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SOC2014-1237

**Émile Durkheim, Criminology and the
Collective Consciousness of Society**

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This paper should be cited as follows:

**Smith, K., (2014) "Émile Durkheim, Criminology and the Collective
Consciousness of Society", Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No:
SOC2014-1237.**

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URL: www.atiner.gr

URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN: **2241-2891**

05/09/2014

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Abstract

In April 2014 I will be publishing a book [with Anthem Press] with the title *Émile Durkheim and the Collective Consciousness of Society: a study in Criminology*. Your conference in May would therefore provide me with a good opportunity to promote this book. I therefore propose to give a short talk—lasting about 45 minutes perhaps with a further fifteen minutes of questions—outlining what the book is about. Would this be acceptable to you?

My book is, I believe, the first ever book-length treatment of this single, very important concept within Durkheimian sociology, the common and collective consciousness of society. What is more, I consider this concept from both a sociological and a criminological perspective. The book has five parts. In part one I outline in detail Durkheim's concept of the Common and Collective Consciousness of Society. In part two I provide a detailed empirical example—a case study in fact—of the collective consciousness of a modern late- industrial society: contemporary Britain. In part three I discuss Durkheim's views on the subject of crime and punishment and relate this to what he has to say about the concept of the collective consciousness. In part four I look at a bizarre claim that Durkheim makes in his famous definition of the common and collective consciousness in *The Division of Labour in Society*; namely that the common and collective consciousness 'has a life of its own'. Whatever can Durkheim mean by this extraordinary claim? While in part five I identify some key problems with Durkheim's concept of the common and collective consciousness and I attempt to rectify these and, as I claim, improve upon Durkheim's concept and bring this up to date.

Keywords:

Durkheim's concept of the, or a, collective consciousness of society has been extensively discussed before by any number of sociologists and criminologists (Lukes, 1973; Hirst, 1979; Alexander 1990; Garland, 1991; Cotterrell, 1999, Pearce, 2001) but, as far as I am aware, my book *Émile Durkheim and the Collective Consciousness of Society, a Study in Criminology* is the first attempt to provide a book-length treatment of this very important concept within Durkheimian sociology.

A major problem that immediately confronts the author of any such book however is that that the account that Durkheim gives of this concept in *The Division of Labour in Society* [hereafter *The Division of Labour*] and also, to a lesser extent, in his second major work, *The Rules of Sociological Method* [1895, hereafter *The Rules*], is really very poor indeed, so much so that it is sometimes difficult to say exactly what Durkheim himself understood by this term. Durkheim, if I can put it this way, seems rather to know exactly what he meant by this concept than he is able to explain this to us, his readers. However, the recent re-publication in 2002 by the Dover Press of the English translation of Durkheim's relatively little known book *L'éducation morale* [1925]—a series of lectures gathered together by his students after Durkheim's death in 1917 and first published in English in 1961 with the title *Moral Education*—provides us with an opportunity to look at this question again in much more detail than Durkheim did in his other better known works.

Although mainly concerned with the question of the reform of the education system in France at the beginning of the 20th century, the first half of the book provides us with a very detailed account indeed of what Durkheim meant by the concept of the collective consciousness itself: the most detailed account of this concept in fact to be found anywhere in his sociology. In Part I of my book, I therefore summarise Durkheim's writing on the concept of the (or a) collective consciousness of society based on his lectures on this subject in *Moral Education* and I then compare this to what he has to say here to his other major writings on this subject, but especially in *The Division of Labour* and in his final book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [1912].

In what I claim is the first major finding of my book I argue that the disciplinary functions of society—the peculiar combination of a love of duty, authority and regulation as Durkheim describes this—does not form any part of Durkheim's actual concept of the common or collective consciousness of society as such, but is in fact analytically separate from this. Rather surprisingly, although 'the disciplinary principle', as Durkheim calls this in *Moral Education*, is the foundation of his concept of the common and collective consciousness of society, this principle does not itself form any actual part of his concept of the common or collective consciousness of society as such. At most, for Durkheim, the disciplinary function is only part of the general morality of society—the basis of this and therefore its foundation and background perhaps—but nothing more than this.

If my interpretation of what Durkheim says on this point is correct then, strictly speaking, he cannot appeal to the disciplinary apparatus of society—the fear of punishment for example—as any part of his account of the common or

collective consciousness. He might well try to do this, and in fact I think he does, but he is not correct to do so I think. Stripped of the disciplinary function, Durkheim cannot appeal to the rule of law, or even to the love of duty, to account for what it was that he is trying to explain. Durkheim's failure to realise the significance of this point is then perhaps the major reason why he is unable to explain the failure of the common or collective consciousness to perform the role that he assigned to it in modern industrialised societies. As is well known, it is not Durkheim, but his great rival Max Weber (and after Weber, Foucault) who is the sociologist of power, domination, and discipline in society (Weber 1978, 1149 -1155; Garland 1991, 177-181), while the discussion of these all important issues is almost entirely absent from Durkheim's sociology.

If Marx can be said to be the sociologist of the material basis of society¹, and Weber the sociologist of power and domination, then Durkheim is the sociologist of morality and consensus (Smith, 2010). For Durkheim morality is the cement that binds everything else together and, as we will see, where this moral force is weak or otherwise poorly developed, the collective consciousness is in danger of assuming an immoral or aberrant form. It is then perhaps due to an actual division between the disciplinary function of society and the collective consciousness, rather than to a flaw in Durkheim's method as such—Durkheim I think is simply describing the actual state of affairs—that the collective consciousness in modern industrialised societies does not develop as part of the normal functioning of the division of labour (or 'organically' as Durkheim describes this process), but has to be artificially created in some way. Durkheim probably would not have agreed with me on this point, but I argue that this is the inescapable conclusion of what he has to say about the concept of the common and collective consciousness of society in the first half of his book on *Moral Education*.

Still in Part I of my book, and based on this discussion of the concept of the collective consciousness of society, I then try to give a detailed explanation of why I believe the French phrase *la conscience collective ou commune* can be translated into English without any loss of meaning as 'the common or collective consciousness', and, in this way, I hope to put an end to the common but extremely irritating practice in English speaking sociology—and especially within criminology I find—of giving this phrase in the French original (usually in italics and / or in quotation marks, as the '*conscience collective*', and without the order of these words being reversed as in the usual way when translating French expressions of this kind into English), almost as though it is being suggested that this expression cannot be translated into English without serious loss of meaning. But, providing only we once have a really thorough understanding of what Durkheim meant by this concept, I claim that we can,

¹As a matter of fact Marx was rather disparaging about the concept of the 'the social' and therefore probably would not have liked the idea of being described as any kind of 'sociologist'. See for example Marx's letter to Kugelmann dated 5th December 1868 discussing a publication called 'Society and State', of which Marx says " '*the social*' (and that's a fine category too!) is treated as the secondary and '*the political*' as the essential." (MECW, 1988, (43) 175; emphasis in original).

once and for all, say exactly what Durkheim meant by this expression and then, this being the case, translate this understanding of the concept into English without any ambiguity as ‘the common or collective consciousness of society’.

In Part I, I also argue—in what I claim is the first major revision of Durkheimian sociology proposed by this book—that we can and should make a clear distinction between the concepts of the common and the collective consciousnesses (plural) of society. These are really two quite separate concepts I think, albeit closely related and clearly of the same type or kind. Durkheim hints at this distinction himself but, as a matter of fact, it is not at all clear what his views on this question were. Sometimes he seems to think that these two concepts should be distinguished and at other times he seems to believe that this is not the case. The clearest indication that Durkheim gives that he thought we might be able to distinguish the common from the collective consciousness is in the first few pages on chapter three, Book II, of *The Division of Labour* (1989, 226-230). Here, the common consciousness seems to have more to do with traditional beliefs and practices and is closely associated with that type of social solidarity that is due to similarity, or what Durkheim calls ‘mechanical solidarity’. For example he says that religion is the outstanding form of the common consciousness [or ‘la conscience commune’ as he says in this case] (1989, 227), while the collective consciousness [‘la conscience collective’] seems to be identified more with the development of the division of labour in society and what Durkheim calls ‘organic solidarity’, or such solidarity that exists despite considerable differences in society.¹ At most other times however—as for example in his most famous definition of the common and collective consciousness in Part I, chapter 2 of *The Division of Labour* (1989, 38-39)—these two terms seem to be presented as being much the same thing: alternative names for much the same social phenomenon.

It seems most likely that Durkheim changed his mind on this question, as and when the situation he was describing changed, and that he sometimes thought they were one and the same thing, in one social situation, but different things altogether in another situation. But, whatever Durkheim’s own views on this question were, I think we can say for him that these two concepts are really quite distinct, or, at the very least, that they are analytically separable from one another and that, generally speaking, they are better understood in this way. I believe that this is a missed theoretical opportunity on Durkheim’s part and, as a matter of fact, it puzzles me that he did not make this distinction more clearly for himself. The ‘common consciousness’, in my view, is the more elementary of the two types and is most closely associated with mechanical solidarity. We typically find this expressed in the form of things like institutionalised

¹See also the following reference in chapter III, Book I of *The Division of Labour* (1989, 69), where Durkheim says that: ‘rules where sanctions are restitutory either constitute no part of the collective conscience, or subsist in it only in a weakened state. Repressive laws corresponds to what is the heart and centre of the common consciousness.’ [In the original French this is given as follows: ‘règles ‘a sanction restitutive ou bien ne font pas de tout partie de la conscience collective, ou n’en sont que des ‘etats faibles. Le droits répressif correspond ‘a ce qui est le coeur, le centre de la conscience commune’ (2004 [1930], 80-81).

religion—Durkheim’s exemplar case of the common consciousness—but class consciousness too, where this was sufficiently well developed (Smith 2012, 188), would also provide another very good example of this type of phenomenon. The collective consciousness, on the other hand, is the more complex of the two types, but is also much less well structured, much less likely to assume an institutionalised form, and is therefore more likely to be found in societies characterised by organic solidarity.

Having outlined in Part I of this my book exactly what Durkheim meant by the concept of the or a collective or common consciousness of society I then attempt, in Part II of this study, to provide a detailed empirical description of what a Durkheimian concept of the common or collective consciousness might actually look like in practice, if any such thing can in fact be said to exist. It is a really very surprising fact—and one that seems largely to have been neglected by Durkheimian scholarship (for partial exceptions to this rule see Hirst 1975, 90-103; Pearce 2001, 17-18 and Newburn 2007, 174)—that Durkheim did not do this himself after he had written *The Rules*. Instead, Durkheim chose to write his third book on the subject of suicide, a topic that might well have lent itself very well to an analysis in terms of the concept of the common or collective consciousness, but in which, remarkably, Durkheim actually makes only two explicit reference to this concept at all (interesting enough, one to the collective consciousness and the other to the common consciousness; 1993, 359 and 369). In Part II of my book, and thereby making a start on the project that Durkheim neglected, I argue that unless sociology can say exactly what the concept of the collective or common consciousness looks like in actual practice—detailed case studies of the actual nature and form of this phenomenon in different societies—then we will be forced to conclude that no such thing exists and that Durkheim, for all his confidence in the matter, was simply mistaken on this point. If this turns out to be the case then Durkheim’s thesis, and much of the rest of his sociology along with this I think, would have been refuted. However, to make myself clear, let me say at the outset that I do find evidence of something that I think might reasonably be called the collective consciousness of contemporary British society today—my primary case study—albeit no real evidence of anything corresponding to the common consciousness as such. Therefore, at least as far as modern Britain is concerned, Durkheim’s thesis is not refuted by this particular case study. What other studies might reveal is of course another matter.

Rather surprisingly, it turns out that the collective consciousness of modern British society is not concerned with large-scale, or macro-sociological, features of society at all. Things like religion or nationalism, or even a veneration for ‘the rule of law’,¹ are not—or perhaps I should say, are no longer—part of the collective consciousness of modern British society. They used to be I think, at

¹I pay particular attention to this concept in Part II—a case study within the case study in fact—which at one point I thought might provide a really promising candidate for the role of the common consciousness in contemporary British society, and hence help to explain the present media obsession with crime and punishment, but which I was reluctantly forced to conclude does not in fact perform this role.

the beginning of the 20th century, when, in 1902 for example, Britain introduced something called 'Empire Day' on the 24th May, the late Queen Victoria's birthday in fact (Skidelsky 2010, 627) and school children were made to march up and down in the playground and salute the flag of the United Kingdom. At this time, I believe, many people would have been genuinely outraged if anyone had refused to take part in such a ceremony, but this is no longer the case today, at the beginning of the 21st century. A good example of how much things have changed in this respect is the recent case of Charlie Gilmore, the son of the Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmore, who was sentenced to 16 months imprisonment in 2011 for swinging on a flag at the Cenotaph—the UK's foremost war-memorial—during a public demonstration held in London in 2010. The public's reaction to this event seems to have been quite mixed, but might perhaps be divided into three broad groups. First there was perhaps a fairly large group of people—but not the majority I think—who were genuinely outraged by Gilmore's behaviour. This would not just have been older people, I argue, but anyone who takes part in poppy-day celebrations and stands still at the eleventh hour, on the eleventh day, of the eleventh month each year, as many people still do in Britain today, to commemorate the ending of the First World War. These are people for whom flag waving ceremonies and memorials of all kinds really do mean something: people who have perhaps lost relatives and friends in the Second World War and more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, a second group of people—a slight majority of the population perhaps—seem to have been largely indifferent to the event. For them Gilmore behaviour was perhaps nothing more than just another picture in their Sunday newspaper—another student behaving badly at yet another student demonstration—and this affected them no more perhaps—no longer—than it took them to turn over the page. Finally there seems to have been a third group of people, much smaller in number this time I think, and largely made up of young people and students themselves, who might have quite admired what Gilmore did, and might even have done the same thing themselves had they been on the demonstration, all the while wondering however where they could buy those rather distinctive shoes that Gilmore can be seen wearing in Ki Price's famous photograph of the event. The point I am making however is this: that whatever the actual details of the matter were, it is quite clear that not everyone in Britain was equally outraged by Gilmore's behaviour and that some people were not outraged by this at all. A reverence for flags, and even war memorials it seems, is not part of the collective consciousness of modern British society, and certainly is not part of anything that might reasonably be called its common consciousness.

Rather it is those apparently quite petty, but actually very irritating, events of everyday social life—things like adults cycling on the pavement, people throwing litter in the street ('Why can't they take it home with them?'), or academics writing the expression '*conscience collective*' in italics—that deeply offend us. Orderly behaviour in public places, I argue, is in some way intimately involved with the collective consciousness of modern British society. Aspects of the common consciousness are still to be found in British today, but

it is these things do not have very much to do with religion or nationalism any more. Rather this has something more to do with customary practices and behaviour and then, following on from this, with what is presented as being a veneration for tradition. It does not matter at all whether these customary practices or traditions are in fact of long standing; all that matters is that those people who are closely incorporated into the common consciousness of society sincerely believe that they are: that things have 'always been done' in more or less the same way as they are now and always will be. If one points out that, as a matter of fact, things have not always been done in a certain way—that mass imprisonment for example is a relatively recent development, or that ceremonials at the coronation of a new monarch are largely an invention of the TV age—this makes not a jot of difference to people who support the use of imprisonment on an industrial scale or are ardent monarchists.

In Part III of my book I provide a detailed account of Durkheim's views on the subject of crime and punishment in general in order to examine in detail how his views on the concept of the common or collective consciousness of society are related to this question in particular. I claim that there is what I think amounts to two schools of thought on this question within contemporary criminology. In one camp there are those criminologists who, when they discuss Durkheim's views on crime and punishment, seem to rely very heavily on what he has to say about this in *The Division of Labour*, and who therefore spend quite a lot of time talking about the collective consciousness and mechanical and organic solidarity. In the other camp there are those criminologists who generally rely on what he has to say in *The Rules*, who therefore talk a lot about the question of whether or not crime is functionally useful for society—'morphological' or 'pathological' as Durkheim describes this—and who usually have very little to say about the common or collective consciousness. As far as the first school is concerned, it appears to be a little known fact that Durkheim *entirely* abandoned all discussion of the important distinction he makes between mechanical and organic solidarity in *The Division of Labour* never to refer to this concept again in his sociology after this point (Bellah 1973, xl). While, similarly, as far as the second school is concerned, Durkheim's equally interesting discussion of whether crime might be morphological or pathological for society is not repeated by him again after *The Rules* except for a very short restatement of this thesis at the beginning of the final chapter of *Suicide* [1897]. There seems to be very little common ground between these two very different schools of thought within contemporary criminology and neither of them have anything very much to say about the really interesting question here: the conspicuous absence of any thing very much on the subject of crime and punishment in Durkheim's sociology after *Suicide* except for his undeservedly well-known 'Two Laws of Penal Evolution' essay [1902].

Because Durkheim's views on crime and punishment in *The Division of Labour* are really so very different from his views on this subject in *The Rules*, there is every chance that we might even say that they contradict one another. Were they not by the same author, I argue, we would never even think to

compare these two. However, in what I claim is the second major revision of Durkheimian sociology in my book, I argue that, in fact, there is no contradiction between these two very different views. In what appears to be another little noticed fact, Durkheim's discussion of crime and punishment in *The Division of Labour*, and all of the really controversial things he has to say about these two concepts in that book, occur in a chapter entitled 'Mechanical Solidarity, or Solidarity by Similarities' and therefore, I argue, would perhaps be better understood as being intended by Durkheim to apply to cases of mechanical solidarity alone. While, if this is the case, the very different claim that Durkheim makes in *The Rules* that crime is somehow functionally useful for society might then be better understood as being applied to cases of organic solidarity only. To make myself clear on this point, I am not arguing that Durkheim says this—I am not even really sure that he did intend his discussion of crime and punishment in *The Division of Labour* to only be applied to cases of mechanical solidarity—but what I am saying is that it makes very much better sense of what Durkheim says about crime and punishment in these two studies, and avoids any contradiction between these two quite different Durkheimian accounts of this question, if we do in fact say something very much like what I have argued here.

In Part III of my book I also make another equally sharp distinction between the concepts of crime and punishment; something that Durkheim himself was surprisingly reluctant to do in his early writings on this subject. I argue that it is because Durkheim does not clearly distinguish between these two really quite separate concepts for himself in *The Division of Labour* and in *The Rules* that, contrary to what he argues in *The Rules*, he is unable to see that it is punishment *alone* that is morphological for highly industrialised societies and not crime at all. Crime is always 'pathological' for society I think, and this is especially the context of mechanical solidarity where the very idea that there is any such thing as crime is a threat to the existence of the common consciousness. By contrast to this however I argue that it is just possible that punishment—but *not* crime—might have a 'morphological' function in societies predominantly characterised in terms of organic solidarity since, in these communities, punishment does provides people who otherwise have very little in common with each other with a rare opportunity to come together in opposition to the criminal and hence to reassert moral norms (Jackson and Sunshine 2007, 214).

In Part IV of my book I then look in some detail at another fundamental concept of Durkheimian sociology, the concept of 'social facts', of which the concept of the common or collective consciousness of society is in fact one of his main examples. I do this in order to consider what I argue is another astonishingly neglected aspect of Durkheimian criminology; namely, what on earth Durkheim could have meant in his much quoted definition of the common or collective consciousness in *The Division of Labour* when he claimed that the collective consciousness is not only that 'totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average member of society' but, also, that this totality somehow 'forms a determinate system *with a life of its own*' (1989, 38-39; emphasis

added). Although a great deal of attention has been given within criminology to the first part of Durkheim's most famous definition of the collective consciousness of society, the second part of this definition has been entirely ignored. However I argue that, incredible though it must seem to us today, Durkheim really did believe, at least in the early part of his career, that 'social facts' as he calls them really were living things—living beings in fact—'with a life of their own'. It is simply impossible, I believe, to understand Durkheim's early enthusiasm for the concept of social facts and his later disenchantment with this concept—sometime after the publication of *Suicide* I think—unless we recognise that he really did believe that he had discovered an entirely new class of sociological phenomena—a social realm underlying the surface appearance of things in fact—which was to be the special subject matter of the new science of sociology.

In Part V of my book I consider again in some detail the many problems we have encountered in attempting to establish Durkheim's concept of the, or as I now argue, a common of collective consciousness of society. Here I consider in some detail the question why Durkheim chose the division of labour in society—the division of labour of all things as I say: something that he might well have supposed was as likely to divide people from one another as to bring them together—as the means of creating the collective consciousness of modern industrialised societies when, it seems, there were so many other much better candidates to choose from. The *formal* answer to this question is that Durkheim simply adopted his views on the subject of the division of labour from Herbert Spencer and, to a lesser extent, from Saint Simon—however, in Part V of this study, I claim that there was something more to it than this, and in fact I argue for what I describe as an 'epistemological break' in his writing between his pre and post 1896 views on this question.

In *The Division of Labour* Durkheim is very confident that the collective consciousness of society, left to itself, will develop on its own, and that of course something very much like this already existed. No society could possibly exist without something like a common or collective consciousness, as Durkheim supposed, and therefore there was nothing very much that needed to do be done—nothing really that could be done—to bring about the development of this crucial social phenomenon. By 1902, however, and largely I believe as a result of Durkheim's own experiences during the now notorious Dreyfus Affair [1894-1906], his views on the development of the collective consciousness changed dramatically. Left to itself, Durkheim came to believe, the collective consciousness of France as exemplified by the Dreyfus Affair, might well assume the aberrant form of authoritarianism, militarism and even anti-Semitism. The people of France needed to be taught what was otherwise likely to remain unclear to them; namely, that we are all to a much greater degree than appears to be the case dependent upon one another in highly industrialised societies. For this reason, France needed to establish a whole new education system—quite literally a whole new school of thought in fact—in order to promote this idea, and Durkheim gave his series of lectures on moral education at the Sorbonne as part of his contribution to this project.

In Part V I also consider the question why Durkheim was quite so opposed, as he seems to have been, to the idea that socialism might fill the role of the collective consciousness of a modern industrial society. Here was an ideology which, after all, had developed alongside and together with industrialisation, or ‘organically’ as we might well say, which had important points to make about the morality of the capitalist mode of production, and which most of Durkheim’s own students thought was tailor made to provide the basis of the new morality suitable for an industrialised country in the 20th century, and yet Durkheim himself did not think this and was in fact opposed to any such suggestion. In what seems like an increasingly desperate attempt to find an alternative to socialism, Durkheim goes through contortions to find almost anything else—the education system, the science of sociology itself, the promotion of the concept of human rights and, most bizarrely of all, the creation of new professional associations—to provide an alternative common consciousness for a highly industrialised society in the 20th century. Durkheim was not, as has sometimes been suggested, a conservative, but what he was rather was both a liberal and, more particularly I argue, a member of the educated town dwelling bourgeoisie. As such he supported the aims of the French Revolution of 1789—liberty, equality and fraternity—but was only able to go along with these ideals up to a certain point. This point was the point at which the socialist programme came into conflict with the interests of the bourgeoisie. He supported those reforms which were opposed to the interests of the aristocracy, and authoritarianism more generally, but he was unwilling to go any further than this. Something else apart from socialism must therefore be found to perform the all-important role of the collective consciousness of French society during the 20th century.

This brings me finally to the sixth major finding and / or disagreement I have with what Durkheim says about the concept of the common and collective consciousness and to what I claim is the third major revision of Durkheimian sociology that I am proposing in my book in order to try to overcome these problems. This has to do with the very important question of whether or not the common or collective consciousness of society is believed in more or less universally by everyone, with perhaps only a few minor exceptions as Durkheim claimed, or whether it is in fact much less universal than Durkheim believed it to be. Apart from criminals, Durkheim thought that support for the common and collective consciousness of society was more or less universal and insisted that this was the case in *The Division of Labour*. However, extending the argument I have already outlined above, I argue that in fact this is only the case as far as mechanical solidarity is concerned, and only really applies in the context of the common consciousness too. As far as the collective consciousness of modern industrialised societies is concerned however, not everyone is equally incorporated into the collective consciousness, but this takes a variety of different forms at different times and places. We are not all equally outraged by the same things, I think, and not all at the same time or place, but rather what is included in the collective consciousness varies

regionally and also varies dramatically from one period in time to another and from one generation to the next.

As far as the issue of local variations is concerned, Durkheim considered this possibility himself in some detail in *The Division of Labour* (1989, 230), but seems to have come to the conclusion that this was something that would change over time once the collective consciousness of society developed and became more firmly established. As he says on this point:

It is true that local collective consciousness can retain their individuality within the general collective consciousness and that, since they encompass narrower horizons, they can more easily remain concrete. But we know that they gradually vanish into the general consciousness as the different social segments to which they correspond fade away (1989, 230).

But in point of fact this claim is incorrect—we do not ‘know’ any such thing at all—but rather what we do know is that the one thing that seems to distinguish the collective consciousness in particular from the common consciousness of society is precisely the fact that the collective consciousness is much less well formed—much more loosely organised, much less definite, and much less institutionalised—than the common consciousness and, were this is the case, such local variations are likely to be a permanent feature of the collective consciousness of highly industrialised societies rather than something that will wither away as the collective consciousness develops.

As far as the possibility that the common or the collective consciousness might vary from one generation to the next—and hence vary over time too—Durkheim has this to say in one of his lectures on *Moral Education*, first given ten years after the publication of *The Division of Labour*.

‘[E]very generation has its own spirit, its own way of thinking and feeling, its own needs, and its special aspirations. We have a fact here whose causes are as yet not well known. There are linguistic changes in each generation, changes in fashion, in aesthetic appreciation, and in philosophical views. A cosmo-politan generation is succeeded by a very nationalistic generation, or vice versa. Optimism follows pessimism. Anarchism follows religious dogmatism, and so on. Such moral discontinuity between generations runs the risk of giving social evolution a jerky and erratic character, promoting chaotic impulses, if precautions are not taken to bring different generations together as soon and as completely as possible, so as to encourage their interpenetration and so closing the moral gaps between them (Durkheim 2002, 248-249).

But if this is the case then it must also be the case—contrary to what Durkheim says in *The Division of Labour*—that the collective consciousness of society certainly, and perhaps even the common consciousness too, is not

always or everywhere the same within any given society. The generation that idolised Queen Victoria, that marched up and down in British playgrounds on ‘Empire Day’, and that cheerfully went off to fight in the First World War, was not the same at all as the generation that reluctantly went to war in 1939-1945.

Even by the time he came to write *Moral Education* Durkheim was still arguing that society ‘cannot exist except on the condition that all of its members are sufficiently alike—that is to say, only on the condition that they all reflect, in differing degree, the characteristics essential for a given ideal, which is the collective ideal’ (Durkheim 2002, 87-88).¹ But I argue that the collective consciousness is not like this. Rather it is something more like a Mexican wave at a football stadium or perhaps one of those very large banners that are sometimes handed over the heads of the crowd and move their way gradually around the stadium. There are a number of different collective consciousnesses in society at any one time and in different places, some now rising, some currently predominant, some now falling away, and some long since gone. Each one of these different consciousnesses has its own set of values, and hence a different set of things that cause some people to become outraged when, as they see it, the values they hold dear are violated, and there is no necessary identity or overlap between the views held by people at the back of the wave or those in the forefront of new opinions.

I conclude my book by arguing that there is indeed such a thing as the common or collective consciousness of society—Durkheim was right to identify this concept I think and what he says about this phenomenon has made an important contribution to the sociology of knowledge—however, as I have indicated, I do not believe that Durkheim, especially in *The Division of Labour*, always got the nature or the form of this concept right. To revisit Durkheim’s work merely to give an account of what he has to say—or yet another account as we might say—would be a pointless exercise I believe. But this is not the purpose of my book. Apart from the six major criticisms of Durkheim’s concept of the common or collective consciousness specifically which I have suggested here and the three major revision of his view on the subject of sociology generally that I have already outlined above, what I hope I have done in this book is not just to revise Durkheim’s views of this concept but really, as Frank Pearce says (2001, xxi), to re-theorise these. The purpose of this book is therefore to look once again in some detail at the major arguments of

¹This is one of those *really* annoyingly functionalist statements that Durkheim makes, that, each and every one of us without exception; including criminals for example?...reflect *in differing degree* (but how much degree of difference then is permissible before we have passed the point where we are all committed to the same) ‘collective ideal’? By definition it must be true that since *a* society—any sort of society—always exists at any given time, then it must also be true that the people in this society are ‘sufficiently alike’ to get on with one another even if there interests are radically opposed and a revolution is about to break out at any time. It would then perhaps be better to say that no society can survive *without changing* unless its people are sufficiently alike and committed to roughly the same common ideal, and that any change which takes place must reflect the degree of difference [or belief in and support for] this common ideal. (See further on this point the essay by Jack Knight 2001, 354-373, and also Turner 2006, 226).

Durkheim's sociology on the question of the common and collective consciousness of society, especially as this has influenced the development of contemporary criminology, but to argue for a systematic reworking of what he had to say. I therefore think that mine might be described as a critical, but also I believe a largely appreciative account, of what Durkheim has to say on this subject. This book will therefore attempts to explain to criminologists in particular, and to social scientists more generally, exactly what Émile Durkheim meant by the concept of 'the common or collective consciousness of society'.

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