically health from sickness in the various orders of social phenomena, science will be in a position to throw light on practical matters while remaining true to its own method."[46] But how does one determine whether a particular society is "healthy" or "ill"? One obvious solution would be to define "healthy" as "flourishing." Durkheim's use of the adjectives "good" and "desirable" to describe "health" in the passage just cited suggests that he may have at least considered a *eudemonistic* definition of

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[44] Durkheim, *On Morality and Society; Selected Writings*, 4.

[45] Durkheim's strong program of moral science is not to be confused with Jeffrey Alexander's strong program of cultural sociology. On the contrary, Alexander's strong program is closer to Durkheim's weak program.

[46] Durkheim and Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 86.

health. So does his proposal, a few pages later, that we define health as "consisting in the joyous development of vital energy" . Here, health is not just normality but flourishing. In the end, however, Durkheim turns away from this solution. Instead, he attempts to ground his program in another distinction, one between "the normal" and "the pathological." The results are far from satisfactory. The problem is that what is "normal" is not necessarily "good" or "desirable." Crime and suicide, for example, are "normal" parts of social life but certainly not "good" or "desirable" ones. Durkheim is not unaware of the difficulty. In *Moral Education*, for instance, he avers that "for a great nation like ours to be truly in a state of moral health it is not enough for most of its members to be sufficiently removed from the grosses transgressions—murder, theft, fraud…Society must, in addition, have before it an ideal towards which it reaches…".

But what is this ideal to be, if not *eudemonia* or virtue? We are thus confronted with a new version of our original question. Why did Durkheim retreat from the more promising, Aristotelian justification of his strong program and choose the less propitious, functionalist justification? At least part of the answer is probably to be found at the intersection of academic and partisan politics under the Third Republic. Crudely speaking, one can distinguish three broad currents or political tendencies during this period: conservative Catholics, moderate republicans ("radicals"), and socialists. Though friendly with many socialists, particularly those of a syndicalist bent, Durkheim did not accept the central goals of Marxian socialism. He did not favor state control of the means of production or a dictatorship of the proletariat. But he allied with the socialists – and against the conservative Catholics – on the two most controversial issues of the day: the secularization of the French educational system and the Dreyfus affair. Nonetheless, there were other, perhaps less salient issues where Durkheim's position was actually closer to the Catholics than to the socialists, particularly his high valuation of social order and economic peace. But as often happens to political centrists during culture wars of this sort, Durkheim found himself excoriated by hardliners from both sides. While the arch-conservative Peguy reckoned him to "the party of the intellectuals" (i.e., to the left-wing secular republicans or "radicals") , the radical socialist Sorel placed him in the "neo-Scholastic party" (i.e., amongst the conservative Catholic nationalists).[47] It is the latter accusation that concerns us most – and that may have concerned Durkheim most as well – because it reveals the broader political stakes that would have been involved in any public identification with Aristotle.

There were narrower academic stakes as well that would have been important to Durkhiem. Amongst the various schools contending for dominance of French sociology were the followers of Frédéric le Play, a conservative Catholic of neo-Scholastic sympathies who advocated cooperation between labor and capital and paternalistic employer policies as the remedy for class conflict and economic exploitation, a position that became the official doctrine of the Catholic Church following Leo XIII's promulgation of *Rerum novarum* in 1891. In an earlier encyclical, *Aeterni patris* (1879), issued in the second year of his Papacy, it should be noted, Leo had also made neo-Thomism the official theology of the Catholic Church and used all of the considerable means at this disposal to see that it was taught and observed by Catholic intellectuals and priests.

Thus, the charge of "neo-Scholasticism", which may seem bizarre or gratuitous to us, was actually quite explosive, all the more so, since it was not altogether unfounded. The patron saint of the neo-Scholastics, after all, was Thomas Aquinas, whose life's work had been to reconcile faith and reason and, more concretely, Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy. Aquinas' oeuvre includes twelve commentaries on Aristotle, many of which are still read today, and Aquinas' ethics and metaphysics

[47] Durkheim, *On Morality and Society; Selected Writings*, xxxviii.

were deeply influenced by "the Philosopher." Building on the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aquinas made the so called function argument – the argument that to be fully human is to develop those capacities that are distinctively human, viz., reason and speech -- into the philosophical foundations of a rationalistic theological ethics. Aquinas' metaphysics were likewise premised on Aristotle's. Neither man's system is easily summarized – or, for that matter, easily understood. What is important in this context is that both systems were radically at odds with the materialistic, reductionistic, and atomistic ontologies that had first been advanced by the Epicureans, reappropriated by 17th century neo-Epicurean skeptics, like Hobbes, and then developed into a full-blown anti-theistic materialism by Diderot and d'Holbach. For instance, both Aristotle and Aquinas argued that: 1) "form" was as real as "matter"; that 2) particular combinations of form and matter resulted in "composite entities" whose qualities and properties were dependent upon their constituent elements, but not reducible to them; and that 3) the real "substance" of an entity was not its constituent parts but the "essence" that resulted from their combination. In other words, they anticipated modern theories of symbolic forms, emergent properties and natural law.

It is not difficult to see the parallels between the neo-Aristotelian tradition of metaphysics and Durkheimian vision of sociology. The parallels emerge with particular clarity in Durkheim's theory of "collective representations." To recall, Durkheim argues that 1) collective representations are every bit as real as individual ones; 2) collective representations emerge from interactions between individuals over time and that while they can exist only in and through individual minds, they have properties and powers not reducible to individual minds; and 3) they are, in some deep sense, the essence of a society without which "society" as we understand simply would not exist. Nor are these parallels between scholastic metaphysics and Durkheimian sociology accidental. Recall that Durkheim's nickname at the *École normale* was "the metaphysician." His beloved teacher, Émile Boutroux, was a neo-Aristotelian who drew on the notion of "composite entities" to develop a theory of emergent properties. And Durkheim himself would draw heavily on Boutroux's work in developing his own theory of collective representations. Of course, the correlation between Durkheim's views and Aquinas' one was almost certainly spurious in that both could be traced back to the same source: Aristotle.

So while Sorel's charge of neo-Scholasticism was surely overblown, it seems likely that Durkheim's sociology drew not only on Aristotle's ethics, but also on his metaphysics. But deny it Durkheim did, and on more than one occasion. In *Suicide*, for instance, Durkheim somewhat disingenuously and incoherently insisted that "there is some superficiality about attacking our conception as scholasticism and reproaching it for assigning to social phenomenon a foundation in some vital principle or other of a new sort. We refuse to accept that these phenomena have as a substratus the conscience of the individual, we assign them another; that formed by all the individual consciences in union and combination. There is nothing substantival or ontological about this substratus, since it is merely a whole composed of parts. But it is just as real, nevertheless…"[48] This may not have been full-blown scholasticism, but it *was* "substantive" and "ontological" as Durkheim himself surely knew, if not in a strongly scholastic sense. Indeed, he admitted as much in a later essay, where he emphasized that: "Metaphysical problems, even the boldest ones which have wracked philosophers, must never be allowed to fall into oblivion, because this is unacceptable. Yet it is likewise undoubtedly the case that they are called upon to take on new forms. Precisely because of this we believe that sociology, more than any other science, can contribute to this renewal."[49] What, after all, was Durkheim's famous claim that "society is a reality *sui generis*" if not an ontological claim? The problem was that he could not

[48] ———, *Suicide, a Study in Sociology*, 319.

[49] Durkheim and Lukes, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 237.

forthrightly concede this without playing into the hands of his political and academic rivals. In short, Durkheim had to abstain from certain theoretical moves that might have endangered his political position.

In sum, Durkheim distanced himself from Aristotle for at least two reasons: first, in order to assert the intellectual autonomy of sociology from philosophy and second, in order to maintain his political distance from Catholic conservatives. There may also have been a third reason as well: amongst the "modern" French philosophers of Durkheim's era, Kant's stock was much higher than Aristotle's. And yet, the distancing was not complete. Durkheim also stressed the continuities between social theory and political philosophy, especially political philosophy of a civic republican sort. Further, his commitment to moral education and corporatist economics did appear conservative to libertarians and corporatists. This double game or balancing act did introduce certain tensions and aporias into the heart of Durkheim's sociology. This was most evident, I argued, in his (failed) attempt to recast eudemonia in terms of normality; flourishing and normality are not the same thing.

Durkheim's sociology might have developed differently in another context. Imagine that sociology's main intellectual competitor is economics, rather than philosophy. Imagine that religious conservatives are radical individualists of a Protestant sort, and political liberals are radical individualists of a secular sort. And imagine, finally, that Aristotle's stock was higher than Kant's amongst academic philosophers and theologians. In short, imagine that Durkheim is working in the contemporary United States. In that context, Durkheim would have no good reason to downplay the Aristotelian connection. On the contrary, it might have served him well. Why, then, have American sociologists been so slow to reconceive Durkheim's sociology as a sociology of the good? It is to that question that I now turn.

The Durkheim reception in American sociology can be roughly divided into three phases.[50] In the first, which spanned the early decades of the 20th century, Durkheim's work was generally misunderstood when it was not simply ignored. Albion Small's 1902 review of the French version of *The Division of Labor* focuses exclusively on the corporatist approach to the social problem which Durkheim advanced in his new preface.[51] There is no discussion whatsoever of the changing nature of solidarity and corresponding changes in law, leading one to wonder whether Small actually read beyond the Preface. Be that as it may, he summarily dismisses Durkheim for giving too little recognition to the role of "interests" and conflicts in social life. With the first translation of *The Elementary Forms* in 1915 and then of *The Division of Labor* in 1933, followed by *The Rules* in 1938, Durkheim's work became much more widely known and, judging from the reviews, also much better understood.[52] But this does not mean it was well received, even by the translators themselves. Thus, George Simpson's introduction to *The Division of Labor* is quite critical of Durkheim's "social realism."[53] Similarly, in his introduction to *The*

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[50] Lewis A. Coser, "Review: [Untitled]," *American Anthropologist* 76, no. 4 (1974).

[51] Albion Small, "Review: *De La Division Du Travail Social* by Emile Durkheim," *American Journal of Sociology* 7, no. 4 (1902).

[52] John Donaldson, "Review: Emile Durkheim on the Division of Labor in Society by George Simpson," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 173(1934); Émile Benoît-Smullyan, "Review: The Rules of Sociological Method. By Émile Durkheim; Sarah A. Solovay ; John H. Mueller;George E. G. Catlin," *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 4 (1938); J.P. Lichtenberger, "Review: *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* by Emile Durkheim," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 66(1916).

[53] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York

Rules, George Catlin takes Durkheim to task for "confusing" science and ethics.[54] While there was a growing recognition of Durkheim's role in establishing French sociology, there was also considerable mistrust of the "French school", a mistrust that was common to laissez-faire individualists, such as Sumner, as well as to socialist sympathizers, such as Simpson, who disliked Durkheim's emphasis on social harmony and his aspirations towards a moral science.

In the second phase, which spanned the middle decades of the 20th century, Durkheim's work came to be seen through a Parsonsian lens and with mixed effects. On the one hand, *The Structure of Social Action* transformed the American Durkheim from the leading representative of the "French School" into one of the "founding fathers", a status he still enjoys today. There was a flurry of translations during the 1950s, and by the early 1960s, all of Durkheim's major works, and many of his minor ones, were available in English. On the other hand, the enormous influence of structural functionalism in the social sciences during these years, both in the United States and the United Kingdom, meant that these translations received little attention, with the notable exception of *Suicide.* Lewis Coser recounts that: "Those of us who went to graduate school in the 1930s, 1940s and 19502 were largely led to see in Durkheim the father of most structural explanation in sociology. Hence, *The Division of Labor in Society, The Rules of Sociological Methods* as well as *Suicide* were the works we were encouraged and required to study."[55] Ironically, then, the structuralist reading of Durkheim had the effect of obscuring the moral dimension of his thought.

More ironically still, it was precisely the revolt against Parsonianism beginning in the late 1960s, inspired partly by a critique of Parsons' emphasis on social norms, that opened the door towards a fuller understanding of Durkheim's work, based on a more complete reading of his *oeuvre.* This third phase of the reception history runs from the early 1970s until the present. Coinciding as it did with the rediscovery of civic humanism by intellectual historians[56], on the one hand, and the renaissance of virtue ethics on the other[57], one might have anticipated that the third phase would have also have involved a greater appreciation of Aristotelian themes in Durkheim's work, and indeed it did, though only to a very limited degree. Thus, the most cited major work of this period, Steven Lukes' intellectual biography of Durkheim, makes only fleeting mention of Aristotle and does not count him amongst the major influences. The influence of "classical philosophy" receives somewhat greater attention in several

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London: Free Press ;

Collier Macmillan, 1933).

[54] Emile Durkheim et al., *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 8th ed., The University of Chicago Sociological Series (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago press, 1938).

[55] Lewis A. Coser, "The Revival of the Sociology of Culture: The Case of Collective Memory," *Sociological Forum* 7, no. 2 (1992): 365.

[56] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Enl. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); J. G. A. Pocock and ebrary Inc., "The Machiavellian Moment

Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition," Princeton University Press, http://site.ebrary.com/lib/yale/Doc?id=10035914 Online book

[57] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue : A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

communitarian interpretations of Durkheim written by non-sociologists.[58] As its title suggests, Douglas Challenger's *Durkheim Through the Lens of Aristotle,* places the connection front and center, and anticipates many of the arguments of this paper, but it has been almost completely ignored within sociology, registering fewer than a dozen citations as of this writing[59]. In retrospect, it is clear that the main upshot of third wave work on Durkheim has been a revitalization of the sociology of culture, not a recovery of the sociology of the good. *The Elementary Forms* is now seen as Durkheim's *chef d'oeuvre;* his works on moral education and civic life, meanwhile, continue to be ignored by most sociologists if, indeed, they are known at all.

Why has the Aristotelian influence on Durkheim remained hidden for so long? In part, curricular reform and intellectual specialization are the causes. The classics are no longer part of the core curriculum at most American high schools and universities as they were in Durkheim's day. They are not even part of the core curriculum in most undergraduate or graduate social science programs. They are to be encountered, if at all, in survey courses on philosophy or political theory. Were he writing today, Durkheim would not really need to renounce the Aristotelian influence because many of his readers probably would not detect it.

This is not to say that a more Aristotelian Durkheim would have met with a more positive reception. There would have been considerable resistance to such an enterprise. The professionalist faction within early American sociology wished to distance itself from practical enterprises such as teacher education and social welfare, not to mention from "religious sociology" and "Christian sociology", which it viewed as threats to its agenda of establishing sociology as a pure science in the core of the research university.[60] It also wished to distance itself from any politics of virtue or moral education, terms that had been coopted by conservative reformers during the 19th century. The Durkheimian agenda of a moral science was very much at odds with these goals. So other Durkheims were created. *The Division of Labor* became a functionalist work. *Suicide* became a positivist work. And *The Elementary Forms* became a work of cultural sociology. Not that these readings are wrong. But they are partial. If the "essence" of a thing is in the whole, rather than the parts, then such readings surely miss the essence of Durkheim's work. For all of these books are moral science with a practical intent, a point that comes out that much more clearly when all of the parts are included in the whole.

Conclusion: Post-Secular Durkheim

This essay has advanced three theses. The first is that Durkheim was a neo-Aristotelian of sorts. I say "neo" because Durkheim was well aware that Aristotle's ideas could not be mechanically applied to modern societies. The chief differences between the ancient city-state and the modern nation-state, as Durkheim saw it, were two: 1) a more complex "division of labor" which could not be captured by the

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[58] Cladis, *A Communitarian Defense of Liberalism : Emile Durkheim and Contemporary Social Theory*; Dominick LaCapra, *Émile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher* (Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 1972); Wallwork, *Durkheim : Morality and Milieu*.

[59] Based on a "Cited References" search of social science titles in Web of Science on 8/18/10.

[60] Christian Smith, "Secularizing American Higher Education: The Case of Early American Sociology," in *The Secular Revolution*, ed. Christian Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Olivier Tschannen, *Les Théories De La Sécularisation*, Travaux De Droit, D'économie, De Sciences Politiques, De Sociologie Et D'anthropologie ; No 165 (Genève: Droz, 1992).

classical distinction between the "one", the "few" and the "many"; and 2) a more egalitarian moral system which extended citizenship to all and postulated liberty and virtue as universal human capacities rather than elite privileges. Viewed in this way, Durkheim's sociology can be fit squarely into the evolving lineage of civic humanism, from Aristotle to Montesquieu, and placed alongside the work of other thinkers who sought to adapt the classical tradition of political thought to the the modern age, thinkers such as Adam Ferguson, Alexis de Tocqueville, Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël and, for that matter, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson.

Why has the Aristotelian influence been so little noticed? The answer proposed here – and this is the second thesis – is that Durkheim himself downplayed it for reasons of academic and partisan-politics. He wished to draw a sharp line between sociology and philosophy and between his politics and social Catholicism and a public association with Aristotle would have blurred these boundaries. Alas, the ruse succeeded all too well. Later generations were ill-equipped to see the Aristotelian influence and were, in any event, more inclined to see Durkheim as something else, not as a neo-Aristotelian, but as a "French sociologist", a "functionalist" or a "sociologist of culture."

What, finally, is to be gained from recovering the neo-Aristotelian Durkheim? As Freud reminds us, the repressed always returns: as symptoms. The double repression of the Aristotelian underpinnings of Durkheimian sociology is no exception to this rule. Perhaps the most debilitating symptom of all has been functionalism. The roots of the disorder can be traced back to Chapter III of *The Rules*, where Durkheim retreats from a positive ideal of human flourishing and seeks to establish his moral science on a pseudo-biological concept of "normality", turning from the function argument a la Aristotle to a quasi-functionalist argument a la Spencer. It was a fatal move that derailed sociology for the better part of two generations. To be sure, the blame cannot be affixed to Durkheim alone. He had his accomplices on this side of the Atlantic as well, with Talcott Parsons being the chief culprit.

Of course, functionalism was put to rest nearly three decades ago – or, rather, exiled to Germany, where it lives on, in the new guise of "systems theory." All attempts to revive it on this side of the Atlantic have thus far failed. But while there is no reason to regret this, there are perhaps some reasons for nostalgia. Functionalism *did* at least provide a certain language for talking about the social good, however inadequate one. Apart from Marxism, post-functionalist sociology finds itself quite bereft of a moral vocabulary and graduate training in the field often serves as kind of moral *un*-education, in which students are taught to transform their moral convictions into researchable problems – a good thing – before sloughing them off altogether – a bad thing.

Durkheim's sociology contains a strong critique of the neo-Kantian and utilitarian "solutions." Against the neo-Kantians, it contends that there are *objective* sources of morality that derive from human sociality itself. We *desire* the common good because of the emotional returns that moral action generates in the social side of our personalities. Against the utilitarians, it argues that infinite pleasure is not the same as individual well-being, and that moral obligation remains psychologically compelling even when it conflicts with "natural" inclinations. To recast "altruism" or "honor" as "preferences" merely defers the problem without solving it.

Durkheim's sociology also suggests a possible alternative: a theory of the good. Indeed, Durkheim's major works contain an implicit theory of the good (modern) society. This theory is articulated and elaborated across Durkheim's *oeuvre* and I can only provide the barest of sketches in this context. In *The Division of Labor,* the good (modern) society is one in which the structural interdependencies between individuals are intellectual recognized, morally valorized and politically organized. In *Suicide,* the good (modern) society is one in which the goods of individual autonomy and

liberty are properly balanced with the goods of group solidarity and moral regulation. In *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals,* the good (modern) society is one in which there is a robust civil society that can mediate between the individual and the state and establish a proper balance between individual rights, group solidarities and regulatory power. In *Moral Education,* the (good) modern society is one that forms its offspring, not simply into good workers, but also into good citizens, by inculcating public virtues. Finally, in *The Elementary Forms,* the good (modern) society is one that reproduces and revitalizes its core values by means of civic rituals and celebrations.

These prescriptions are admittedly vague. But a neo-Aristotelian moral science would of course be a practical science that would somewhat vague in its results, however exact it might be in its methods. It can help to conceptualize the mean or "target" that one is aiming form, but it is not the means or "bow" itself. And vague is not wrong. On the contrary, contemporary work on "hedonics", "positive psychology" and "the sociology happiness" suggests that Durkheim's conclusions were essentially correct. Income above a certain level (ca. $10,000 per capita) does *not* increase aggregate levels of happiness within a society. Personal well-being and even longevity is much more strongly influenced by the density of social ties than by the size of one's paycheck. And participation in rituals does have measurable effects on individual contentment.

Of course, Durkheim's is not the only vision of sociology. But neither is his the only case of repression. With the exception of Tocqueville, all of the "founders" of modern sociology entered into more or less the same strategic trade-off that he did: in order to distance themselves from religion and philosophy, they cut themselves off from moral and political philosophy. The result, however, was not an "objective" science independent of moral concerns. Rather, it was a moral science predicated on a thin morality – one that came to valorize equality and autonomy above all else – a morality that is publicly denied and typically performed in negative terms – as a critique of all inequality and, more generally, of all power. It is in no small part this lack of moral depth and seriousness that leads many "laypeople" to dismiss the discipline out of hand.

How might we recover this lost depth and seriousness? One strategy might be to undo the double repression that was the side effect of the "secular revolution" in which early sociology was swept up, by reconnecting the discipline to the traditions of moral and political philosophy which it initially arose out of, traditions that have real depth and seriousness. This is not to say that sociology should merge with philosophy or that it should become a stalking horse for civic republicanism – though worse outcomes are imaginable. Rather, it is to say that it should seek to bring the rigor of its methods to bear on the study of human flourishing, and pose the results of its researches against the moral naivete of radical individualism, so as to recover the good from the closet.

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