Philosophy from the Margins: Durkheim on the Science and Art of Morality
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Gili Kliger

Introduction

In 1906 Émile Durkheim presented a paper on "The Determination of Moral Facts" before the *Société française de Philosophie* in which he argued that while rules of morality have the obligatory character identified by Kant, "by virtue of which [rules] are obeyed simply because they command," this character, on its own, was not enough to compel us to obey: the content of the command must also appear *desirable* to us, that is, it has "to appear in some respect as good." However, because "it is impossible to desire a morality other than that endorsed by the condition of society at a given time," Durkheim—shattering the pretentions of the very people he was addressing—concludes that the moral good does not represent a trans-historical ideal conceived by only the best independent minds, our philosophers and moralists; instead, it is social through and through, determined by time and place, and finds expression in outlets well beyond the reflections of our highly-vaunted metaphysicians.[1] Of them Durkheim maintained, "I have nothing whatever to do with their systematic attempts to explain or construct moral reality, except in so far as one can find in them a more or less adequate expression of the morality of their time."[2] The discussion that followed, though largely cordial, betrayed nevertheless fierce disagreements that struck at the foundational bedrock of their respective disciplines, as the Third Republic's leading philosophers raised objections to Durkheim's overly deterministic portrait of moral behavior and Durkheim defended the reach of his new science against those whose

[1] Durkheim, "The Determination of Moral Facts," in *Sociology and Philosophy* trans. D.F. Pocock (New York: Free Press, 1974) 35-62 (36). This collection of essays, including Durkheim's presentation along with excerpts from the discussion that followed, was first published in France in 1924. The full discussion is available only in *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie, Sixième Année* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1906). I will cite the English translation when available. Otherwise I will provide my own translation and cite the *Bulletin.*
[2] Durkheim, "The Determination of Moral Facts," 41.

personal and professional convictions demanded they hold sacred the autonomy of individual representations.

The stakes were high; when the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, a journal closely associated with and later owned by the *Société*, was founded in 1893 the editors declared that "between the current positivism which stops at the facts, and the mysticism which leads to superstition," philosophy needed to "take back its empire."[3] A decade later Durkheim—whose writings regularly appeared in the *Revue* and whose journal *Année Sociologique* was first published as an insert in the *Revue's* pages—was encroaching on their frontier. If, as Marcel Mauss—Durkheim's nephew, disciple, collaborator, and sometimes critic—said, progress in the sciences is made at the margins between disciplines, "where professors devour each other,"[4] then this paper will interrogate the way those margins were conceived and challenged, and will, in so doing, seek to pose broader questions about the now entrenched divisions between the human and social sciences. Ultimately this paper asks: what did Durkheim, a founding figure of the sociological discipline in France, imagine philosophic inquiry—that is, specifically, inquiry into the nature of our representations—could still contribute once he had exposed the relativity of its enterprise?

To answer this question, I return to Durkheim's most notable statements on the status of philosophy—beginning with his writings in the 1890s, to his 1906 presentation at the *Société française de Philosophie,* and up through his introduction to a never completed book on morality, published only posthumously in 1920. I trace the development of his thought with particular attention to the place he reserves for questions that had previously fallen under the purview of

[3] "Introduction," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1893, 1-5 (4).
[4] Marcel Mauss, "Les Techniques du Corps," in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), 363-386 (365). Cited in Camille Tarot, *De Durkheim à Mauss, l'invention du symbolique: Sociologie et science des religions* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 27.

philosophy. While Durkheim received his training in philosophy at the *École Normale Supérieure*, where he befriended future distinguished academics like Henri Bergson and studied with neo-Kantians like Émile Boutroux, by the time he sat for his *agrégation* exam in 1882 he had identified his primary research interest as the relation between individualism and socialism.[5] And by the time he had written the first draft of *The Division of Labor* in 1886 he had, as Mauss would later write, "by a progressive analysis of his thought and the facts…[come] to see that the solution to the problem belonged to a new science: sociology."[6] Yet he would later reflect, "Metaphysical problems, even the boldest ones which have wracked the 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 new forms. Precisely because of this we believe that sociology, more than any other science, can contribute to this renewal."[7] And finally, towards the end of his life he wrote, "Having started out from philosophy, I tend to return to it; Or, rather I am quite naturally led back to it by the nature of the questions I encountered on the way."[8]

Indeed the most striking feature that emerges in a survey of Durkheim's writings on the topic is the degree to which his position changes over the course of his career, and especially in the last twenty years of his life. I argue that his writings can broadly speaking be divided into three phases. In the first phase Durkheim, as Steven Lukes writes, "had been tempted in the direction of singling out a subset of social facts, characteristic of the structure or 'milieu' of a given society, as basic…Although…he had never explicitly *excluded* ideas and beliefs from that subset, he nevertheless tended to consider them as, in a broad sense, derivative and without any

[5] Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford, 1985), 66-7.
[6] Marcel Mauss, "Introduction to Durkheim" in Durkheim, *Le Socialisme* (Paris: Alcan, 1928), v. Cited in Lukes, 67.
[7] Durkheim, "The Contribution of Sociology to Psychology and Philosophy (1909)," in Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and its Method* ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 2013), 180-83 (181).
[8] Georges Davy, "É. Durkheim," *Revue française de sociologie,* vol. 1, 3-24 (10). Cited in Lukes, 406.

major independent explanatory significance."[9] But around 1895 Durkheim experienced, by his own admission, a "revelation" that would compel him to take more seriously the "capital role played by religion in social life."[10] The result was that he began to afford greater significance to the set of ideas and beliefs shared by a given society, and eventually to see them "as a crucial and relatively independent set of explanatory variables."[11] In this paper I will focus on Durkheim's more occasional pieces from this period, including the 1906 debate, and will trace his efforts to develop the discipline of sociology as a positive science that can objectively study collective representations, including and especially the moral ideals upheld by a given society at a given time—and a subject that had until then been largely left to philosophers. His position, however, betrayed clear difficulties, which his interlocutors at the *Société française* were quick to point out. The most notable difficulty is that if one maintains that each society contains within its very makeup the ingredients for the distinct set of norms best suited to it, and that the job of the sociologist of morality is simply to clarify what those norms are, then it is difficult to explain how collective consciousness changes over time, or how individuals throughout history have been able to imagine ideals in opposition to or distinct from that shared by their contemporaries. In the second section of this paper I trace how Durkheim's later works respond to this difficulty.[12]

While Durkheim's relation to the discipline of philosophy has received its share of scholarly attention,[13] I return to the topic here because it can, I think, lead us to the heart of

[9] Lukes, 229-30.
[10] Simon Deploige, Émile Durkheim, "A propos du conflit de la morale et de la sociologie. Lettres de M. Durkheim et réponses de S. Deploige," *Revue néo-scolastique*, vol.14, no. 56, 1907, 606-621 (612-13).
[11] Lukes, 227.
[12] See W.S.F. Pickering, "Introduction," in *Durkheim: essays on morals and education* ed. W.S.F. Pickering, trans. H.L. Sutcliffe (London: Routledge, 1979), 3-29 (26)
[13] See for example Lukes; Marcel Fournier, *Emile Durkheim: A Biography* trans. David Macey (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013); Dominick LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2003); Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*; *The Sociological Domain, the Durkheimians and the Founding of French Sociology*, ed. Philippe Besnard (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

current debates among intellectual historians—a field which, as Samuel Moyn writes, has "consistently and almost definitionally…skirted engagement with the most serious consequences of social theory for its practice," namely: "the assault on the autonomy of representations," and the challenge to the firm distinction between ideas and practices. While intellectual historians would appear to pose fierce methodological disagreements over the relative "idealism of intellectual history"—or the extent to which context ought to inform our understanding of ideas—Moyn observes that apparent disagreements mask a shared assumption that the "exclusion of most forms of context goes without saying," and that what context *is* allowed into view remains mainly limited to discursive context, or other texts, rather than practices.[14] I want to suggest that the reservations voiced by Durkheim's colleagues in response to his efforts to anchor our representations in shared practices reflect some of the same assumptions regarding the ultimate autonomy of ideas. I return to this century-old debate, then, in the hope that it may illuminate for us new ways of thinking about the methods of intellectual history. In particular, I hope to show that Durkheim's evolving understanding of the origins and pathways of our collective representations reveal to us new possibilities for configuring the relation between ideas and their context.

The Science of Morality

As I have already intimated, in the period prior to his 1895 "revelation," Durkheim assigned little weight to the role of ideas and beliefs in helping us understand social phenomenon, writing in 1890 of the "principles of 1789," that "it is necessary to set [those principles] aside in order to reach back to the needs from which they sprang" and that "to know the meaning and the source

[14] Samuel Moyn, "Imaginary Intellectual History," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* ed. Darrin M. McMahon, Samuel Moyn (Oxford, UK: Oxford U. Press, 2014), 112-130 (112).

of these [unconscious] aspirations it cannot suffice to meditate on the formulations which translate it into consciousness for nothing is less certain than the exactness of this translation."[15] It may be that the theories provided by individual thinkers, since they reflect the state of mind of a society at a given time, offer a way into understanding that society. But we might just as well study other social facts—laws, institutions, demographics—to gain this insight. However Durkheim's realization about the capital role of religion in social life led him to recognize the realm of ideas as having distinct and independent value. Writing in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* in 1898, Durkheim—drawing on an analogy between collective representations and individual mental states, which maintain a relationship with, though are not fully dependent upon, the chemical, neurological processes that produce them—claimed, "If representations once they exist continue to exist in themselves without their existence being perpetually dependent upon the disposition of the neural centers, if they have the power to react directly upon each other and to combine according to their own laws, they are then realities which, while maintaining an intimate relationship with their substratum are to a certain extent independent of it."[16] In other words, while representations bear some relation to the social structure in which they take shape—their "substratum"—they also become "partially autonomous realities with their own way of life."[17] The sociologist was thus called upon—using the objective methods of the new science—to "discover those moral forces that men, down to the present time, have conceived of only under the form of religious allegories," and to "disengage them from their symbols, present them in their rational nakedness."[18] Precisely because those "moral forces" were now understood as social in origin, the individual could not, just by inward reflection, be counted on to reveal to

[15] Durkheim, "The Principles of 1789 and Sociology," in *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society* ed. Robert Bellah (Chicago: U. Chicago, 1973), 34-42 (36, 42).
[16] Durkheim, "Individual and Collective Representations," in *Sociology and Philosophy,* 1-34 (23).
[17] Ibid., 31.
[18] Durkheim, *Moral Education* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 13-14.

us the moral absolutes best suited to our time. Durkheim wrote, "The individual does not carry within himself the precepts of morality designed in some schematic form, so that he has nothing more to do than sharpen and develop them."[19]

Such claims came to a head in the discussions that unfolded at the *Société française* at their February and March meetings in 1906. When, for example, the philosopher Dominique Parodi asked how, on Durkheim's model, an individual could legitimately critique the morality of his time—can't the moral reformer, he asked, "conceive of a moral ideal that his time does not understand and does not yet want, that his time does not demand in fact, but only that ought to be demanded?"[20]—Durkheim insisted that someone like Socrates only expressed more clearly the "morality suited to his time." He explained, "It would be easy to show that, as a result of the transformation of the old society…and the consequent disturbance of religious beliefs, a new morality and religious faith had become necessary in Athens."[21] And when Alphonse Darlu pressed him further, saying that each moral transformation must begin with an individual opposing his conscience to the collective conscience, Durkheim insists, "It is the true nature of society that is conformed to when traditional morality is obeyed, and yet it is also the true nature of society which is being conformed to when the same morality is flouted."[22] Durkheim's conception, as other discussion participants pointed out, seemed, on the one hand, to reject the view that moral absolutes represent timeless, metaphysical ideals, and to depend, on the other

[19] Ibid., 87.
[20] *Bulletin*, 171.
[21] Ibid., 173.
[22] Ibid., 174. In a 1901 letter Durkheim complained, specifically, of Darlu writing, "The current spiritualist metaphysics…the one that has become and has remained current in France since the middle of the century, tends, by a natural inclination, not perhaps to monopolize sociology, but to declare it impossible, in short to oppose it. There is no doubt in my mind that people like Darlu, for example, accept the word but deny the thing in itself. All of them in fact are prone to isolate representations from the rest of reality, to make of them a separate world. Consequently they cannot admit that there can be a science thereof, in the proper sense of the word. Being heirs to religious thinking, they set themselves as defenders of this last bastion and without realizing it, labour to remove it from the reach of profane thinking. It is said here are things too subtle, too complex to be taken over by the crude procedures of science; that all is a matter of nuances, of uncategorisable qualities, which sentiments, intuition alone can appreciate. Ah! Nuances! That is the slogan of men who will not think." See *The Sociological Domain* ed. Besnard, 53.

hand, on a kind of time-bound metaphysics. The true morality of the time lies beyond the apparent one, and when a transformation is demanded the new morality surfaces; Socrates might have been ahead of his time in a certain sense, but what he really did, according to Durkheim, was express or translate his society's true "spirit." While this claim seems to go against even contemporary assumptions about our moral ideals—we still praise the moral vision of outstanding individuals or otherwise assume that certain ideals transcend the particulars of a given society—it may not be quite as foreign as it appears. Consider, for example, the statement, "It's 2016 and women in the U.S. still don't receive equal pay for equal work." The coherence of such a claim may rest, in part, on the long history of the struggle for equal rights, but the claim also seems to carry with it an assumption about the morality best suited to our particular time, about the ideals that *our* society demands. In any case the main difficulty of this position is that it begs, but cannot fully answer, the question: who initiates changes in moral consciousness? Might we reserve *this* role for philosophers?

When Durkheim is asked why he discards the moral theories provided by philosophers in fact he admits:

> The ambition of philosophers is sooner to construct a new morality, different, sometimes on essential points, from that which their contemporaries follow. They have sooner been revolutionaries and iconoclasts. However the problem which I pose to myself is to know what morality consists in or what it has consisted in, not such as it is conceived or has been conceived by such and such individual philosopher, but such as it has been lived by human collectives. From this point of view, the doctrines of philosophers lose much of their value.[23]

[23] Ibid., 196.

And, yet, while he dismisses philosophers precisely because their moral imagination takes them out of step with their time, a few sentences later he returns to the idea that the best philosophers can provide is insight into the moral consciousness of their time, writing, "However one would be mistaken in thinking that I exclude [the theories of philosophers] systematically; I deny to them only this kind of prerogative and primacy that is too often accorded to them. They are also facts and instructive; they also give us information on what is going on in the moral consciousness of an era…What I refuse to admit is that they express the true morality in a particularly exceptional manner."[24] And, *yet,* just a few responses later, Durkheim admits that the conceptions of philosophers and moralists "direct our attention to aspirations that are only in the process of becoming conscious,"[25] which would suggest that philosophers *do* help prepare transformations in collective consciousness, and *are* able to conceive of ideals that are distinct from those of their time.

Durkheim's equivocal stance only becomes more muddled when we turn to the other reviews and essays he penned in this period. In a 1903 review of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *La Morale et La Science des Moeurs* he wrote that theoretical morality "is quite simply a way of co-ordinating as rationally as possible the ideas and sentiments which comprise the moral *conscience* of a particular period. In actual fact, the moralist lays down the law less than he thinks; he is merely the mirror of his time." And, "far from dictating laws for practice," he writes, theoretical morality "merely mirrors practice and conveys it in a more abstract language."[26] Durkheim is insistent, then, that the moralist can play no part in creating new ideals: "The morality of a people at a given moment in its history does not have to be created. It exists: it is a

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 199.
[26] Durkheim, "Review 'Lévy-Bruhl, *La Morale et la science des mœurs'*," in *Durkheim: essays on morals and education,* 29-33 (30).

reality… Its morality does not therefore come from the hands of some intellectual genius; it receives it with its very organization, which is to say, when it receives life."[27] And yet he gestures nonetheless towards the thought that the moralist might prepare the way for a "rational modification" of moral reality: "As the laws of moral reality become known, we will be gradually more in a position to undertake a rational modification of it, to say what it should be."[28] And, similarly, in a 1905 essay Durkheim insists, once again, that "the role of the moralist is thus not to create or invent morality as though it did not already exist: it does exist." Yet the task of the moral expert is to study the causes that give rise to our moral precepts. And so Durkheim admits, "When one knows that a moral conception is dependent upon a particular condition of existence which has now disappeared, one can declare with certainty that this conception must change, and furthermore it is by analogy with the past that is possible to conjecture—one can do no more than that—what the change shall be."[29] Durkheim, who otherwise insists on a firm distinction between the descriptive and the prescriptive, the "is" and the "ought," tentatively suggests that the moral theorist might somehow hover between the two, or deal in both realms.

While Durkheim's claim rests on an understanding of theoretical morality as a formal social science—it is because the moralist has objectively studied the moral precepts of her time and in the past that she can speculate on the morality to come—I want to suggest that these writings also betray the possibility that the work of speculation might involve, too, a creative leap. One way we might think about this is to pose the question: Where do collective representations exist? Durkheim assumes, on the one hand, that the collective representations in

[27] Ibid., 31-2.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Durkheim, "Contribution to 'Morality without God: an attempt to find a collectivist solution'," in *Durkheim: essays on morals and education,* 34-36 (34-5).

which moral ideals find expression exist out there in the world waiting for the moral scientist to "rationally coordinate" them. On the other hand, he insists that those representations have a "partially autonomous" reality—both independent of while still bearing a relation to the material, social reality that produced them. Do our collective representations float indefinitely above our institutions and practices without ever settling in the minds of individuals? Or are they only given shape and definition once the moralist steps in and articulates them? And if that is the case can it be said that the moralist *creates* representations? Durkheim, at least in this period, would sooner deny her those powers.[30] Yet while he insists that the moralist does no more than reproduce the moral practices of his contemporaries (*il ne fait que reproduire…les pratiques morales de ses contemporains)*, he says, within the same breath, that the moralist renders those practices more readily representable (*plus aisément représentables*). I would argue that Durkheim is hinting at a possibility that he would further, though only partially, develop in his later works: that not only do collective representations reflect what is out there in the world; they are also the product of human artifice and creation.

Moral Art

It is only in his writings beginning around 1909 that Durkheim further elaborated the thought that representations are actually created. In an essay that first appeared in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale,* and would later be published—in modified form and with an entire section removed—as the introduction to his 1912 *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim intended to indicate "the social elements which have helped to constitute certain of our

[30] Although we might note Durkheim's claim in his 1898 "Individualism and the Intellectuals" that the current ethic that demands respect for man's life and liberty has become "a religion in which man is at once the worshiper and the god." Durkheim means to suggest that man has become both the subject who does the worshiping and the object that is worshiped. But the god-analogy is compelling in that it also places man in the role of creator—a role that Durkheim only signals towards in his later works.

categories. (Time, causality, the notion of force, the notion of personality.)," and which he thought could best be tackled from "the perspective of religious thought."[31] Durkheim here addresses most directly the relation between sociology and philosophy. He is notably critical of those neo-Kantians who continue to study our categories of understanding and seek to find the law that gives them their unity. He writes, "If these categories have the origin that we have attributed to them it is not possible to treat them according to the exclusively dialectic and ideological method employed at present."[32] Because the categories are social in origin they cannot be the same across time and place, and, hence, cannot be treated as natural or given.[33] In a footnote he writes, "For these philosophers the categories pre-form (*préforment*) reality," that is, shape reality beforehand, "while for us they summarize (*résumer*) reality. According to them they are the natural law of thought; for us they are the product of human artifice (*l'art humain*)."[34] And in another footnote he writes, "The rationalism that is immanent in a sociological theory of knowledge stands between empiricism and classical apriorism. For the first, the categories are purely artificial constructs; for the second, on the other hand, they are naturally given; for us, they are works of art, in a sense, but an art that imitates nature ever more perfectly."[35]

I want to suggest that the idea that the categories might be thought of as works of art, or products of human artifice, opens the way for Durkheim for a model according to which moral ideals are liable to change and in which the moralist plays a role in producing those changes.

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[31] This comes from a letter Durkheim wrote to Xavier Léon, the editor of *RMM,* dated July 24 1908. See Lukes, 408.
[32] Durkheim, "The Contribution of Sociology to Psychology and Philosophy (1909)," in Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and its Method,* 182; Durkheim, "Sociologie Religieuse et Théorie de la Connaissance," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* vol. 17, no. 6, 1909, 733-58 (757).
[33] In fact, however, it was precisely because Durkheim and his colleagues discovered, through their survey of ethnographic research, that the categories of understanding varied across societies that they were led to conclude their social origin.
[34] Durkheim, "The Contribution of Sociology to Psychology and Philosophy (1909)," 240, note 1; Durkheim, "Sociologie Religieuse et Théorie de la Connaissance," 757, note 1.
[35] Durkheim, "Sociologie Religieuse et Théorie de la Connaissance," 753, note 2. See Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 17, note 22.

This marks a shift even from essays written a few years earlier in which Durkheim, on the one hand, recognizes that collective representations take shape in a semi-autonomous realm, distinct from their material "substratum," and yet seems to suggest that it is only when institutions change that ideas, too, can change with them. The most the moralist can do, on this model, is study the "the particular conditions of existence" upon which a moral conception depends; the moralist is then equipped to call for new ideals should those conditions change. The change in Durkheim's thinking on these matters emerges in one of the final texts he produced: the opening chapter of a planned book on ethics, titled *La Morale*, which he wrote the summer before he died in 1917. Mauss would write that this work "was the goal of his existence, the center point of his intellect."[36] In this opening section Durkheim states clearly, "The moral ideal is not immutable…New ideas and aspirations appear which modify or even revolutionize existing morality."[37] Already we note the expanded role he assigns to ideas, now able to "revolutionize" existing thought. More interesting is the expanded role of the moralist. Durkheim writes, "It is the moralist's role to prepare the ground for these necessary transformations. And since he is not held back by established morality, he claims the right to sweep it completely aside should his principles so demand. *He is at liberty to create something original and break new ground*" (my emphasis).[38] I argue that Durkheim is able to arrive at this claim only because he recognizes that collective representations are constructed or created, which means that they must be created *by someone*. He writes, for example, that in order to cope with the tangible things of our world, we make for ourselves representations ("*nous nous en faisons certains représentations*").[39] Durkheim thus admits, "Moral speculation, which we first thought was scientific in nature…is

[36] Cited in Pickering, "Introduction," in *Durkheim: essays on morals and education*, 4.
[37] Durkheim, "Introduction to Ethics," in *Durkheim: essays on morals and education,* 77-96 (81).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Durkheim, "Introduction à la morale," *Revue philosophique*, vol. 89, no. 6, 1920, 79-97 (92).

the product of thought and reflection…it is said to be both an art and a science."[40] Durkheim's moralist thus hovers between the realm of "is" and "ought." The moralist, as scientist, deals in the realm of the descriptive, while the moralist as artist deals in the prescriptive. He notes, "The methods employed by science and art differ; there is in fact a fundamental antithesis between them. The domain of science is the past and the present, which it attempts to interpret as accurately as possible. Art is turned towards the future which it seeks to anticipate and construct in advance."[41] But he insists, too, that the latter is dependent on the former: "Thus the art of morality and the construction of the moral ideal presuppose an entire science which is positive and inductive and encompasses all the details of moral facts."[42]

Conclusion

I want to provisionally sketch what we might draw from Durkheim's own rather provisional conclusions regarding "moral speculation." We do not have to concern ourselves with the details of Durkheim's projected new "science of moral facts" to appreciate the broader claims he makes about the nature of our collective representations. That is, even if he means to restrict his conclusions to the study of moral facts, I think his insights might have applications beyond just our understanding of moral ideals, and in particular might provide new ways of thinking about longstanding debates in intellectual history. As I see it, there are two central claims worth retaining: first is the idea that the activity of producing representations might be thought of as a science to the extent that it involves an effort to—or perhaps cannot even help but—positively capture or describe what is or what has been, and as an art to the extent that it involves the creation of something new. Second is the idea that understanding the latter depends upon the

[40] Durkheim, "Introduction to Ethics," 81.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 90.

former—that is, our understanding of this constructive or creative dimension depends upon an adequate appreciation of the extent to which representations reflect or embody current practices. What can this tell those of us who study representations produced in the past? I think it might serve us well to think about the production of representations as hovering between, or involving both, science and art. To do so would call for us to recognize the extent to which the ideas we study embody or are embedded in contemporary practices—not because they are wholly reducible to their outside, but because it is only once we can see the imprint of current practices that the genuinely new or creative dimension of those representations can be revealed to us. Only then do we take full stock of the dynamic processes through which representations continue to be unmade and remade across time.