

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

EDWARD A. TIRYAKIAN, *For Durkheim: Essays in Historical and Cultural Sociology*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, xiii + 360 p., index.

For Durkheim, a collection of articles in Durkheimian sociology, is a testimony to the intellectually rich career of American sociologist Edward Tiryakian. In the spirit of Louis Althusser's *For Marx* (1965) and Bryan Turner's *For Weber* (1981), this book completes the series of homages to the sociological trinity. The preposition, "for," from a title that is easily confused with a dedication page, signals our debt to Durkheim as the founder of sociology as a formal science. To take a cue from his nephew and collaborator, Marcel Mauss, it attests to the binding nature of the "gift relation" Durkheim initiated in bringing credibility to this emergent discipline at the end of the nineteenth century. In reciprocating the gift, as he does by championing Durkheim's work, Tiryakian sometimes risks too cozy a relationship with the latter. It is a kind of relationship that can blight one's critical distance. The author certainly interprets Durkheim with great nuance as one of the foremost living authorities of his work. There are, however, occasions where the reader cannot help but wonder if Durkheim's concepts are adequate to the phenomena in question, and indeed how well certain concepts deployed here stand up against a century of critique and sociological innovation.

Tiryakian's work is representative of the recent revival in classical sociology. This movement seeks to both resituate the canon within its historical context as well as derive from it unique insights for understanding contemporary social life. As Robert Bellah implores on the book's back cover, we must reject Merton's incitement to "forget the founders." The hindsight of a century or more gives us new purchase on these works and in some cases allows us to understand better the circumstances in which these theorists wrote than they did themselves. We are further able to witness once invisible cross-pollinations of far-flung contemporaries.

Tiryakian's historical and biographical accounts compel us to imagine the richness of work that could have come from Durkheim and many of his students had they survived the First World War. Durkheim, we are reminded, left behind an incomplete project: to find a moral basis for collective life in a culture where the old gods had grown old or died off with none yet come to replace them. This is in part the legacy Tiryakian takes up.

The collection is organized into three broad sections: The first, "(Re)Discovering Durkheim," is a mix of historiographic accounts of Durkheim's life and work and the re-imagining of that work for understanding the contemporary world. The second, "Durkheim and Cultural Change," examines the treatment of culture in Durkheimian sociology, with a particular view to the cultural context in which

the school developed. The final section, “Durkheim and Weber,” stages a rapprochement between the work of these two sociological heavyweights, more often placed in opposition to each other.

A couple of pieces that have been included seem dispensable in a collection of this sort – a book review here, an encyclopedia entry there. However, the overview article, “Emile Durkheim’s Matrix,” is as strong an introduction to Durkheim as any I have read, deftly interweaving biographical, historical, theoretical and epistemological insights. The majority of the remaining articles focus on the mature Durkheim of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. This is where Durkheim develops his concept of “the sacred.” He saw religious systems, organized around the sacred, as integral both to society’s coming to consciousness of itself and to its ability to (re)generate social bonds. The innovation of this magnum opus is that in examining religion one arrives at the precondition for the social itself: society’s self-sacralization. This work is arguably of renewed importance today where dismissive and non-sociological accounts of religion like Hitchens’s *God Is Not Great* and Dawkins’s *The God Delusion* dominate public discourse. A classic in cultural sociology, *Elementary Forms* is rightly shown here to be a theoretically rich work at significant variance with the early, positivist Durkheim who dominates too many introductions to sociology. Tiryakian indeed frequently conveys a Durkheim who transcends his earlier, positivist approaches, though the reader is still left wondering just to what extent the latter has really abandoned those early epistemological commitments with his phenomenological turn.

I would agree with the preface-writer that Tiryakian’s writing is indeed “not unmusical.” I might even go so far as to call it “musical” in the affirmative; “playful” even. In one instance, Tiryakian investigates with forensic acuity the mystery of Durkheim and Weber’s failure to demonstrate any awareness of each other despite being contemporaries and intellectual superstars in their respective countries. At times the reader must follow Tiryakian through some intellectual acrobatics, whether in seeking out the conceptual alignments between Durkheim and Weber, in attempting a fusion of horizons between Durkheim’s spirit of positivism and Husserl’s spirit of phenomenology, in speculating upon what Durkheim would say about subjects like East Asian economic development and avant-garde art (subjects about which he was almost completely mum), or even in interpreting the late Durkheim himself as a “creative avant-garde artist.” Less acrobatic but still compelling is Tiryakian’s thorough culling of Durkheim’s work, both along themes like work or social change that are immediately salient to readers of Durkheim as well as themes that are more peripheral to his writings, like sexual anomie or social revolution.

Despite representing a fairly comprehensive account of Durkheimian approaches to culture, some of the more interesting iterations of this tradition seem glaringly absent. The work of the Collège de Sociologie of the 1930s, for example, receives but brief mention, as if inhabited by Durkheim’s illegitimate grandsons. This is despite the fact that one finds in Bataille and his colleagues both a clear continuity with the Durkheimian school and perhaps the most compelling attempts to grapple with themes like revolutionary violence and collective trauma, so pertinent to the analysis of subjects addressed by this collection. This

omission would be less striking if Tiryakian did not draw so extensively from other schools and contributors to the Durkheimian tradition.

It is a bit difficult to perceive in For Durkheim the trajectory of Tiryakian's intellectual career as the articles are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. Some do read as clear products of their time, now seemingly anachronistic in, for example, speculating upon what the new millennium will bring. Others are strikingly current and make a good case for the contemporary relevance of classical sociology. Tiryakian also proves himself to be a champion of the discipline more generally by pointing to the unique insights it may yield for subjects often dominated by political economy like globalization and international development.

Overall, this collection reflects an admirable and humbling contribution to sociological theory spanning the last half-century. For Durkheim would be an engaging read for sociologists of knowledge, cultural sociologists, classical theorists, and certainly anyone actively pursuing the study of Durkheim.

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