

# Durkheim as the Founding Father of Phenomenological Sociology

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**Abstract** In the first place, I discuss the main papers and books on Durkheim published in recent years, where no attention is given to the phenomenological interpretations of his work. Then I expose different phenomenological readings of Durkheim, some of them positive (for instance, Tyriakian's), some negative (Monnerot and others), some ambivalent (like Schutz's). Later I find that there is in Durkheim an implicit practice of phenomenology, inspired by Descartes' *Meditations on first philosophy*. Consequently, I support Tyriakian's thesis that there is in Durkheim an implicit phenomenological approach, despite his positivism. Then I wonder whether this tacit approach produces a phenomenological ontology of the social world. I find that it actually does, especially in what regards to social facts considered as things. I argue that Durkheim's conception of social things is consistent with Husserl's notion of ideal objectivities. I conclude that Durkheim's rule of considering social facts as things is part of his phenomenological legacy and that it does not contradict the idea that they also are "states lived".

**Keywords** Durkheim · Husserl · Social facts · Social things · Phenomenological method · Social ontology

## Introduction

In my paper, I will argue that Durkheim is the founding father of phenomenological sociology. This might come up as a surprise since he is deemed to be an "objectivistic" who opposed to allegedly subjectivistic approaches such as

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phenomenology. From this perspective, there cannot be any serious convergence between Durkheim and phenomenology since they hold different ways of conceiving the social (see Bourdieu 1979: 562f. and Bourdieu 1980: 58, 74).

The current consensus amongst Durkheimian scholars reinforces the idea that phenomenology has nothing to do with Durkheim. If we take a look at the most important books on Durkheim in the last 15 years, we might be surprised to find out that there are no references to Husserl or Schutz, whose works are not even included in the bibliography. Other phenomenologists are rarely named. For instance, Alexander and Smith include a few mentions to Heidegger (Alexander and Smith 2005: 246, 362) and Merleau-Ponty (Alexander and Smith 2005: 211), all of them incidental or trivial. Pickering quotes Berger and Luckmann's definition of reality as "a quality appertaining to phenomena which we recognize as having a being independent of volition" only to argue that "Durkheim frequently used the word reality in this sense" (Pickering 2000a, 104). Berger and Luckmann are also mentioned in Schmaus, according to whom their "purely phenomenological analysis" lapses into "causal talk" (Schmaus 2004: 7).

One could also corroborate that in the last 10 numbers of *Durkheimian Studies* (the scholarly journal of the British Centre for Durkheimian Studies) there is not a single article on Durkheim and Phenomenology and that phenomenologists are only mentioned for allegedly seeing Durkheim as someone who ignores "the nature of social action as intrinsically meaningful" (Stedman Jones 2003: 14).

Something similar happens with books and dissertations published in the new Century, where phenomenologists are depicted as confronting Durkheim. For instance, Hamilton thinks that phenomenologists "are critical of Durkheim" (Hamilton 2002: 94) and Richman refers to Merleau-Ponty and Sartre as part of the generation that rejected his "Third Republic ideology" (Richman 2002: 102). Morin (2003), instead, does not mention Phenomenology at all, and Toews refers to Durkheim in a vague, superficial way by saying that "his strategy is to take the social a phenomenon" (Toews 2001: 24).

Why is it that Durkheim's affinity with phenomenology has been overlooked by contemporary sociology? Could it be because there is not such a thing? In the following, I will provide two kinds of answers to this question: one factual in nature, another rational. As a matter of fact, some of the main French phenomenologists supported the idea that Durkheim has accounted for social phenomena in an insightful manner and American scholars have found in his writings an implicit phenomenological approach. As regards the order of reasons, my claim is that only the idea of phenomenology allows us to make sense of Durkheim's work as a whole.

I hope the reader will find the arguments provided hereby at least reasonable enough to make sense. Briefly, the reasons that I will allege are: that Durkheim, as Husserl, conceives his pursue as a kind of Cartesianism, regardless the fact that they both confront Cartesianism in many aspects; that we may find not the idea but, yes, the practice of Phenomenology in Durkheim and even some methodological convergences with Husserl; that they share some ontological definitions such as the idea of objectivities as a particular kind of things and the intent to conceive society as a form of conscientiousness.

In the next sections, I will develop further these perspectives, starting (“[The Phenomenological Readings of Durkheim in the Phenomenological Tradition](#)” section) with the factic argument that Durkheim’s work has interested many phenomenologists. Then I will offer different reasons why the phenomenological perspective can contribute to make sense of Durkheim’s work in a unique, unmatched way. Each of these reasons will be addressed in particular (“[A Few Good Reasons Why Durkheim Must Be Considered as a Phenomenologist](#)” to “[Husserl and Durkheimian Sociology](#)” sections). I will finish by setting some limits of my comparison (“[Durkheim as a New Galileo](#)” section) and articulating the reasons presented in a global, integrated argument that will disclose the deep phenomenological meaning of Durkheim’s sociology (“[Durkheim as the Descartes of Phenomenological Sociology \(Final Remarks\)](#)” section).

## **The Phenomenological Readings of Durkheim in The Phenomenological Tradition**

As said, it is a fact that some of the most prominent phenomenologists have appreciated the deep insights of Durkheim, particularly in the twentieth Century. Mainly it was French philosophers who recognized this phenomenological air in his work, although some sociologists out of the ordinary have been perceptive to this implicitly phenomenological approach of the founding father of academic French sociology. In this section, I will go through these phenomenological interpretations of Durkheim and distinguish three different stances: (a) one against Durkheim; (b) another, ambivalent; (c) a last one, positive.

**2.a.** The phenomenological reading of Durkheim can be traced back to Monnerot (1946), with whom he overtly engages in discussion from a phenomenological-existential perspective inspired by Sartre and Husserl. Thus considered, the alleged “social facts” are not “things” but “situations lived” and identified pursuant to a particular “human condition”. Hence, it would not be possible to address social facts as things because the manner in which they exist is not that proper of things; therefore, “Durkheim’s dogmatic sociology” would make the mistake of using the same word to designate two types of phenomena that are substantially heterogeneous.

As opposed to Durkheim, Monnerot argues that social facts, while phenomena, are ambiguous and can only exist if they gain meaning from a human situation in a specific place and time. Therefore, Sociology should refer to “states lived” and not to “things”.

These states should be comprehended rather than explained rationally as required by the “non-written rule” of Durkheim’s sociological method; namely, in order for sociology to be deemed scientifically, it should establish explanatory relations with grounds on statistical co-variations.

A more contemporary and radical critique of Durkheim’s ideas is presented by Henry (2007) who considers that Durkheim conceives of society as a specific reality whose laws rule individual life even though they are, as laws, mere abstractions. Thus, it would be nonsense to think that abstract “social laws” rule individual life.

From this point of view, the words “social life” would not refer to any kind of reality.

Indeed, for Henry, reality (i.e., life) is strictly individual and the social is nothing else than mere abstractions (i.e., unrealities). For instance, neither politics nor economics find their reality in themselves but in the subjective praxis of the individuals who produce and sustain them.<sup>1</sup> From this angle, there is no reality in society other than the real living individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, from a Hernian point of view, Durkheim’s idea of society as a reality *sui generis* whose laws are different from the ones that rule individual phenomena would be nonsense (Paredes-Martín 2011: 105). Consequently, the conception of the supremacy of society on the individuals and the belief that it can act on them according to objective rules would be an “illusion” because “the laws of society cannot be different from the laws of the living subjectivities” (Paredes-Martín 2011: 105). Thus, social laws, “based on an abstract hypostatized reality,” would be incapable of causing any individual actions (Paredes-Martín 2011: 106–107).

**2.b.** Also in the context of social sciences, phenomenology has let Durkheim’s phenomenological legacy escape. In that regard, Schutz’s case is paradigmatic as he reflects a duality that includes familiarity with and aversion to Durkheim. On one hand, he strongly denies the existence of such a thing as a “collective consciousness” because “social relations are always inter-subjective” (Schutz 1967: 144). The concept of collective consciousness would be nothing but a metaphysical aftertaste. Hence, Schutzian criticisms unwillingly match positivists’ challenges to metaphysics, while paradoxically being more positivist than Durkheim.

Furthermore, not all references to Durkheim made by Schutz are critical. For instance, he praises the concepts of anomie (Schutz 1964: 117) and of rule (Schutz and Luckmann 1989: 280). However, the Schutzian rescue of Durkheim is questionable. What would be of rules and anomie if they did not make reference to the collective consciousness? That is to say, how can Schutz focus on social things under a Durkheimian approach, having rejected the idea of collective consciousness on the grounds that it is speculative and metaphysical in nature?

A deeper understanding of Durkheim can be found in Ortega y Gasset, who points out that society is not a mere creation of individuals but an “authentic reality” (Ortega y Gasset 1981: 12) since we face them daily in our personal life. Hence, *there are* social facts. So, even if Ortega y Gasset is close to Schutz in many other matters<sup>3</sup> [specially in arguing that there is not “a collective soul” (Ortega y Gasset 1981: 16f.)], he disagrees with him when claiming that, disregarding his misleading concept of a collective consciousness, Durkheim is the one who got closest to an appropriate intuition of social facts (Ortega y Gasset 1981: 16).

<sup>1</sup> According to Michel Henry, “reality is not ‘economic,’ which means that both the objective structures of Economy and their allegedly autonomous laws have their ultimate founding outside the economy, in the living individual; thus, such laws are subject to his fate and to the immanent law that transforms, in the individual, his needs into action and satisfaction” (Lipsitz 2012: 140).

<sup>2</sup> In other words: “society has no reality of itself, a specific or different one from that of the individuals, since the only reality is life in its irreducible nature” (Paredes-Martín 2011: 105).

<sup>3</sup> On the Schutz–Ortega relation, see Nasu (2009: 271–289).

2.c. As opposed to the controversial frame of mind of Monnerot, Henry, and Schutz, and taking Durkheim's side in a more resolute way than Ortega y Gasset, Merleau-Ponty refers to him in two texts collected in *Éloge de la Philosophie*. The first one («Le philosophe et la sociologie») depicts an attachment to the Durkheimian manner of understanding social facts upon stating—based on an interpretation by Husserl—that, for as regards the social, the question lies in understanding “how it can constitute a ‘thing’ to be known without preconceptions and, at the same time, a ‘meaning’ that is only given an opportunity to become evident by the societies from which we gain knowledge” (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 104). The second text mentioned («De Mauss à Claude Lévi-Strauss») recalls the rule of treating social facts as things and other Durkheimian ideas such as collective representations, collective consciousness and essential forms of social life (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 124); clear references that are directed to a reading of Lévy-Bruhl and his notion of “primitive mentality,” and Mauss' theory of gift (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 125f).

Furthermore, Levinas also embraces some of Durkheim's claims and engages in an early study thereof at the University of Strasbourg, where he attended Halbwachs' classes (Hayat 1995: 41).<sup>4</sup> Hence, he managed to capture from a Durkheimian perspective a drafting of the “essential social categories” on the basis of the main idea that the social “is not limited to a mere addition of individual psychologies”; however, he believes those ideas only become entirely meaningful when recovered under a Husserlian and Heideggerian approach (Levinas 1982: 17–21). Thus, Levinas portrays Durkheim as a “metaphysician” of the social world, who successfully proved that society is structured as a totality with its own reality, and is superior to the individuals who are part of it (Levinas 1961: 203). This, in turn, entails appraising the idea of social totality (Levinas 1991: 40) understood not as merely factual coexistence but as what gives individuals the chance to elevate themselves to morality (Hayat 1995: 42).

Irrespective of these friendly phenomenological interpretations of Durkheim, it was Tiryakian who drafted the most emphatic argument in support of Durkheim, upon claiming that—despite his positivism, which could give rise to confrontations with phenomenology-, if we consider the connotations of treating social facts as things, we could establish a profound affinity with Husserl, who attempted to go back to things themselves. Furthermore, both authors share a methodological procedure that consists in suspending a naive stance, setting aside the prejudices inherent to our natural stance in order to operate some sort of reduction. It is in this regard that Tiryakian refers to Durkheim's implicitly phenomenological approach (Tiryakian 1965: 383).<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly, this analogy is limited. Indeed, Tiryakian's stance has been challenged by Heap and Roth, alleging that he uses the concepts of phenomenology in a metaphorical way (Heap 1973: 355)—mainly as regards the intentionality of consciousness, the reduction, the concept of phenomenon, and the concept of

<sup>4</sup> See also Caygill (2002: 9f.).

<sup>5</sup> See also Tiryakian (2009).

essence. All these elements would lead to a distorted, if not perverted, idea of both phenomenology and sociology (Heap 1973: 359).

I could possibly agree with Heap and Roth that the expression of Tiryakian's proposition is somehow rudimentary and vague. Even so, I find his intuition that there is an implied phenomenology in Durkheim sound; therefore, I hereby intend to find more accurate arguments different from those of Tyriakian, holding out hope of proving a deep and programmatic rapprochement between Durkheim and Husserl, disguised through odd positivism and even lost after the illusions such positivism cherishes. Also, supporting Tyriakian's thesis will mean to reject Monnerot's by stating that social facts are indeed things in full phenomenological sense.

## **A Few Good Reasons Why Durkheim Must Be Considered as a Phenomenologist**

Phenomenology cannot stay at a mere empirical level. Its commitment is not just to collect facts but to make sense of them. Thus the sole constatation that, as a matter of fact, important phenomenologists have found in Durkheim valuable insights does not suffice. We must take our considerations to another level reflecting not only on the fact that there is something phenomenologically challenging in Durkheim's work but considering the reasons why this is so. In this perspective, my aim is to prove a rapprochement between Durkheim and Husserl as regards two levels, methodological and ontological.

As to the methodological convergences between Durkheim and Husserl, I will focus on the idea that they both considered Descartes as one of their main inspirations. In "[Cartesian Spiritualism and the Context of Durkheim's Sociology](#)" and "[Durkheim's Practice of Phenomenology](#)" sections, I will address their peculiar Cartesianism: (a) by listing a number of Cartesian themes present in Durkheim and Husserl; and (b) by showing that they both abide by the first step of Descartes' philosophical method as exposed in his *Meditations on first philosophy*. I will also show another kind of methodological convergences by describing, in "[The Quest for the Origins as a Practice of Genetic Phenomenology](#)" section, the way that Durkheim practices a genetic phenomenology.

As to the ontological convergences, I will argue in "[Sacred Things and the Ontological Regions of the Social](#)" section that Durkheim's mandate of treating social facts as things has a phenomenological meaning, namely that social things are ideal objectivities that, as I will show in "[The Quest for the Origins as a Practice of Genetic Phenomenology](#)" section, are constituted historically and eidetically. In "[Husserl and Durkheimian Sociology](#)" section, I will find a similar conception of the social in Husserl's manuscripts with the aim to disclose that they share a social ontology based on objectivities constituted by consciousness. Nonetheless, in "[Durkheim as a New Galileo](#)" section, I will ascertain some limits of this comparison, noting that there are not only similarities but also significant differences among them. With this spirit, I will argue that Durkheim, like Galileo in Husserl's *Crisis*... "is at once a discovering and a concealing genius" (Husserl 1970: 52). Who wastes his finding in as much the same manner as Descartes lost his

*cogito* soon after discovering it. I will end, in “[Durkheim as the Descartes of Phenomenological Sociology \(Final Remarks\)](#)” section, with some general remarks on the importance of Durkheim for phenomenological sociology.

## Cartesian Spiritualism and the Context of Durkheim’s Sociology

A number of recent studies have remarked the importance of Cartesianism for understanding Durkheim’s sociology. They appropriately call attention to the importance of this perspective as one of the main contexts of French academic discussions of that time. Nevertheless, the way these studies related Cartesianism to Durkheim is, as I will try to prove here, insufficient because they can only see in it a collection of misunderstandings and confrontations.

About Cartesianism as a misunderstanding, Stedman Jones recalls that, “for Kant, Descartes is the main exponent of problematic idealism” (2000a: 46). Fields, in turn, considers that, when Durkheim refers to the soul as something real but without extension, he tacitly quotes Descartes’ *res extensa* (Fields 2005: 175) in a way that Descartes might not accept (Fields 2005: 178). And Schmaus refers to Descartes as a skeptical, invoking his “evil genius” (Schmaus 2004: 139)—which might be contested by many Cartesian scholars.

About the idea that Durkheim confronts Descartes, it is possible to find a variety of motives why this is so. One, historical, is because Renouvier, who influenced Durkheim, “dismissed the spiritualists’ Cartesian introspection of the soul” (Schmaus 1998: 178) and opposed “the egocentric approach of Cartesian idealism” (Stedman Jones 2000a: 47). This alleged confrontation is also extended to some of Durkheim’s predecessors and contemporaries such as Cousin, Mendelssohn, Kant, Maine de Biran, Guyer, and Rabier (Schmaus 2004: 20, 60ff, 50–52, 164, footnote 9).

Another motive—probably, the most claimed—is that Durkheim’s sociology surpasses Cartesian philosophy not only because—in some respects—Durkheim is superior to Descartes but also because sociology solves some philosophical antinomies. For instance, according to Schmaus, Durkheim offered “a superior explanation” of the universality and necessity of the categories than that provided by Cartesian introspection (Schmaus 2004: 1f.). Also Richman sees this relation in a similar way when stating that Durkheim and “the French invention of sociology arose as a reaction to” Cartesianism (Richman 2002: 75) whose “global effects [...] on French thought and culture” he reproved (Richman 2002: 79). In this view, nothing good seems to come out of Cartesianism.

I will agree that Durkheim’s relation with Cartesianism is complex, sometimes conflicting and even mistaken. Nevertheless, a more accurate and specific relation with Descartes can be found in *Rules...*, which might let us to think that most of what Durkheim confronted had to do with the Cartesian spiritualism of his contemporaries rather than with Descartes himself. Anyway, I have to admit that Durkheim challenged many of Descartes’ ideas, particularly that the spirit is the easiest thing to know because the ego accesses it from the inside. Although I will like to focus on one special issue which, in my opinion, makes Durkheim a



Cartesian and, therefore, a phenomenologist in Husserl's sense. This is easiest seen through a comparison between Descartes' *Meditations on first philosophy* and Durkheim's *Rules...*

The influence of *Meditations on first philosophy* in Durkheim's *Rules...* can be ascertained through minor and anecdotic references, such as considering heat as an example of subjective impressions for being confusing; i.e., not being "clear and distinct notions" (Durkheim 1999: XIII). Also true is that, based on the same case and the same criterion, Durkheim reaches a conclusion opposite to that made by Descartes: it is not about the certainty of sentiment (it is absolutely true that I feel hot, irrespective of the outside temperature) but about the doubtful nature of our impressions (considered under Hume's rather than Descartes' approach, as fallible representations or copies of the outside). Nevertheless, at this particular point, I only intended to prove that a highly significant paratext of *Rules of Sociological Method* is, indeed, *Meditations on first philosophy*.

However, the deepest convergence should not be traced to incidental quotes but to the programmatic aspects of both authors, that will reveal a Durkheim who is not as positivist as expected by prevailing consensus in the academic arena. Indeed, such positivism—the main hurdle to the comparison suggested herein, as previously noted by Tyriakian—is embraced by Durkheim for being a legitimate science model for its time rather than for philosophical convictions. Furthermore, the author of *Rules...* considers himself as a rationalist rather than a positivist; positivism being a consequence of his rationalism and not the other way around (Durkheim 1999: 13). That is to say, the positive method is not appraised by Durkheim in terms of its intrinsic features but upon consideration of the fact that it would guarantee adherence to rational science. Therefore, *Rules...* is a "‘rationalist’ manifest, as Durkheim himself invite us to think" (Chazel 2011: 27).

In this context, the most direct and significant influence of Descartes on Durkheim is—once again, despite his positivism—of methodological nature. It is precisely the rule whereby social facts should be treated as things what Durkheim presents as a "state of mind" that must be reached by sociologists, not so different to the phenomenological *epoché* (as will be seen in "[Durkheim's Practice of Phenomenology](#)" section). So, the Durkheimian method is a Cartesian method—just as Husserl's when he claimed that Phenomenology is almost a "neo-Cartesianism" (Husserl 1982: 43).

This is sufficiently evidenced in the title of *Rules of Sociological Method*, where Durkheim, in a Cartesian spirit, proposes "rules concerned with the observation of social facts" (Durkheim 1999: 15) so that the leanings of the "spirit" do not make him fall into preconceptions. Now, the first one of these rules—"systematically discard all pre-notions"—is associated with Descartes' methodic doubt as if it provided an example for application (Durkheim 1999: 31). Durkheim also commits himself to respect the rules of synthesis and analysis (Durkheim 1999: 137) which, as it is well known, are two of the rules stated by Descartes in *Discourse of Method*. That is to say, despite any speculation or conclusion we may reach, *Durkheim himself explains that the sociological method departs from the very same principle as the Cartesian method*.



## Durkheim's Practice of Phenomenology

The aforementioned methodological convergence allows us to consider Durkheim as a phenomenologist like Husserl, who also finds inspiration in Descartes for the first step of his method which consists in bracketing all our theories and preconceptions. Yet, neither the meaning of Durkheim's work nor the meaning of Phenomenology can be understood as a mere matter of facts. It is not just the fact that Durkheim and Husserl quoted Descartes what makes them phenomenologists.

There are two different features that make a phenomenologist out of Durkheim: (a) that the context of his Cartesianism is similar, in many aspects, to the context in which Husserl interpreted Descartes' findings; (b) that Durkheim's Cartesianism leads him to a practice of phenomenology which shares not only the first step of the Husserlian *epoché* (namely, the phenomenological reduction) but also the second step (i.e., the eidetic reduction). In this section I will explore both levels of Durkheim's implicit phenomenological stand.

**4.a.** It would not be difficult to establish deep in the wording of *Rules of Sociological Method* the presence of various phenomenological topics. One could find there some of the key slogans of Husserlian phenomenology such as the explicit rejection of any metaphysical approach or speculation in order to focus entirely on "things themselves". Further, this idea is rooted in "a higher positivism" which sets itself up as the heir of rationalism and not a mystification of empirical dogma. Similarly, we could detect some of the fundamental problems of *The Crisis of European Sciences* (Husserl 1970) such as a criticism of psychologism—a doctrine Durkheim considers "dangerous"—in concomitance with a criticism of objectivism (here, of a materialistic kind) to which he declares an "opponent". Moreover, we could focus on this sort of "heroism of Reason" (as Husserl puts it) while Durkheim invites all those who take part in the "faith in the future of reason" as a way out of these "times of resurgent mysticism" (Durkheim 1999: IX).

The foregoing are Husserlian themes mentioned in Durkheim's work; but we would err if we remained at this level because we would only have general and thematic rapprochement to offer. We would fail to reach the accuracy and thoroughness sought herein trying to contribute to a foundation stricter than that offered by previous interpretations. Hence, we should step forward in the quest for further methodological convergences between Durkheim and phenomenology.

**4.b.** I will argue that Durkheim's interpretation of the Cartesian method directs him towards the practice of phenomenology. I do not mean that he was fully aware of that or that he took some ideas from Husserl. However, if we agree that "phenomenology is not the interpretation of texts, but rather the reflective observation, analysis, and eidetic description of phenomena, which is to say mental or intensive processes and things-as-intended-to or encountered in them" (Embree 2012: 3), then we could find in Durkheim a practice of phenomenology which comes from a switch in mental attitude that (influenced by Descartes) he adopted towards social things which, indeed, is the first step of the phenomenological reduction.

According to Reeder, the *phenomenological reduction*—of which Descartes’ *Meditations...* is as an example (Reeder 2010: 73)—can be “characterized in terms of two stages or steps, the first of which is called *bracketing epoché* or simply *reduction*, and the second of which is called *eidetic reduction*.” (Reeder 2010: 71)

The first step or *epoché*, which makes part of Husserl’s “Cartesian way” (Kern 1977: 127ff.), “is a method of adopting a certain attitude towards experience in self-critical reflection” (Reeder 2010: 71) which

doesn’t change or remove the experience to be described, but only alters our focus upon it: instead of living in the natural attitude of everyday naïve realism, one views one’s experience solely as *transcendental correlates* of one’s own subjectivity. (‘Transcendental’ means for Husserl lived experience, self-given in intentional, phenomenologically reduce experience). While under bracketing, one remains focused upon the intentionality of all acts of consciousness, thus seeing [...]. *Only* the naïve metaphysical beliefs [...] are put out of play, and one examines ‘the given’ without either positing or rejecting its reality. (Reeder 2010: 71f.)

The second step or *eidetic reduction* consists of “the *free variation in phantasy* upon some object presented in bracketed, retentive presence” and it is used to find its general evidential structures (Reeder 2010: 77). To that aim, “the phenomenology focuses upon some feature in imagination, to see whether this aspect of the object is essential to the presence of such an object” (Reeder 2010: 75).

Now, if we consider Durkheim as a phenomenologist, we can see that he practices both steps of the phenomenological reduction. As seen before, he claims to be doing an *epoché* (even though he does not use the word) inspired in Descartes’ rule of bracketing all our previous notions; and from there on, he proceeds to an *eidetic reduction* in order to figure out what is the essence of social facts. I will argue this in some extent as follows.

We can find in the first rule of the sociological method an *epoché* since Durkheim intends nothing but to suspend the representation of social things we have made through our life, trying to overcome the resistance posed by the natural ways of thinking about the scientific study of social phenomena, and definitely relieving the science of social facts from preconceptions.

Once this spontaneous phenomenological *epoché* is made effective, Durkheim engages in an *eidetic reduction* inquiring, in chapter one of *Rules...*, what is it a social fact. It is now time to search for the essence of social phenomena, whose understanding was obstructed by dogma and theoretical speculation. Hence, only after bracketing our preconceptions is it possible to “see the apparently most arbitrary facts to then display, to a more thorough observation, features of regularity and persistence that constitute the symptoms of its objectivity” (Durkheim 1999: 28). That is to say, only then are we in a position to ask: “What is a social fact?”

According to Durkheim, social phenomena are “external to the individuals”—i.e., “the facts of individual life and those of collective life are, at a certain point, heterogeneous”—(Durkheim 1999: XV). Another aspect of the “intrinsic feature of these facts” is that “they are endowed with a constraining and imperative power, by means of which they are imposed” upon the individual (Durkheim 1999: 4); so that

they “consist in manners of acting, thinking, feeling, external to the individual, endowed with a certain power of constraint” (Durkheim 1999: 5). Briefly: “A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint” (Durkheim 1999: 14).

Being constraining is one of the reasons why we must consider social facts as things: because they are independent from the individual’s will. Nevertheless, Durkheim “rejects the idea of the ‘thing-in-itself’” (Pickering 2000b: 109). According to him, the sociologist studies representations “as phenomenal reality,” (Pickering 2000b: 111) which “supersedes reality” (Pickering 2000b: 113). This, by the way, makes him a phenomenologist since he is not differentiating “reality from appearance” but taking appearances as “real phenomena” (Pickering 2000b: 106). Indeed, Durkheim “referred to the subject matter of sociology as social phenomena, and [...] asserted that such phenomena are ‘immaterial,’ but ‘nevertheless real things’” (Pickering 2000b: 108).

Now, if social facts are phenomena, then Tyriakian’s assumption that there is an implicit phenomenology in Durkheim’s sociology is accurate and, in addition, Monnerot’s thesis that social facts are experiences rather than things must be reviewed. Social facts being experiences is an assertion that cannot be challenged—I agree with Monnerot on that—; the question lies in the misperception that they cannot be things: that is to say, in the idea that their nature as experiences deprives social facts from any objectivity. Based on Husserl in *Logical investigations* (1995), I will argue that social facts are ideal objectivities. In that regard, their being things (external to individual psychism, necessary and non-apprehensibles to introspection) does not define social facts as something other than experiences but as a specific type of them.

That said, we should ask about the phenomenological meaning of Durkheim’s maxim of treating social facts as things. Monnerot’s conclusion sustains that if social facts are to be treated as if they were things, that is precisely because they are not things at all. On the contrary, I will explain that it is necessary to treat them that way because they actually are things of a particular kind.

According to Durkheim, a thing is an object of knowledge that is presented to the spirit in a manner that it is understood from its outside towards its deeper—though less visible—aspect, which can only be understood by detaching from it. Therefore, every thing, while becoming an “object of science,” is something known to us because our daily representations—having been made without a method or criticism—lack any scientific value (Durkheim 1999: XIII, 18–19). Then, social facts are “things” in a very peculiar way: they are not “tangible things,” even though they are “things” in as much the same as tangible things (Durkheim 1999: XII) but differently, since they are “social things” (Durkheim 1999: 142); i.e., intangible things (Durkheim 1999: 143).

Hence, Durkheim confers to social facts the same features as Husserl does to ideal objectivities, since they are perceived as not thought just by me or others given that they have a constant manner of being, a nature that does not depend on individual arbitrariness, which results in necessary relations (Durkheim 1999: XVIII). Indeed, he “always stressed that collective representations should be

conceived independently from the subjects who have them” because they are not thoughts of individuals (Némedi 2000: 92).

Furthermore, Durkheim expressly refers to the idea of “region” to draft what can be considered an ontology of the social world, with its laws and facts (Durkheim 1999: XXV). Thus, in order to “address the social realm,” Durkheim (1999: 46) proposes a regional analysis that is not so different from Husserl’s (1992: 17–45), in the awareness that it is always possible to find the most general structure of a phenomenon of a specified type (Durkheim 1999: 56). Therefore, based on a grouping and designation of groups of similar phenomena, Durkheim proposes a stratification into different ontological regions within the more general region of the modes of being.

Hence, Durkheim intuitively discovers into the vast region of realities, the superior ontological region of social things, considered to be as real as that of tangible things. Consequently, to be things is one of the more remarkable phenomenological aspects of social facts. That is the reason why we prefer Tyriakian’s thesis rather than Monnerot’s: because social facts occur—while experiences—as a specific type of “thing,” as ideal objectivities.

## Sacred Things and the Ontological Regions of the Social

Far from being an early intuition abandoned in his latest years, the idea that social facts are things in their own right is reassumed in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. I will show that Durkheim maintains this first intuition in his latest work, even by openly quoting his earlier books (Durkheim 2005: 33n). So, I will agree with Boudon when, against Jeffrey Alexander, he calls to insist on the unity of Durkheim’s work (Boudon 2006: 140). I will also make my own Affergan’s opinion that there is not a clear-cut “conversion” from *Rules...* to *The Elementary Forms...* “but rather a continuity with its curves, its inflections and fissures,” not a “rupture” (Affergan 2008: 147).

In this framework, I will argue that Durkheim thinks of “objectivities” in a phenomenological way. To make my point I will disclose in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* the practice of some basic steps of the phenomenological method (such as the phenomenological reduction, the eidetic variation and genetic analysis) which endow Durkheim’s description with a Husserlian spirit.

Let’s start by showing that, in a way not so different to that taken in the *Rules...*, in *The Elementary Forms or Religious Life* Durkheim suspends all preconceived notions in order to go back to things themselves and to ground on them a renewed sociology. In order to do that, he performs the phenomenological reduction and the eidetic variation.

Indeed, Durkheim’s practice of phenomenology begins with the suspension of all “preconceptions”. This rule, which had already been construed under the Cartesian method in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, is re-introduced as the starting point in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Here, Durkheim intends to set aside preconceptions, as they are “preconceived notions” that, having been formed unmethodically, cannot be relied on. The reason why these ideas formed beforehand

should be rigorously disregarded lies in that “it is advisable to examine how those prejudices have entered into the commonest definitions” before taking up the question of the “study of facts” (Durkheim 2005: 69). Accordingly, we should not resort to prejudice to consult for the elements of the definition we need; definition must be sought from “reality itself” (Durkheim 2005: 32). Hence, we should “face that reality,” “setting aside any conception” as to the phenomenon to be studied, which should be considered on the basis of this specific reality (Durkheim 2005: 32). In other words, upon addressing the “sacred thing,” (Durkheim 2005: 55) Durkheim is advocating the return to the things themselves, in as much the same manner as Husserl did.

Once the *epoché* is completed, Durkheim performs an eidetic reduction of the various religions forms to what they are “comparable,” in the understanding that, given that they all belong to the same kind, the essential elements are the same everywhere (Durkheim 2005: 6). These “permanent elements”—according to Durkheim—constitute that which is “eternal and human in religion” and they form “all the objective contents of the idea which is expressed when one speaks of *religion* in general” (Durkheim 2005: 6). Therefore, in order to understand this, it is necessary to distinguish “the essential from the accessory,” in order to successfully discover the ever-present causes upon which the most essential forms of religious thought and practice depend (Durkheim 2005: 7).

To that effect, “inferior religions” (as referred to by Durkheim) are particularly “instructive for they can be viewed as convenient experiences where facts and relationships “are easier to determine” (Durkheim 2005: 11). Hence, in as much the same manner as a physicist simplifies the phenomena that he studies “and gets rid of their secondary features” in order to discover its laws; as regards institutions, nature makes a “spontaneous” simplification of that kind, from which Durkheim wishes an advantage to be gained, since only this method will enable to find the “elemental facts” (Durkheim 2005: 11f.).

After that determination, Durkheim finds that in “inferior societies,” “everything is common to all,” “unified” and “simple” because that which is accessory or secondary has not yet come to hide the principal elements. All is reduced to that which is indispensable, to that without which there could be no religion. “But that which is indispensable is also that which is *essential*,” i.e., that which we must know before all else (Durkheim 2005: 8; emphasis added). In other words, “given that for these very simple beings life is reduced to its essential traits,” they would hardly stay unknown; therefore, as facts were simpler in primitive religions, the relations among them were also more evident (Durkheim 2005: 9). In other words, it is in those key expressions that the essential of phenomena becomes evident.

Having performed a practical *epoché*, Durkheim produces a material or regional ontology of the social, which—as such—presents “a closed unity and form the particular principles” of positive sciences (Kern 1977: 136). In order to produce this ontology, Durkheim starts with the clarification of the religious phenomena as a form of ideation that can be ordered in increasing degrees of generality, composing categories that can be ranked in terms of genus and species that constitutes the “realms of reality”.

Indeed, Durkheim considers that “religious phenomena are naturally structured into two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites,” which are distinguished by the same differences “that separate thinking from movement” (Durkheim 2005: 50). Hence, there are two categories of religious phenomena (beliefs and rites) that are clearly differentiated from each other based on their essential features. Out of these phenomena, we are more concerned with beliefs since, given their status as forms of thinking, they will give us access to ideal objectivities.

Now, religious beliefs imply a classification realized by man of things into two contrasting genres, “the profane and the sacred,” which result in a “division of the world into two domains” (Durkheim 2005: 50) and hold a relation of subordination between them, in addition to relations of distinction. Consequently, the “circles” of “profane things” and “sacred things” (Durkheim 2005: 51) are differentiated not only due to their “heterogeneity” but also on the basis of their rank, as they are subordinated one to the other (Durkheim 2005: 53).

As regards heterogeneity, Durkheim indicates that such aspect “*is absolute*” since “in all the history of human thought, there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated, so radically opposed to one another [...] the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as separate genres, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common” (Durkheim 2005: 53; Durkheim’s emphasis). Hence, even though the form of such opposition can vary, opposition itself is universal (Durkheim 2005: 53). The manner of thinking about the objects that fall within each of these classes is also universal, including more general categories such as time—that is “objectively” conceived by all men of the same civilization (Durkheim 2005: 14)—or symbols—understood as ideas that have “objective value” (Durkheim 2005: 26).

Now, ideal objectivities are not only divided into categories that organize the world and establish hierarchies but they are also grouped into “regions,” understood as specific realities with their differentiated emotional values (Durkheim 2005: 16) and their own ways of manifestation, governed by immanent laws that lead us to think about “realms” of reality (Durkheim 2005: 26), considered by Durkheim as “an empire within an empire” (Durkheim 2005: 25).

The domain of this type of ideal legality applies not only to each of the genus described above (the sacred and the profane) but also to the wider ontological region of the social. Thus, as alleged by Durkheim, societies are subject to laws of necessity and form a “natural kingdom” (Durkheim 2005: 37) that may be well reflected in the religious phenomenon as its more elemental expression, whose main characteristic is that it always entails “a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable into two genres which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other” (Durkheim 2005: 56). For instance, “sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first” (Durkheim 2005: 56). In turn, “religious beliefs are the representations which express the nature of the sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things” (Durkheim 2005: 56). Therefore, according to Durkheim, the most relevant aspect of the religious is that it conceives the world

as divided into “two heterogeneous and incomparable worlds, though nothing in sensible experience” suggests “the idea of so radical a duality” (Durkheim 2005: 58). In other words, the distinctiveness of this perspective consists in establishing an ideal, rather than empirical, distinction.

## The Quest for the Origins as a Practice of Genetic Phenomenology

So far, in static perspective, I have shown that the social is thought by Durkheim as an ontological region formed by two sub-regions (the sacred and the profane) which, in turn, are mutually differentiated and establish relations of subordination between them (the second being subordinated to the first sub-region) that govern the relations to be established with the ideal objectivities that each of them covers (representations, values, etc.). Yet, so far we have only practiced static phenomenology<sup>6</sup> which, according to Husserl, is focused on types arranged in their “systematic order” (Husserl 1982: 76) and addresses “finished” apperceptions, i.e., apperceptions that “emerge and are awakened as finished, having a ‘history’ that reaches way back” (Husserl 1998a: 142). We must still deal with “the *problems of phenomenological genesis*,” (Husserl 170: 69) which is the object of genetic phenomenology—a perspective which necessarily completes static analysis,<sup>7</sup> particularly as regards phenomena which are “essentially temporal” (Larrabee 1976: 170).

Genetic phenomenology “follows the history, the necessary history of this objectivation and thereby the history of the object itself as the object of a possible knowledge” (Husserl 1998a: 142). It then

shows how consciousness arises out of consciousness, how constitutive accomplishments are also continually carried out here in the process of becoming, thus the relation of conditionality obtaining between the motivating and the motivated or to the necessary transition from impression into retention, in which is constituted the consciousness precisely of this becoming, and correlatively of the alteration of the Now into a Now that is just past. (Husserl 1998b: 150)

Another way to put it is by saying that “genetic phenomenology follows the histories of the constitution of objects that are there for the concrete monad as well

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<sup>6</sup> As Larrabee recalls, the method of static phenomenology can be summarized in two principles: “(1) Guide the analysis by the use of a ‘transcendental clue’ in the form of an object which is pre-given and therefore is a finished unity embodying a certain sense (*Sinn*); and (2) Carry out a series of correlation analyses which trace on the side of the object its various levels and on the side of consciousness the corresponding levels of conscious acts” (Larrabee 1976: 164).

<sup>7</sup> Husserl’s “radical approach”—which expresses his most elaborated position on this matter— would restructure the elements of static and genetic methods into a *single* method; the latter would integrate into genetic method those elements from static method which have both methodological and phenomenological validity and do not involve essential distortion. [...] We shall call this new analysis ‘static/genetic’ analysis to signify the integration of the viable elements of static phenomenology into genetic phenomenology. This new static/genetic method is the only feasible solution to the difficulties inherent in the complete distinction of the static and genetic phenomenology of perception and related phenomena” (Larrabee 1976: 171).



as traces the genetic ‘history’ of the monad itself” (Steinbock 1998: 133). In this perspective, it could be said that Durkheim practices—to some extent—genetic phenomenology because not only he accounts for idealities from a static perspective but also, when inquiring into the “origin” of ideal objectivities, for the histories of its consecutive constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Durkheim asks how did it happen that men constituted certain ideas and how is it that they organized their worlds based on them. Appealing to “reasons of method,” he states that we can only understand the recently constituted regions pursuing throughout history the way in which they have been progressively developed. Through history we can deconstruct institutions in their “constitutive elements” and perceive them as growing in time, one after the other, and grounded one upon the other.<sup>9</sup>

In order to perform the analysis described above, Durkheim introduces the following principle as one of the main “reasons of method”: we cannot hope to succeed in understanding the most recent religions unless we follow the way in which they have been progressively constituted in the course of history. “History is indeed the only method of explanatory analysis which can possibly be applied to them” (Durkheim 2005: 4). It alone enables us to deconstruct an institution into its constituent elements since history displays them to us, one after the other as they are born in time (Durkheim 2005: 4). Therefore, only by placing each of the constituent elements in the set of circumstances in which they were born and at a given moment in time, we will be able to describe human things. To that effect, it is also necessary to go back to “its most primitive and simple form” (Durkheim 2005: 4). This means that human questions can only be fully understood upon a genealogical retrospectiveness based on its original elements, describing the genetic-historical process of its naissance.

This entails not only recognizing phenomena where they can be found without confusing them with others (Durkheim 2005: 32), as Durkheim did in his static phenomenology; but also to describe them in genetic perspective, based on the elemental phenomena they derive from (Durkheim 2005: 49). For that reason, Durkheim engaged in the study of the most simple and primitive religion: because given that it does not contain any elements inherited from previous religions, it is easier to accurately and truthfully describe “the religious nature of man” as “an essential and permanent aspect of humanity” and to base on it, a genealogical description of the specific historical processes of the constitution of positive

<sup>8</sup> Although a distinction must be made here. Durkheim practices genetic phenomenology in a limited way since he does not trace the genetic history of the monad itself nor does he carry his “investigations into the ultimate levels of consciousness, those of inner time-consciousness, the ‘obscure depths’ which were omitted in the static analysis” in order to account for “all characteristics of conscious experience” (Larrabee 1976: 164).

<sup>9</sup> I’m indebted to Nisashi Nasu, who made me notice that, in genetic perspective, the historical must be distinguished from the eidetic. Both layers coexist in Durkheim. On the one side, he sketches out a brief history of religions, by describing how different kinds of cults followed one after the other. On the other side, this history is structured in strict order from the complex to the simple, elemental. Therefore, history has its logic. So, in Durkheim, the eidetic and the historic are articulated, just like in Husserl’s *Crisis...* (2009) when he accounts for history not as it has occurred but as it would have occurred.

religions. Hence, it is necessary to trace back current religious phenomena to the original, essential and elemental forms they derive from, even though it might seem “strange” and “paradoxical” that, to get to know the current humanity, it is necessary to start by turning away from it (Durkheim 2005: 2).

By tracing back religions to their primitive forms—i.e., its “original state,” where they are more clearly exposed—we can go back to the “first impressions from which they originated” without getting stuck in an extensive system of distorting interpretations (Durkheim 2005: 10) because, in primitive religions, the religious fact still bears the visible mark of its origins (Durkheim 2005: 10).

Based on these considerations, Durkheim intends to take up the old problem of the origin of religions from a different angle. This other manner of approaching to the origins consists in a retrospective method: “to discover the truly original form of the religious life,” he observed that it is necessary to “descend by analysis beyond these observable religions, to resolve them into their common and fundamental elements,” and then to seek among these latter one from which the others were derived (Durkheim 2005: 67). In short, it consists in the phenomenological method of establishing relations of foundation among the studied phenomena.

## **Husserl and Durkheimian Sociology**

Up to this point, I attempted to prove that there is in Durkheim a profound affinity with Husserl, while a Cartesian inspiration can be detected in his method and the results of its application to sociology lead to an ontology that could well be interpreted as consistent with Husserl’s proposal in his best-known writings on static and genetic phenomenology. However, despite the efforts made, this comparison would be incomplete unless we also had some evidence that the analogy can be repeated the other way around by disclosing Husserl’s affinity with certain aspects of Durkheim’s sociology. To that aim, I will pose the question about the possibility of accounting for social facts from a strict phenomenological approach. Is it possible for a phenomenologist to support Durkheim’s intuition that social facts must be treated as things?

The most obvious answer would be to demonstrate that Husserl referred to collective consciousness, providing the grounds for a phenomenological justification of social facts in a Durkheimian spirit, i.e., as manners of acting, thinking, feeling, endowed with a certain power of constraint emanating from collective consciousness. Should that be the case—if Husserl’s concept of a collective consciousness can be taken strictly- it is possible to ground phenomenologically Durkheim’s approach to “social facts” and, based on that, outline a program of phenomenological sociology.

For the purposes of exploring this other side of the analogy, I will quote some paragraphs from a text written by Husserl *circa* 1910, where I will find conceptions about collective consciousness, norm and social sanction that do not significantly differ from the manner in which they were thought by Durkheim. Furthermore, I will find out that he suggests analyzing social objectivities and the manner in which they are grouped into genus and species, depending on its essential varieties, thus

organizing societies in as much the same manner as Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. In short, I will find a way to access the social in a mode that is consistent with Durkheim's method.

Indeed, Husserl refers to the social by using some of the most relevant terms inherent to Durkheim's sociology, such as "moral consciousness", "coercive rules" (Husserl 2001: 213), and "sanction" as "transgression atonement" of the law (Husserl 2001: 214). In this framework, he proposes to analyze social objectivities "in a purely objective manner" (Husserl 2001: 208).

To that effect, we may "form different general concepts, concepts of genus and species, and so variously vary the idea of an objectivity of this kind, mostly build essential supreme concepts, and study them a priori by organizing them based on their essential varieties" (Husserl 2001: 208). This procedure allows to build "the systems of these social ideas" (Husserl 2001: 210), preparing—from a genetic phenomenological approach—a social ontology based on essential types arranged in relations of genus and species, differentiated and founded among them.

The social not only requires a static description but calls as well for a genetic description. Therefore—according to Husserl—it is necessary to study "the primitive forms of society, [and] the closest forms of relations and connections of these primitive configurations with the configurations of a higher order through which a 'complexly organized society' is purely and simply born" (Husserl 2001: 209). This means that it is necessary to genetically retrace the most complex forms of a society to its elementary forms, from which it arises.

Husserl not only refers to social things as objective but also to a collective consciousness. For instance, in *Ideas II* he refers to social subjectivities as conglomerates of subjects communicatively constituted (Husserl 2005: 242) which presuppose empathy, since they are based on an experience of other subjects and of their inner lives (Husserl 2005: 245). Husserl also states that a collectivity as such not only has a consciousness but it might even have a genuine "selfconsciousness" if it is disposed to direct its will towards itself, that is, to auto configure.

Summarizing, the idea of a collective consciousness seems to be implied in Husserl's conception of social life and to have similar consequences for an understanding of the realm of social things as in Durkheim. Consequently, it has been proved that they both hold a comparable conception of the social and methodologically proceed in a similar way.

## Durkheim as a New Galileo

If the arguments displayed so far were convincing enough, there will be no doubt that Durkheim is a practitioner of phenomenology, some of whose ideas are consistent with Husserl's understanding of the social. However, not everything in his work is phenomenological. Just as Descartes in Husserl's interpretation (Husserl 1970: §9, 23ff.), Durkheim gives birth to phenomenology (here, to phenomenological sociology) soon before aborting it. That is why, like the Galileo of the *Crisis...*, one could say that he "is at once a discovering and a concealing genius" (Husserl 1970: 52) because, after unveiling the phenomenological character of the social, he

masks it behind the veil of the naturalism and objectivism he fought against—which, nevertheless, is consistent with his positivism since “naturalism, positivism and objectivism, are, properly understood all forms of loss or distortion of subjectivity” (Moran 2014: 237).

This aftertaste of dogmatic naturalism will keep him a prisoner of an unintended anthropomorphism. The prejudices that Durkheim could not manage to discard speak for him, assuming that intersubjective things may be strange to us or, in other words, that our subjectivity does not completely and utterly take part in them. So, having had a glimpse at the appearing of social phenomena, aiming at the conditions that would render it evident, Durkheim allowed such phenomenon to hide behind naturalist, objectivist prejudices and anthropomorphic habits, even though it was not his method that led him to flaw but the fact that he failed to abide in full by the first of his rules. Hence, the most deeply rooted assumptions of scientism of his time still remain intact in Durkheim, making him disregard the best of his findings.

Indeed, *Rules of Sociological Method* exhibits an aftertaste of a naturalist objectivism that takes Durkheim’s stance back to sensualism. Instead of exploring in depth the heterogeneity of the social compared to the individual, thus reaching an accurate description of its specificity, Durkheim describes it by comparing social and natural phenomena: both would constitute “real things” because they enjoy “a defined nature that manifests itself”.

We could also find in Durkheim an aftertaste of unintended anthropomorphism, which provides social facts with plentiful capacity for action. Hence, for instance, Durkheim claims that social facts “exert coercive influence on individual consciousness”; that collective consciousness constrains individual consciousness; that “*society represents* itself and the surrounding world”; that certain representations “control us from the inside”; and that “social practices and beliefs impact on us from the outside”.

I allege that Durkheim’s anthropomorphism is involuntary because he is openly critical towards it. He challenges the survival of the “anthropocentric proposition” as being an obstacle in the track of science. Hence, having strayed from the path that led to what could have been the largest discovery for sociological thinking constitutes a problem, not only for phenomenological sociology but also for Durkheim himself. What remains uncertain between his objectivism and his dogmatic anthropocentrism is nothing less than the fundamental ontological question about the social. Consequently, the main topic of the key chapter in *Rules...* remains partially unanswered, harboring ambiguity and prejudice of diverse nature.

## **Durkheim as the Descartes of Phenomenological Sociology (Final Remarks)**

Is it a problem for our main argument that Durkheim’s phenomenology succumbs in naturalism and objectivism? It would be if our claim were that he is a well succeeded phenomenologist. Of course he is not Husserl, but could he be as important for phenomenological sociology as Descartes was for Husserl?

In my closing argument, my claim is that, just as Descartes, Durkheim started a new perspective, which switches our natural attitude towards the world and makes us reconsider all our certainties in a radical, methodic reflection. By this means, he rediscovered a region of our experience that was eclipsed by our prejudices and started a new science. And, just as Descartes, his discovery was so unexpected and vast that he could not deal in full with it. Also as Descartes, he did not manage to completely abide by the rules stated by himself, in particular the first one which mandates to set aside all preconceptions. Durkheim invented a Durkheimian way of doing sociology which is not far from the Cartesian way of doing philosophy.

It is this profound meaning of Durkheim's sociology which I tried to depict in my paper, aiming to disclose that the originality of his work cannot be fully understood in relation to the historical and intellectual context of his time but only in relation to the anticipated future that he opens in the horizon of his time.

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