Rereading Durkheim in light of Jewish law: how a traditional rabbinic thought-model shapes his scholarship

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Abstract

When studying the work of Émile Durkheim, scholars must consider how his intellectual development in a traditional Jewish environment contributed to and informed his ideas. This article details how Durkheim's upbringing endowed him with a traditional rabbinic thought-model. The author analyzes five of Durkheim's major works to argue that the system of classification, language, and style of argument Durkheim used to define concepts in his scholarship mirror streams of rabbinic thought. The article builds off the sociology of knowledge to illuminate how Durkheim employed his codified knowledge of biblical texts and modern Jews to bolster his arguments, and reveals the subtler ways he demonstrates his tacit knowledge of the texts and argument styles. The article ends with an exploration of how conceptual frameworks from the sociology of knowledge may be applied to other leading sociological thinkers—how the modes of thinking instilled during formative years may orient scholarship and the benefits and limitations of this approach.

Keywords Epistemic culture · Habitus · Identity formation · Rabbinic Judaism · Socialization · Sociology of knowledge

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When studying the work of Émile Durkheim, scholars must consider how his intellectual development in a traditional Jewish environment contributed to and informed his ideas. Sociologists have analyzed how other philosophers¹ or the political climate² of his youth shaped his work, but the specific ways in which Durkheim's early exposure to rabbinic law framed his approach to science have been surprisingly neglected in the discipline. In this article, I detail how Durkheim's upbringing endowed him with a traditional rabbinic thought-model. I note how scholars in other disciplines have invoked his Jewish upbringing to make arguments about his work and position myself in the discussion. Then I delve into five of Durkheim's major works, *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1966[1895]), *Suicide* (1951[1897]), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]), and *Moral Education* (1961[1925]) to argue that the system of classification, language, and style of argument Durkheim used to define concepts in his major works mirror streams of rabbinic thought. I illuminate how Durkheim employed his codified knowledge of biblical texts and modern Jews to bolster his arguments, and the subtler ways he demonstrates his tacit knowledge of the texts and argument styles. The article ends with an exploration of how conceptual frameworks³ from the sociology of knowledge may be applied to other leading sociological thinkers—how modes of thinking instilled during formative years may orient scholarship and the benefits and limitations of this approach.

Intellectual heritage: “Don’t forget I am the son of a rabbi”

Although Durkheim is one of the most influential sociologists, the discipline has widely overlooked the influence of his traditional Jewish childhood on his work. Sociologists have more readily connected his legacy with his intellectual fathers, such as Auguste Comte, than with his biological father, Moïse Durkheim (Greenberg 1976, p. 624). David Émile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1850 into a family of devout French Jews (Fournier 2013, p. 13). His father, Moïse, as well as his grandfather and great-grandfather, were prominent rabbis in their communities. Family legend held that the family had been “rabbis, father and son, for eight generations” (Lukes 1973, p. 42; Filloux 1977, p. 8; Fournier 2013, p. 13).

Durkheim's family was dedicated to upholding Jewish law. As Steven Lukes wrote in *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (1973), Durkheim “grew up within the confines of a close-knit, orthodox, and traditional Jewish family, part of the long-established Jewish community of Alsace-Lorraine” (p. 39). His childhood community of Épinail had three synagogues (Birnbaum 2008, p. 95). George Davy (1960), Durkheim's student and friend, noted that in the Durkheim residence, “observance to the law was precept and example, nothing diverting one from duty” (p. 17). Durkheim's family belonged to a stream of rabbinic Judaism that found its ultimate authority in the

¹ Such as Saint Simon, Comte, and Kant.

² The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and rise of the Third French Republic.

³ A more formal conceptualization of ‘conceptual frameworks’ can be found in Herrissa Lamothe's “From Descartes to Du Bois: The Dual Subject and a Unifying Framework for Sociology.” Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, NY, August 10, 2019.

Babylonian Talmud,⁴ as both the Written and Oral Torah were considered part of divine revelation at Mount Sinai; this stream of Judaism continues to hold the status of orthodoxy, and is called normative, classical, or traditional Judaism (Neusner 1994, p. 5).

Growing up in a traditional Jewish household, Durkheim's intellectual role model was the rabbinic scholar (Greenberg 1976, p. 627). His father was known for being a Talmudic expert and "answering the most difficult Talmudic questions correctly," in his role as the Chief Rabbi of Vosges (Fournier 2013, p. 13). Moïse was true to the Lithuanian tradition⁵ and rabbinic school of Troyes in his, "solemn discipline, a devotion to learning entirely literal and logical in its emphasis, and a dedication to duty and work that would permeate his son's entire existence" (Greenberg 1976, p. 626). Louis Greenberg (1976) argued: "much of the criticism later raised against the restrictive character of Durkheim's work, its dependence on sanctions, its formalism, and its denigration of inner spontaneity and feeling, is in fact criticism of the legacy of the father and the narrow, cold rabbinic tradition of northern France" (p. 628). Similarly, Etienne Gilson (1962) found Durkheim's sociology to mirror his father's "constraint" (p. 25).

Durkheim received the education of one who was expected to become a rabbi (Lukes 1973, p. 39; Bellah 1973, p. xi). He learned Hebrew, studied the Torah and the Talmud, attended synagogue, and had a bar mitzvah (Bellah 1973, p. xi; Allan 2005, p. 111; Birnbaum 2008, p. 97). One of Durkheim's grandsons, M. Étienne Halphen, shared that Durkheim even attended a rabbinical school for a while (Lukes 1973). Although Fournier (2013) is unable to locate evidence of a rabbinical school near Durkheim's town, it is most likely that this school was a *heder* (Jewish day school) for local Jewish children. Regardless of whether or not Durkheim studied Talmud in a formal setting, given that the Torah places the obligation of a son's Jewish education on the father (Deut 11:19; *Sifre Deut* 46; Strack 1996[1991], p. 9) and Durkheim's father was a traditional rabbi, it is likely that Durkheim studied with his father and was proficient in rabbinic law and the Talmudic hermeneutical principles (Jacobs 1984, p. 5; Fournier 2013, p. 13). Durkheim would have been versed in the rulings of "the rabbis"—influential rabbinical figures whose writings span from Mishnaic and Talmudic times (200 to 600 CE) to the creation of a solidified system of Jewish Law (ca. 1563 with the publication of Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Shulchan Aruch*) and its commentaries (Neusner 1994, p. xix).

Between the ages of 13 and 16, Durkheim's trajectory shifted course. Davy hinted that he underwent some sort of crisis under the influence of an old Catholic school

⁴ The Talmud is the codification of Jewish Oral Law. The Talmud is comprised of the Mishna (ca. 200 CE), which is the first written redaction of the *Oral Torah*, and the Gemara (ca. 600 CE) which details and comments on the Mishna. In its existing form, the Gemara is a compilation of rabbinic commentaries on the Mishna. For more details on the Mishna and Talmud, see Herman Strack's *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1996[1991]) or Jacob Neusner's *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (1994). The Torah (The Five Books of Moses) is considered the *Written Torah* that was given at Sinai. Some consider the Written Torah to also include the entirety of written scriptures from ancient Israel (Neusner 1994, p. xx). Within traditional Judaism, it is also believed that the Oral Law was given at Sinai, but was transmitted only by word of mouth. It was only codified after the destruction of the Second Temple.

⁵ Lithuanian Jews were known for their opposition to Chassidut, a mystical Jewish movement that spread through Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. Their stoicism and asceticism in practice and text study stood in high contrast to Chassidic Jew's ecstatic prayer and other emotion-filled practices.

mistress during his secular studies (Davy 1919, p. 183; Bellah 1973, p. xi; Pickering 1984, p. 6; Fournier 2013, p. 24). At this time, he also acquired a taste for science and philosophy. This combination pushed Durkheim into a career and lifestyle far from the path of his forefathers. Although he did not convert to another religion, Durkheim did “settle on a secular career as a professor through which he could express in another form the religious aspirations of his youth, a career which he always viewed in Davy’s words, ‘a veritable calling’” (Bellah 1973, p. xi). Davy (1919) wrote that by the time that Durkheim went to the highly-prestigious *École Normale Supérieure* in 1879, he was living a completely secular life. Although his father wrote a letter to the director of the school that his son be exempt from classes on Saturday, which is the Jewish Sabbath, Durkheim continued in school despite the rejection of the appeal (Halphen 1987, p. 7; Pickering 1984, p. 15; Fournier 2013).

Durkheim’s break from traditional Judaism to pursue secular studies was not as jarring as one may imagine within his historical context. Durkheim grew up during a time when the Jewish community was torn between “tradition and transformation”—when it was possible to become secular and still identify with the Jewish community (Fournier 2013, p. 18). Even his father, Moïse Durkheim, was “sympathetic to modernism” and had a thirst for intellectual exploration (p. 17). Many sources reveal Moïse Durkheim’s desire to explore secular knowledge, at least as a young adult (Greenberg 1976, p. 625).⁶ Photos from the era show him beardless and dressed in modern clothing, which would have been highly unusual for a traditional rabbi of earlier epochs (p. 625). Thus, when Durkheim moved away from religious life, he was not necessarily actively rejecting his roots. William Pickering (1994) argued that Durkheim was able to adopt “gentile culture” without “denying Jewish culture” (p. 14). Chad Alan Goldberg (2017) furthered that Durkheim’s Jewish identity may have not been traditionalist, “but neither was it absent or nonexistent” (p. 26).

As a secular academic, Durkheim never stopped thinking about religion. One of his first paper topics at *École Normale Supérieure* was on the Jews of the Roman Empire (Birnbaum 2008, p. 97). References to the Torah are abundant in all of his work. *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]) has 45 references to the Torah, “more than to any other single topic or person” (Cuddihy 1974, p. 151). Some scholars push the relationship between Durkheim’s work and his Jewish roots further, to demonstrate “parallels in his thinking with traditional Jewish ideology” (Lindenthal 1970, p. 42). Ivan Strenski (1997) described this scholarship as assigning Durkheim an “essential Jewishness”—it assumes “that Durkheim’s thought is really a secularized form of Jewish thought and necessarily so” (p. 1). Strenski examined work that contained this essentialist perspective to discredit them. In the essentialist perspective:

Durkheim’s affection for justice, and justice over charity, or his tolerance of other religious is supposed to point to his deep Jewishness (Schoenfeld and Mestrovic 1989). Durkheim’s penchant for analysis is likewise felt to indicate an

⁶ Traditional Judaism did not completely shun secular studies, as these pursuits could help sharpen one’s mind to understand better the divine or make a livelihood to serve god better (Zalman of Liadi 2014[1795]; Maimonides 1912[1135–1204]). Maimonides 1912[1135–1204] is perhaps one of the strongest advocates for secular studies in traditional Judaism, which is clear from his writings on the topic and embrace of Aristotelian philosophy. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi clarified in *Likutei Amarim* (2014[1795]) that Maimonides and Nachmanides only pursued secular studies to understand and serve god better (Chapter 8).

ineradicable and typically Talmudic sensibility (Filloux 1976; Greenberg 1976; Derczansky 1990); his aversion to miraculous brands of messianism shows him to be in his heart a modern Maimonides (Derczansky 1990); his use of language indicates the “vocabulary of Jewish mysticism” [Moore 1980]; his dynamic direction of the *équipe* certifies his leadership as self-consciously ‘prophetic’ in the classic Jewish sense (Filloux 1976). His orientation to the social domain, to ritual, to symbolism, to religion itself likewise reveals the indelible marks of ‘his Jewish intellectual heritage’ (Lindenthal 1976; Moore 1980). Thus, because Durkheim was born and raised a Jew, he remained ‘essentially’ and eternally Jewish in a significant sense; since Durkheim’s thinking must have been Jewish from the start; it likewise forever continued to be Jewish. (p. 1)

Strenski argued that this way of analyzing Durkheim is misguided. It is misguided because Durkheim’s Jewish upbringing “is of little significance when compared with his intellectual, thus social, relations with contemporaries” (Strenski 1997, p. 11). Strenski presented identity as, “something that is learned, negotiated, and practiced over time” (p. 6). He sided with Lucy Dawidowicz’s (1977) argument that, “those who don’t use them [identities] lose them” (Strenski 1997, p. 6). Since Durkheim left traditional Judaism and was not associated with any Jewish cultural institutions, his work cannot and should not be connected with his upbringing.

While I agree with Strenski that identity is fluid and evolves over time, sociology of knowledge affirms that one cannot discount how early life experiences shape one’s thought-model. Karl Mannheim introduced the concept of thought-models in his seminal work *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1997[1936]). Thought-models are clustered styles of thought that influence the way individuals make sense of the world around them. These models do not develop in isolation: they arise out of communal practices and prescribed outlooks that are part of group membership (Halbwachs 1992[1925], p. 52). Mannheim emphasized, “[i]f one were to trace in detail, in each individual case, the origin and the radius of diffusion of a certain thought-model one would discover the peculiar affinity it has to the social position of given groups and their manner of interpreting the world” (Mannheim 1997[1936], p. 247). Individuals perceive objects differently depending on their thought-models, as “the same word, or the same concept in most cases, means very different things when used by differently situated persons” (Mannheim 1997[1936], p. 245). Mannheim posited that both theoretical and cognitive emotional components of thought-models could be detected in the writings of intellectuals, in particular the inclusion or absence of certain concepts and their proposed meanings, and the structure of the categorical apparatus (Nelson 1992, pp. 27, 29).

Michael Polanyi developed a similar concept to a thought-model in *Personal Knowledge* (1958). He introduced the “personal coefficient”: “into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known, and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge” (Preface). Individuals filter new knowledge through the framework of their past experiences and communal understandings (their “knowing what is to be known”). The personal coefficient is present during the discovery and validation of knowledge. Hence, there is no purely objective science because each thought and understanding

must pass through one's coefficient: personal knowledge shapes all factual knowledge and fills the gap between subjectivity and objectivity (p. 18).

Pierre Bourdieu's (2013[1979]) concept of *habitus* builds upon the conceptual framework of thought-models and personal coefficients, and this is perhaps the most fitting model for understanding the impact of Durkheim's religious upbringing on his scholarship. Bourdieu argued that the social structure inscribes itself on one's mind during socialization, forming a *habitus*. The *habitus* causes individuals to think and act only in ways that feel inherently right given their particular socialization. These group-based cognitive and bodily dispositions reproduce the social order. In the case of Durkheim, his *habitus* would lead him to reproduce a rabbinic style of thought despite his distance from Jewish practice as an adult. Durkheim himself supported the idea of inscribed ways of knowing and being in *Moral Education* (1961[1925]), writing that judgments are "inscribed in the *consciences* of normal adults; we find them ready made within us" (1975[1917], pp. 313–315). Although scholars have moved past the view of culture as a *single* system of embodied dispositions, Bourdieu's discussion of the development of the *habitus* and how it structures actions are still helpful for thinking about how upbringing contributes to the persistence and embodiment of certain thought-models.

More recent sociologists of knowledge have expanded the concepts of thought-models, personal coefficients, and *habitus* into "epistemic cultures," in which people acquire, produce, and apply knowledge in specific ways (Cetina 2007, p. 362). By understanding a scholar's epistemic culture, it is possible to look inside the "black box that constitutes [her] scientific inquiry" and to make sense of her research methods and analysis (pp. 363, 369). In a similar vein, Durkheim begged scholars not to ignore the context of an individual's life on his work:

Even the moralist who believes he is able, by the power of thought, to withdraw himself from the influence of surrounding ideas, cannot succeed in doing so. For he is entirely permeated by them and whatever he does, it is they that he discovers once more at the conclusion of his deductions. (2014[1892], p. 330)

The ways of thinking, acquiring, producing, and applying knowledge that are instilled in scientists during their formative years will continue to orient their scholarship throughout their lives. Working within this conceptual framework, scholars have the opportunity to explore how individuals' group memberships may have influenced their ways of thinking and being without essentializing them to *only* being a member of a particular group.

In the case of Durkheim, traditional Judaism was chronologically a primary source of influence on Durkheim, even though it was not the only influence on his thinking. Given the particularly insular and all-encompassing nature of traditional Judaism on communal bodily and theological practices, the impact of formation in this environment would be particularly acute. As a child and adolescent, Durkheim was permeated with traditional Judaism and rabbinical arguments, and thus, continued to leverage these ideas in his discoveries and deductions even after he became secular. Durkheim continued to have *codified knowledge* of the historical Jewish traditions—explicit and easily transferable knowledge, such as knowing biblical laws—and *tacit knowledge*—knowledge that is not easily transferable and must be learned through direct experience,

such as Talmudic rhetorical strategies (Polanyi 1958). During his childhood, Durkheim acquired an epistemic culture of a particular stream of Judaism that he carries over into sociology. Even though he became detached from his roots, this does not completely erase Durkheim's years immersed in Jewish legalistic thought. Indeed, Durkheim himself was cognizant that individuals can have more than one influence (family, country, humanity) on their moral development, and that new influences do not eliminate prior ones (Durkheim 1961[1925], p. 74). Durkheim integrated new ways of thinking into his work and developed new “meaning-contexts” through which to look back on past experiences throughout his career (Schutz 1967, p. 106); but, a rabbinic approach remains present, even if below the surface, throughout his work on social phenomena. Harry Alpert (1939) supported this framework when he shared that Durkheim, “never forgot his rabbinical background. He was fully conscious of his own predominantly ethical and religious preoccupations and recalled to his colleagues of the *Année Sociologique* that he was, after all, the son of a rabbi” (p. 15).

In this article, I work to study how being the son of a traditional rabbi influenced Durkheim without pigeonholing his sociology into a single all-encompassing framework.⁷ I do not delve into whether the topics Durkheim studies are a result of his “religious preoccupation,” or if he takes a philosophical approach similar to streams of Jewish philosophy. Rather, I reveal the places in *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1966[1895]), *Suicide* (1951[1897]), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]), and *Moral Education* (1961[1925]) where he employed his codified and tacit knowledge of Judaism and rabbinic traditions to make innovative arguments, and where he mirrored rabbinic classifications and discussions. Even when Durkheim held divergent opinions from Talmudic and contemporaneous rabbis, he arrived at these opinions through employing similar intellectual techniques. The content varies but the form remains. Beyond studying the larger patterns of similarities, I look for clues in his language and example choice that are reminiscent of rabbinic law. These seemingly “negligible details” can often reveal more about an author than more striking parts of his argument (Ginzburg 1979, pp. 277, 282). Durkheim recognized that the language one employs “implies a particular mentality, that of the society which speaks it... it is this mentality which provides the foundation for individual mentality” (Durkheim 1961[1925], p. 69).

I reread Durkheim through a rabbinic lens—drawing attention to how he employs the same system of classifications, hierarchies, examples, terminology, and argument styles as the Talmud and influential historical and contemporaneous rabbis. For the sake of simplicity, I use the term “rabbinic thought-model” throughout this article to refer to the conceptual approach captured in Mannheim's thought-model (1997[1936]), Polanyi's personal coefficient (1958) Bourdieu's *habitus* (2013[1979]), and Centina's epistemic culture (2007) and how it is reflected in Durkheim's scholarship. To ignore the patterns between Durkheim's work and Jewish law for fear of “essentializing” him would prevent

⁷ I agree that it is important to stay away from “essentializing” Durkheim because this way of thinking often reflects either: (1) a desire to claim Durkheim's thought as part of one's own intellectual heritage (i.e., Jews searching for Jewish patterns in Durkheim to claim the success of his ideas), or (2) a way of discounting his thinking (i.e., Anti-Semites who argued that sociology was just, “a Jewish scheme to undermine authentic French thought”) (Strenski 1997).

sociologists from uncovering the ways in which Durkheim's life experiences combined to produce his innovative social theory.

Codified knowledge: Jews as the ideal type

Durkheim leveraged his codified knowledge of biblical texts and contemporary Judaism in order to re-conceptualize contemporaneous literature on the division of labor, suicide, morality, and religion. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim repeatedly employed the Jews as his ideal type of the repressive society with mechanical solidarity—a group of like-minded individuals who stay united through specific beliefs and practices. For almost every argument, he substantiated his claim with an example from the Torah, which he refers to as the Pentateuch. For example, when positing that crimes in repressive societies can be criminal merely because they offend the common sentiment of the group, he offered the examples “touching an object that is taboo, or an animal or man who is impure or consecrated,” which are well documented in the Jewish tradition and abundant in the Talmud, and wrote, “we need only to open up the Pentateuch to be convinced” of this phenomenon (p. 32). Just as he stated that, “it would be impossible to list all of the religious crimes that the Pentateuch delineates and represses” (p. 122), it would be difficult to detail all the places in *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), where Durkheim evokes examples from the Torah. However, one of the most impressive concentrated displays of Durkheim's knowledge of the Torah was when he presented the non-repressive laws in the Pentateuch and argued that they still stem from the “Godhead”:

Law of Property: right of withdrawal; jubilee; property of Levites (Leviticus 15:14–25, 29–34, and 27:1034).

Domestic Law: marriage (Deuteronomy 21:11–14; 23:5; 25:5–10; Leviticus 21:7, 13, 14); law of successions (Numbers 27:8–11 and 26:8; Deuteronomy 21:15–17); slavery of native-born and foreigners (Deuteronomy 15:12–17; Exodus 21:2–11; Leviticus 19:20; 25:39–44; 36:44–54).

Loans and wages: (Deuteronomy 15:7–9; 23:19–20; 24:6 and 10–17).

Organization of public functions: functions of priests (Numbers 10); of Levites (Numbers 3 and 4); of elders (Deuteronomy 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; 21:1; Leviticus 4:15); of judges (Exodus 18:25; Deuteronomy 1:15–17).

He quoted verses from the text that revealed the divine nature of these laws. Durkheim posited that these laws and crimes are, “graven on everyone's consciousness” and they appear to be graven on his conscious as well, because he states the biblical verses and cites the sources without relying on secondary sources.⁸ Durkheim did include material on other types of repressive societies, such as the Greeks or Early Romans in these sections, but in these cases, he always cited secondary sources.⁹ Although most university-educated individuals in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century

⁸ In a few causes when he uses historical examples, he does cite Salomon Munck's *Palestine* (1845).

⁹ For examples, see *Division of Labor* (2014[1892]), pp. 51–52.

would be familiar with the Pentateuch, Durkheim's comprehension of the biblical text is particularly striking. Pierre Birnbaum (2008) described Durkheim's knowledge of the Pentateuch as "remarkable," noting his "surprisingly detailed knowledge" and "veritable mastery" of sacred texts (pp. 100–101).¹⁰ Some scholars attributed Durkheim's knowledge of Semitic religion to his reading of Robertson Smith (Douglas 1984[1966]); yet, it is more likely that *The Religion of the Semites* (1972[1894]) resonated with Durkheim so strongly because of his own Semitic roots.¹¹ These biblical examples allowed Durkheim to map out the causal pathway between the division of labor and social solidarity—a path that Comte recognized but did not detail.

Durkheim did not just leverage his knowledge of the biblical Israelites to propel the literature forward: in *Suicide* (1951[1897]), the modern Jew was essential to his argument. He used the modern Jew to demonstrate that intellectual pursuits do not lead to a higher suicide rate.¹² An increase in suicide is not a result of increased knowledge: "Knowledge does not determine this process. It is innocent; nothing is more unjust than to accuse it, and the example of the Jews proves this conclusively" (p. 168). The Jew is able to exist in the intellectual sphere and be almost immune to suicide because:

He superimposes this intellectual life upon his habitual routine with no effect of the former upon the latter. This is the reason for the complexity he presents. Primitive in certain respects, in others he is an intellectual and man of culture. He thus combines the advantages of severe discipline characteristics of small and ancient groups with the beliefs of intense culture enjoyed by our greatest societies. He has all the intelligence of modern man without sharing his despair. (p. 168)

The Jew exists in between the ancient and modern space and thus is able to take the best from both. He can enjoy intellectual thought without the breakdown of innumerable beliefs and practices that keep him tied to the group. It is when these beliefs and practices break down that free thought emerges, and with it, feelings of futility, despair, and suicide. Durkheim revealed this process by comparing the Protestant, Catholic, and Jew:

If Protestantism concedes a greater freedom to individual thought than Catholicism, it is because it has fewer common beliefs and practices.... The more numerous the matters of action and thought of a religious character are, which are accordingly removed from free inquiry, the more the idea of god presents itself in all the details of existence, and makes individual wills converge to one identical goal. Inversely, the greater concessions a confessional group makes to individual judgement, the less it dominates lives, the less its cohesion and vitality.... this also explains the situation of Judaism. (p. 159)

¹⁰ See Birnbaum (2003) for more examples of Durkheim's use of Jews and Judaism in his work.

¹¹ Indeed, Durkheim diverged completely from Smith when it came to his approach to the separation between the sacred and the profane (Douglas 1984[1966]). Durkheim took an approach that was much similar to traditional Judaism, as detailed later in this article.

¹² A more minor point is that despite high levels of insanity in Jews, they do not commit high number of suicides—which he argues proves that insanity is not a cause of suicide (Durkheim 1951[1897], p. 72).

Suicide occurs when a group loses control over individuals' beliefs and practices and individuals start to make their own decisions. The same solidarity that made Jews primitive in *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]) makes them the most adept to thrive for the modern world in *Suicide* (1951[1897]).

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1995[1912]) used Judaism to demonstrate that religious laws are not dependent on supernatural beings. Durkheim detailed prohibitions that do not rely on the divine, such as isolating menstruating and birthing women, hitching horses and donkeys together, wearing clothing that mixes hemp and linen, and dietary restrictions. He stated it is “impossible to see what role [god] could have played in those relations, for he is absent from all the relations thus prohibited and could hardly be interested in them” (p. 32). These are classic examples from rabbinic Judaism, but Durkheim is careful to add that these restrictions are not “particular to the Hebrews” (p. 32). It is important to note that Durkheim employed a name of god in this example that is forbidden for Jews, demonstrating his personal distance from the religion (Maimonides (2010[1135–1204]) 12:11).

Durkheim described Jews during the Feast of the Tabernacle (Sukkot) to emphasize further that god is not a critical component of religious rituals. During Sukkot, Jews stir the air and shake willow branches in specific rhythms, “to make the wind blow and the rain fall: the belief was that the rite produced the desired result automatically, provided it was correctly performed” (p. 33). This example served to reveal that rituals arise without god. In *Moral Education* (1961[1925]), Durkheim again used the example of Judaism to show that religions have not always relied on other-worldly sanctions to guarantee moral compliance (p. 105). Instead, morality depends on law and action.

The examples cited in this section represent just a small sample of the times Durkheim referenced Jews and Judaism in his work. Birnbaum provided a more thorough review in his book *Geography of Hope* (2008). Birnbaum argued commentators are mistaken to stay silent about Durkheim's pages devoted to Jews and Judaism—these moments are often “essential to the demonstration of the whole” argument (pp. 112–113). For example, Durkheim first introduced his interpretation of religion as collective consciousness through the sole example of Jews (p. 102). Commentators “underestimate ... the constant interest shown by Durkheim, in his very work, with respect to the behavior unique to the Jews” (pp. 112–113). Whether or not Durkheim wrote about Jews due to a “constant interest” in them is difficult to prove (internal motivations are hidden); yet, his codified knowledge about biblical and contemporary Judaism and Jews is visible throughout his works.

Things over ideas

Inherent to Durkheim's sociological approach is the distinction between visible symbols —“things”—and non-visible symbols—“ideas” (Durkheim 1966[1895], p. 27). Things can be observed directly, while ideas are inaccessible (p. 28). Durkheim believed that ideas (including emotions and feelings) are derived from physical, visible things, such as laws and actions. Hence, scholars must focus on, “the observable manifestation of the rules that are functioning under our eyes” (p. 23). Scholarship that focuses on ideas instead of things is not a science; it is mere speculation (p. 25).

A focus on visible manifestations instead of internal ideas is also inherent to traditional Judaism. In one of the most dramatic moments in the bible, god tells the patriarch Abraham to sacrifice his son. Many traditional commentators grappled with the question of how god could ask Abraham to do this horrible task. Why would an all-knowing god need to test Abraham? Did god not already know of his loyalty? Moses ben Nahman¹³ (ca. 1194–1270), a leading medieval rabbinical scholar, explained that god needed to test Abraham because Abraham's emotions were still internal—they were not actualized until he acted them out. His deed allowed his latent fear to emerge into actuality, and then his merit was complete and could be rewarded (Ben Nahman 2009[1246–1286] on Genesis 22:12). Deeds, “bring out the thing from ability to actuality, giving a reward for a good action and not just a reward for a good heart” (22:1). Jewish philosophers from the Middle Ages onwards recognized outward observance of rituals as a signal of internal religiosity (Heinemann 2008[1953], p. 174). Actions reveal internal nature, and thus, a moral society must “multiply the opportunities in which the sentiments ... can manifest themselves in actions” (Durkheim 1961[1925]), p. 229).

Unsurprisingly, for Durkheim, morality exists in the realm of law and action. In *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), Durkheim introduced his argument that morality emerges from law because “morality constrains us to follow a path laid down” and law enforces these constrictions (p. 13). Durkheim solidified the theoretical foundations of the relationship between morality and law in *Moral Education* (1961[1925]). He presented morality as a “system of commandments” and a “comprehensive system of prohibitions” (p. 42). Fixed and specific rituals and rules act to, “determine conduct, to fix it, to eliminate the element of individual arbitrariness” (p. 27). Durkheim distanced his moral system from those that rely on beliefs and emotions, the “spiritualistic philosophy [that] continues the work of Protestantism” (p. 7). The principal duty of a Christian towards god is emotional—“to love his neighbor”; in this theology, ritual duties towards the divine diminish in number and importance (p. 7). For a secular morality to function properly, individuals must act according to their duties at the appropriate time, regardless of personal preference (p. 34). Repeating proper actions creates morality because “one only learns to do by doing” (p. 229). Actions should become so imbedded in individuals that, when an individual tries to act immorally, “he feels something that stops him just as clearly as when he tries to lift a weight too heavy for him” (p. 42).

Durkheim's presentation of law as morality mirrors the approach of traditional Judaism. The Hebrew term for Jewish law, *Halacha*,¹⁴ is translated as the “way of walking.” As such, Jewish law is commonly thought of as a path that teaches practitioners how to walk through life. Traditionally observant Jews perform daily and periodic obligations to remain on the righteous path. The Talmudic Midrash Bereishit Rabbah shared that *mitzvot* [laws/commandments] exist to improve humanity, not just to please god: “What does it matter to god if an animal is slaughtered by cutting its neck through the spine or the throat?

¹³ Commonly known as Ramban or Nachmanides.

¹⁴ *Halacha* (חלצה) has the root of (hei) – (lamed) – (kaf), which means to go, to walk, or to travel.

[The answer is:] “The commandments were given only in order to refine humanity” (Bereishit Rabbah 44:1).

Maimonides¹⁵ (ca. 1135 to 1204), one of the most influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages, explained that *mitzvot* help Jews overcome their evil inclinations, correct traits, and straighten their ways (Maimonides 2010[1135–1204]). Although Maimonides was heavily influenced by the theories of contemporaneous philosophers, such as Aristotle¹⁶ and al-Farabi,¹⁷ his commentaries on the Torah, Talmud, and *Halacha* continue to be an essential component of traditional Jewish education. Maimonides integrated external philosophies with the, “the body of law revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai,” because without the prophetic insight, the theories would be incomplete (Seeskin 2012, p. 111). Indeed, Lawrence Berman (2008) wrote that Maimonides wove, “an important thread of philosophic ideas into the very fabric of traditional Judaism.... Thus, indirectly, [Aristotle’s] *Ethics* has had a tremendous influence upon traditional Jewish circles (pp. 14–15). In *Shemonah Perakim* [The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics] (1912[1135–1204]), Maimonides wrote that when individuals perform good actions, they gain virtue; when they perform bad acts, they gain vice (Maimonides, p. 58). The only way to acquire moral excellences (or defects) is through, “frequent repetition of acts resulting from these qualities, which, practised during a long period of time, accustoms us to them” (p. 58). Repetitive actions create moral behavior. The *Sefar Hachinuch* [*The Book of Mitzvah Education*] (1992[1235–1300]) detailed the importance of repetition of positive actions for cultivating righteousness:

A person is influenced by his actions, and his heart and thoughts follow the acts he does whether they are good or bad. Even one who is a completely wicked person, who constantly thinks of doing bad deeds, if he is inspired for the better and puts time into fulfilling Torah and *mitzvot*, even if it is not for the sake of Heaven, he will turn to the good and he will overcome his Evil Inclination

¹⁵ Born as Moses ben Maimon and also called Rambam.

¹⁶ Scholars have paid increasing attention to the influence of Aristotle on Maimonides’ work. The Aristotelian corpus was translated into Arabic in the ninth and tenth centuries and integrated into the work of scholars in the eastern Islamic intellectual tradition (Berman 2008, p. 13; Seeskin 2012, p. 107). Maimonides appreciated Aristotle’s work to such an extent that in a letter to his Hebrew translator, Maimonides wrote that, “with the exception of those gifted with prophetic inspiration, Aristotle’s intellectual achievement represents the extreme of the human intellect” (Seeskin 2012, p. 107). Yet, because Aristotle was not part of the prophetic and legal Jewish tradition, “his account of virtue is incomplete” (p. 111). The translations of Aristotle that Maimonides read were influenced by Neoplatonism, and thus, in his work, Maimonides switches between Aristotle and his commentators, particularly al-Farabi (p. 122). For more details on the relationship between Aristotle and Maimonides, see Lawrence Berman’s “The Ethical Views of Maimonides within the context of Islamic Civilization” (2008) and Kenneth Seeskin’s “Maimonides’ appropriation of Aristotle’s ethics” (2012).

¹⁷ Lawrence Berman (2008) wrote that “Alfarabi is one of the great conduits by which thought based on *Ethics* passed into Islamic civilization and thence into medieval Western European thought” (p. 15). Thus, Maimonides’ understanding of Aristotelian philosophy is largely mediated through Abu Nasr al-Farabi’s perspectives. Maimonides draws heavily from al-Farabi’s *Fusul al-Madan* [Aphorisms of the Statesman] (al-Farabi 1961 [872–950]) in *Shemonah Perakim* (1912[1135–1204]). Maimonides only uses the philosophical, psychological, and ethical sections of the books and took a different approach when writing about religion, relying on Jewish scripture and tradition (Davidson 1963, p. 34). The relationship between al-Farabi’s and Maimonides’ scholarship is discussed at length in Herbert Davidson’s “Maimonides’ ‘Shemonah Peraqim’ and Alfarabi’s ‘Fuṣūl Al-Madani’” (1963).

through the power of these actions, since the heart follows the actions a person does. Similarly, even if one is a completely righteous person who desires Torah and *mitzvot* but always involves himself in bad deeds ... after a certain amount of time he will become a wicked person, for we know, and it is true, that every man is affected by his actions. (Halevi 1992[1235–1300], Mitzvah 16)

In other words, wicked people who follow the laws (even if they do not do it “sake of Heaven”) become good, and if the righteous deviate from the law, they become wicked. Practitioners’ actions determine their morality.

Moderation: Walking the middle path

Durkheim posited that “a morality of duty”—with stringent rules and discipline—is also a “morality of good” (Durkheim 1961[1925], p. 122). Despite other contemporaneous scholars and theologians’ theories that duty and good are distinct, perhaps incompatible, Durkheim argued that a disciplined life is inherently positive (p. 96). He outlined and disputed arguments that equated discipline with negative outcomes for humans; for example, discipline “impedes his unrestricted development” (p. 38). He also refuted the perspective that discipline is harmful to human nature, but that this harm is positive because humans are essentially bad. Durkheim distanced himself from this Christian conception of original sin.¹⁸

If, then, from our point of view, discipline is good, it is not that we regard the work of nature with a rebellious eye.... it is not because that nature seems to us bad, or because we would deny the right to gratification; on the contrary, it is because otherwise such natural inclinations could have no hope of the satisfaction they merit. (p. 51)

Durkheim’s discipline does not work to suppress humans’ evil nature; rather, it is a conduit through which individuals can achieve a lifestyle of moderation, and ultimately, happiness.

For Durkheim, the “inability to restrict one’s self” is a “sign of disease” (p. 28). Normal individuals are satiated with a regular amount of food—“it is the bulimic who cannot be satisfied” (p. 38). Durkheim viewed unlimited desires as a sort of sickness that leads to anguish and slavery to one’s passions (pp. 40, 42). Not only are law and discipline critical for a functioning society, but they are also necessary for individual well-being. Limitation is the “condition of happiness and of moral health” (p. 44). Durkheim’s linkage between discipline and well-being in *Moral Education* (1961[1925]) resonates with his argument about Jews’ immunity to suicide in *Suicide* (2014[1892]): their “severe discipline characteristics” protect them (p. 168). He concluded that learning to “restrain and master” oneself is the path to “emancipation and of freedom” (Durkheim 1961[1925], p. 49). Indeed, “liberty is the fruit of regulation” (p. 49). By practicing moral rules, individuals “develop the capacity to govern and regulate ourselves, which is the whole reality of liberty.”

¹⁸ Romans 5:12–19.

Moderation is also considered the righteous path in Judaism. Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda¹⁹ argued the importance of setting limits against extreme asceticism in *Duties of the Heart* (1996[ca.1080]) and Judah Halevi²⁰ emphasized that god equally desires religious joy and submission through fasts in the *Kuzari* (1947[1140]) (discussed in Kreisel 1988, p. VII; Heinemann 2008[1953], p. 171). Maimonides equated the righteous path with the “the medium course of action,” which is in between “extremes in action and attitude” (Maimonides 1912[1135–1204], p. 58). Jews should follow a “path of moderation ... eating, drinking, enjoying legitimate sexual intercourse, all in moderation, and living among people in honesty and uprightness, but not dwelling in the wilderness or in the mountains, or clothing oneself in garments of hair and wool, or afflicting the body” (p. 63). Maimonides argued that *mitzvot* exist to ensure that individuals stay far from extremes in behavior. For example, laws around sexuality exist to make sure Jews do not engage in inordinate indulgence of passions or complete aestheticism, “so that there may be firmly rooted in our souls the disposition for moderation” (p. 67, citing Tractate Sanhedrin). One who takes on extra stringencies around food, sexuality, comfort, and alcohol is as improper as one who completely disregards the law: “this, too, is a bad path and it is forbidden to walk upon it. Whoever follows this path is called a sinner” (Maimonides (2010[1135–1204]), 3:1).

Durkheim’s comparison of those who are morally unbounded to those who are physically diseased mirrored Maimonides presentation of the souls of those who are not acting according to the law: “[s]ome of the sick even desire and crave that which is not fit to eat.... Similarly, those who are morally ill desire and love bad traits, hate the good path, and are lazy to follow it (2:1). A soul is healthy when an individual performs proper action and sick when an individual acts immorally (Maimonides 1912[1135–1204], p. 58). Again, this comparison in Maimonides work almost certainly originated from the work of Aristotle and al-Farabi, as both scholars explicitly discuss the health and disease of the soul (Berman 2008). However, Maimonides embeds the philosophy of moderation within the context of rabbinic Judaism, relying on Psalms (“The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalms 19:7)) and Talmudic passages (“Is what the Torah has prohibited for you not enough, that you prohibit other things for yourself?”) (Jerusalem Talmud Tractate Nedarim)) (Seeskin 2012). Whether or not the love of moderation is a Jewish or Greek ideal—or both—the context of which Durkheim would have *first* encountered these philosophies is in his childhood home.

Moderation of desires is also necessary for well-being in the Jewish paradigm: “A lover of money never has his fill of money” (Ecclesiastes 5:9). Individuals who do not pursue enough money to meet their needs are also unwell. *Pirkei Avot* [Ethics of the Fathers], a tractate of the Mishnah, declares: “Who is truly wealthy? He who is contented with his lot” (4:1). Similarly, “Who is strong? One who overpowers his inclinations” (4:1). Those who can keep their unbounded desires limited will be happy and strong.

¹⁹ A Jewish philosopher and rabbi who lived ca. 1050–1120 in Spain.

²⁰ A Jewish philosopher and rabbi who was born in 1075 in Spain and died in 1141 Israel.

Actions over beliefs

Durkheim detailed his views on the relationship between action (and in-action) and beliefs in his presentation of religion. Beginning in *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), Durkheim went against the mainstream perspective that religion was about only about beliefs:

It has often been stated that at any moment in history religion has consisted of a set of beliefs and sentiments of every kind concerning man's links with a being or beings whose nature he regards as superior to his own. But such a definition is manifestly inadequate. In fact, there are a host of rules of conduct or ways of thinking that are certainly religious and that, however, apply to relationships of a totally different kind. Religion prohibits the Jew from eating certain kinds of meat and lays down that he must dress in a prescribed fashion. It imposes upon him this or that view regarding the nature of men and things, and regarding the origin of the world. It often regulates legal, moral and economic relationships. Its sphere of action thus extends far beyond man's communication with the divine. (p. 131)

Religion functions by directing the details of practitioners' everyday lives through laws and action, and, in turn, instills in them almost *instinctual* ways of moving through life and thinking. Even if practitioners *choose* proper action, "ideas arising from reflection have never the same constraining power as instincts." Actions from choice "have not the instant immediacy of involuntary actions" (p. 233).

Durkheim honed this argument in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]). He began the book with how people incorrectly assume that all religious life is dependent on ideas. He held that, "the critical rationalists who have sought to dismiss religion as a tissue of superstitions ... are as much in error as those theologians—especially of the Protestant faith—who have endeavored to express its nature in terms of creed and dogma" (Nisbet 1965, p. 85). Religion is much more than just a system of belief.

When specific bodily practices are lacking, religion loses its influence. Durkheim wrote that, "even collective ideas and feelings are only possible through the overt movements that symbolize them. Thus, it is action that dominates religious life" (1995[1912], p. 421). In other words, religious action is the mechanism that leads to religious beliefs. Without group-specific actions, the group will lose its group-specific beliefs.

Durkheim divided the rituals that produce belief into negative and positive cults in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]). He presented negative cults as a "system of abstinences" that serve to inhibit activity (p. 313). These prohibitions help individuals rid themselves of any profanity, so they are able to engage with the sacred world. Once individuals have participated in the negative cult, they are able to have access to the positive cult. The positive cult is a system of periodic feasts, celebrations, and daily rituals that combine to create collective identity, beliefs, and emotions.

Durkheim's positive and negative cult practices correspond with the rabbinic system of positive and negative commandments. There are 613 commandments that can be divided between 248 "positive commandments" [*mitzvot aseh*, lit. "commandments to do"], and 365 "negative commandments" [*mitzvot lo taaseh*, lit. "commandments not to

do”]. Negative commandments refer to laws that prohibit certain behaviors (i.e., do not murder, do not make idols, do not have adultery), while the positive commandments encourage ritual behaviors (i.e., say the *shema* blessing twice a day, pray three times a day, put a *mezuzah* on door frames). Durkheim’s negative cults prepare individuals to partake in positive cults, and the negative commandments provide access to the positive commandments. For example, the negative commandment against desecrating the Sabbath day paves the way to implementing the positive commandments to sanctify the day, such as making *kiddush*, the blessing over the wine. Durkheim and the rabbis see specific rituals as the way to ensure practitioners stay within the same conceptual framework. They do not see religion as functioning “under grace alone” (Romans 6:14). Beliefs are not sufficient to maintain religious life. Indeed, Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), a leader of European Jewry, explicated that: “It is impossible for ... beliefs to be actualized if no preparation for them is made” (1993[1494], Chapter Seven). An individual must undergo specific actions to *prepare* himself to, “give birth to belief in his soul” (Chapter Seven). If he “does not wish to involve himself with this,” beliefs will never be born (Chapter Seven).

Durkheim and leading traditional rabbis viewed rituals as a systematical way to produce beliefs and emotions. Rituals are the source, “of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as experimental proof of their beliefs” (Durkheim 1995[1912], p. 420). Rituals are additionally used to create negative emotions. Mourning rituals proscribe specific actions—such as weeping, lamenting, or self-mutilation—to help the mourner express the appropriate emotions: “one weeps, not simply because one is sad, but because one is obligated to lament” (p. 400). The Jewish rituals of mourning are similarly structured to reproduce specific feelings. When an individual is informed of the death of a close relative, she performs *k’riah* [rending of the garments] as a sign of grief. The week after the burial, she sits *shivah* [lit. seven] during which she is forbidden from many pleasurable activities, such as bathing, wearing fresh clothing, cutting her hair, and sitting on regular chairs or couches. Durkheim and traditional rabbis held that rituals are used strategically in religion to create certain moods and beliefs. However, these rituals will only be successful in creating the appropriate mood if the individual is performing the same rituals as others in his group. Emotion will peak if rituals are performed collectively.

A hierarchy of holiness: Separating sacred from profane

The crux of religion for Durkheim is the distinction between the sacred and the profane. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he wrote :

Whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes—two opposite genera—that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the worlds *profane* and *sacred* translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane—such is the distinctive trait of religious thought (1995[1912], p. 34).

Durkheim defined sacred and profane as two antagonist forms of life that mutually exclude each other. So intense is the distinction between them that profane and sacred thoughts cannot even be held at the same time (p. 38). All of religious life is the separation between these two states. Durkheim's rigid classification between these two antagonistic forms reflects traditional rabbinic thought.

Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane are mirrored in the tenets of *kodesh* [holy] and *chol* [profane/mundane] in Judaism. In the words of Lindenthal, "there is probably no other religion which possesses as extensive a literature concerned with the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular²¹ in every sphere of human endeavor as Judaism" (1970, p. 46). This distinction between the holy and the profane perhaps becomes most clear in the last moments of Shabbat, the holiest day of the week, when the *Havdala* [lit. separation] blessing is said:

Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who separates between the holy and the profane; between the light and dark; between Israel and the other nations; between the seventh day and the six days of the week. Blessed are You, God, who separates between the holy and the profane.

The category of the sacred includes light, the Jewish people, and Shabbat. The profane includes darkness, other nations, and six days of work. All aspects of Jewish life are separated between these two mutually exclusive categories. The following paragraphs detail how Durkheim and the traditional rabbis similarly apply the categories of sacred and profane in their work.

Sacred and profane time.

Both Durkheim and traditional Judaism distinguish between sacred and profane time. Durkheim describes feast-days on which all activity that "has no religious object" is suspended (1995[1912], p. 311). Work cannot occur on these days because, "work is the preeminent form of profane activity. It has no apparent aim other than meeting the secular needs of life, and it puts us in contact only with ordinary things" (311). In his description of the life of Australians during festival times, Durkheim is mirroring the language of Shabbat. Indeed, the designation of work as something completely antagonistic to sacred time emerges in Exodus 20:7–10:

Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it. Six days may you work and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, your God; you shall perform no labor, neither you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your beast, nor your stranger who is in your cities.

Six days of the week Jews are able to do all of their creative work, *melacha*, but on the seventh day all of these "profane" activities are prohibited in order to make it holy. Cooking, planting, writing, and thirty-six other activities are forbidden on Shabbat. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Shabbat is a "sanctuary in time" (Heschel 1978[1951], p. 17).

Durkheim's specific wording that work is profane and rest is sacred is a clue that he is speaking from a Jewish framework. Work cannot occur on "religious days of rest"

²¹ The word secular is interchanged with profane in some translations of *chol*.

because work is not in the realm of the holy (Durkheim 1995[1912], p. 311). A person cannot be intimate with the divine while, “bearing the marks of his profane life” (p. 311). One might be tempted to connect this language to Christianity because Durkheim would have been exposed to French Catholics who celebrated the Sabbath on Sundays. Yet, Catholics do not have a category of profane activity that is forbidden on these days. Christ freed Christians from Torah laws to “live in the new way of the spirit” (Romans 7:6). Shabbat becomes a spiritual day of rest, not a literal day of physical rest. Ignatius explicitly contrasts the physical rest required for Jews with the spiritual rest for Christians in his letter to Magnesians:

Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness.... But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's [Day, *Dominicam*] as a festival." (Strand 1982, p. 325)

While Christians are encouraged to take Sunday as a rest day, there are no precautions against mixing the profane with the holy. The very laws that kept Jews from heating up their water and leaving a prescribed space on Shabbat are the ones that kept them from profane activity. A law issued by Emperor Constantine in March 321 CE, specifically allows Christians to cultivate their fields on Sundays because it is the best day for planting grain (Ayer 1922[1913], p. 284). Thus, although the Christian Sabbath fits within Durkheim's model, it is clearly not the inspiration for his profane and sacred time framework.

Durkheim further creates a hierarchy of holy days by introducing a category where profane activity can occur. These days are festive, but rank second in their holiness and importance (1995[1912], p. 313). Similarly, rabbinic holidays,²² such as Purim and Hanukkah, are ranked below the biblically mandated holidays. There are some restrictions during these holidays but profane activity is allowed. On Hanukkah, traditional Jews are allowed to work, but they cannot fast or mourn (Karo 2005[1563]: Orach Chaim 670). On Purim, work is allowed but discouraged—many traditional Jews hold that one is only allowed to do work that is connected with celebrating the holiday or doing a *mitzvah* (Karo 2005[1563]: Orach Chaim 696). The intermediate days of longer festivals, such as the days between the start and end of Passover, are called “chol ha-moed” [lit. the profane/mundane (part of) the festival]. Those who follow these traditions will keep some laws of the holiday (e.g., no leavened bread) for the whole week, but are allowed to do some profane activity as these days are less holy than *yom tov* [lit. good day, the full holiday days]. These days are reminiscent of the Christian Sabbath; yet, they are certainly not the inspiration for Durkheim's hierarchy, as the “Lord's Day” can hardly be considered second-rank in its holiness.

Embodying the sacred and profane.

²² Holidays that were not present in the Torah and were introduced by the rabbis to commemorate events in Jewish history

Durkheim extended the distinction between the sacred and the profane beyond inanimate objects and time into the realm of the human body. Durkheim and traditional rabbis show that it is possible for humans to become sacred by distancing themselves from profanity. Durkheim explained how cults distinguish between common and sacred members of their group—in particular, through conversion, circumcision, and food. The way Durkheim applied the framework of sacred and profane to humans mirrors rabbinic discussions on differences between Jews and non-Jews. The Jewish nation considers itself inherently a *goy kodesh* [holy nation] when compared to the other nations (Exodus 19:6). Both sources move from spiritual transformation to bodily alteration, as well as to specific actions to create holiness in the body.

When an individual wants to join the sacred class, she must undergo a process of conversion that gives birth to a new sacred soul. For Durkheim, conversion occurs when a human:

For the first time, he comes out of the purely profane world, where he has passed his childhood, and enters into the circle of sacred things. This change of status is conceived not as a mere development of preexisting seeds but as a transformation *totius substantiae*. At that moment, the young man is said to die, and the existence of the particular person he was, to cease—instantaneously to be replaced by another. He is born again in a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are held to bring about the death and the rebirth, which are taken not merely in a symbolic sense but literally. (1995[1912], p. 37)

This “second birth” allows one to be fully part of the new sacred class and distance oneself from his earlier behavior (p. 315). Likewise, in the Talmud, the rabbis discussed how “one who became a proselyte is like a child newly born” (Tractate Yebamoth 62a, 97b). Converts can be “born into holiness” even if they were not “conceived in holiness” (97b). The convert loses her original ancestry and is reborn with a Jewish—and thus, sacred—soul. Catholic conversion fits within this model, but the language in scripture does not match up. Catholic repentance and baptism wipe the soul clean of previous sins and allows one to achieve salvation (Acts 3:19, 2:38). While the Catholic paradigm and more contemporary approaches of Evangelical Christianity allow for rebirth symbolism, the language uses the trope of sin and salvation—not of a separation between sacred and profane communities. The focus is on belief, not how to manipulate the body and actions.

Individuals can join the sacred class through intentional bodily alteration. Durkheim invoked circumcision as one of the prime avenues for group initiation: “an organ is given sacredness by painful mutilation, for that very act enables it to withstand sacred forces that otherwise it would be unable to confront” (1995[1912], p. 281). Male genital alteration is essential for membership in the Jewish nation. When a baby boy is eight days old he must be circumcised; if he is not, his “soul will be cut off from its people; he has broken My covenant” (Genesis 17:14). The Talmud elaborates to say that men older than thirteen who are uncircumcised are liable to the punishment of *kareth* [spiritual excommunication] (Shabbat 113b). According to traditional Judaism, a man cannot be part of the Jewish people if he is not circumcised.

The fact that Durkheim chooses circumcision as his example for bodily modification and that the way he presents it parallels traditional rabbinic thought is another seemingly marginal detail that should not be ignored. The idea that one must undergo bodily modification to join a community is not inherent to all religions. 1 Corinthians explicitly says, “Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.... Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing” (Corinthians 7:17–19). Judaism is one of the few religions that require bodily alteration as part of membership, and is almost certainly the first culture within which Durkheim was exposed to circumcision. These early experiences likely shaped how Durkheim would later make sense of circumcision in Australia.

The next stage of bodily holiness depends on what individuals put into their body. Durkheim differentiated between the types of food profane and sacred individuals are allowed to eat. A profane person can eat profane vegetables and animals, but is forbidden to eat food with sacred attributes. Sacred individuals are only able to eat sacred food—profane food is forbidden to them (1995[1912], p. 125). There are also certain foods that have additional elements of holiness, which are reserved for only the most sacred members of a clan. For example, the food taxes set-aside for priests are forbidden to other clan members (p. 140).

Durkheim’s complete separation between the food of the sacred and the food of the profane does not map perfectly onto the Jewish framework, because non-Jews are allowed to eat kosher food. Rabbinic law only places dietary restrictions on Jews (Leviticus 11). However, the very concept of classifying foods as profane and sacred—within a hierarchy of holiness—is essential in traditional Jewish law. God commands Jews to follow the dietary laws because, “I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be you holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). Jews must eat holy foods in order to become more holy and emulate god. Catholics are not concerned with these categories as Jesus declared all food clean (Mark 7:19).

Even though all Jews belong to the sacred nation, there still exists a spectrum of holiness. There is a hierarchy of holiness among the laity, the priests’ helpers [*levieim*], and the priests [*kohanim*]. Certain types of sacrifices are only permitted to the kohanim and their descendants (Leviticus 2; Numbers 18:9). One tenth of all crops are given to the levieim, and one tenth of the levieim’s portion is given to the kohanim (Numbers 18:23–32). If a Jew does eat food that is forbidden to her, she becomes impure. Impurity is a category that is distinct from profanity—it is a type of sacred that both Durkheim and the Talmud discuss.

Two types of sacred: pure and impure.

Beyond the distinction between the sacred and the profane, there also exists a distinction between the two types of sacredness: the pure and the impure. “The pure and the impure are not two separate genera but two varieties of the same genus that includes all sacred things” (Durkheim 1995[1912], p. 415). These are transitory states that an object or person can pass between, and that are contagious to others (p. 413). Durkheim uses the examples of menstruating women and dead bodies to describe impure objects that have the ability to spread impurity. Men may not have sexual relations with women who are menstruating and individuals cannot come near dead bodies without risking becoming impure themselves (p. 414).

In Jewish tradition, the existence of this temporary state of impurity dictated all aspects of life in Temple times. The Torah and Talmud contain countless references to

these intricate laws. When a person came in contact with something with *tum'ah* [impurity], he became *tameh* [spiritually impure]. The examples Durkheim presents are also the main examples found in the Torah. One can become *tameh* by menstruating (or having sex with a menstruating woman), coming in contact with a dead body, and eating forbidden foods (Leviticus 18:19; Leviticus 21:1; Leviticus 14). One can return from this state and become *tahor* [ritually pure] again after waiting a certain amount of time, immersing in a ritual bath, or giving certain sacrifices at the Temple. It is unlikely that Durkheim was exposed to another religion that overpowered the influence of rabbinics on his ideas about purity and impurity. In Christianity, there are immoral behaviors and beliefs that taint one's soul and exclude one from the "Kingdom of Heaven;" but these do not create temporary, transferable states of physical impurity (1 Corinthians 6:9). This is an entirely different system of analysis and classification. For Durkheim, the Torah, and the Talmud, sacredness and profanity, purity and impurity are states that emerge from certain actions and bodily states—not belief.

Collective effervescence, communal practice

Defining and analyzing the effects of community is central to Durkheim's five major works. Even in his first work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), Durkheim argued that when individuals come together it creates a "new species, which consequently has its own manner of thinking and feeling" (p. 311). Group emotions are distinct from individual emotions:

In the midst of an assembly that becomes worked up, we become capable of feelings and conduct of which we are incapable when left to our individual resources. When it is dissolved and we are again on our own, we fall back to our ordinary level and can then take the full measure of how far above ourselves we were (Durkheim 1995[1912], p. 212).

Durkheim defined this experience as collective effervescence, a paramount emotional state. Group emotions are so strong that they "can carry us away in spite of ourselves" and even lead individuals to express feelings that later feel foreign, or even horrifying (Durkheim 1966[1895], pp. 4–5). Because group thoughts, feelings, and actions are distinct from the behaviors of isolated members, "sociological theories that begin with the individual will not comprehend what happens in the group" (p. 104). Durkheim went as far as to write in *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1966[1895]), "every time a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may rest assured that the explanation is false" (p. 104).

As such, Durkheim refuted, "the supposition that religion is, as Protestants and secularists alike have argued, something basically individual" (Nisbet 1965, p. 84). Their view, "misunderstands the fundamental conditions of religious life" (p. 84). In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim illuminated the pivotal role of community in religion. Durkheim held that each religion is comprised of a "Church" in which, "members are united because they imagine the sacred world and its relations with the profane world in the same way, and ... translate this common representation into identical practice" (1995[1912], p. 41). When the members come together in

shared ritual, the Church becomes more than just the sum of the individuals present (p. 212). Experiences of collective effervescence provide the basis for lived religion, as collective rituals create mental states in groups that one cannot achieve alone. Communal rituals must be repeated periodically in order to keep individuals invested in the religion and their beliefs strong (p. 212).

Durkheim's emphasis on communal practice mirrors the integral role of community in Jewish law. The *mitzvot* serve to bring individuals together in community, as people are not permitted to deviate from local customs in implementing the laws, due to potential disputes (Tractate Pesahim 50b). In traditional Judaism, in order to have a communal prayer experience, ten adult men need to be present to constitute a *minyan* [quorum]. There are several parts of a service that cannot be performed if a *minyan* is not present. The source for the requirement of *minyan* is recorded in the Talmud. The two explanations are because of the wording in the verse: "And I shall be *sanctified* in the *midst* of the *children of Israel*" (Leviticus 22:32, emphasis added). Babylonian Talmud Tractate Megillah 23b used a verbal analogy to compare this verse to Numbers 16:12 ("Separate yourselves from the *midst* of the *congregation*") and Numbers 14:27 ("How long shall I bear with this evil *congregation* which murmur against me?"). The first reference is to Korah's rebellion, which included ten men, and the second is to the negative report of the spies, which also included ten men; thus the Talmud concludes that "sanctification" should occur in the "midst" of a "congregation" of ten. Another explanation is found in the Jerusalem Talmud Tractate Megillah 4:4—Israel, is another name for Jacob in the Torah, so the "children of Israel" can refer to Jacob's ten sons who descended into Egypt, as the phrases in Genesis 42:5 and Leviticus 22:32 are parallel. Therefore, the verse comes to mean that god is sanctified in groups of ten or more men. A group of ten or more allows for "God's countenance" to rest upon them (Berakhot 6a).

More mystical strands of Jewish thought hold that when ten men are gathered together in prayer a portion of the divine, the *shechinah*, will literally descend to be in their midst (bar Yochai 2002[1110–1400] 7–8). Chasidic streams of traditional Judaism argued that a group of ten contains all of the attributes present in the Jewish people—when they pray it is as if all of Israel is gathered together again as they were during revelation at Mount Sinai (Zalman of Liadi 1998[1848]: 44a). Here, a group of ten certainly represents more than just each individual present. From his experiences living a traditional Jewish lifestyle in his youth and learning with his father, Durkheim would have certainly known the requirements for a *minyan* and more than likely been familiar with these rabbinic discussions. He may have been less knowledgeable of the writings of Chassidic rabbis however, as his father's Lithuanian tradition opposed Chassidut, the Jewish movement that made esoteric Kabbalistic teachings available to the masses. However, even non-Chasidic traditional Jews recognized that humans were made in the image of god (Genesis 1:26) and the soul in the body paralleled the god within the world (Berakhot 10a).

God as society

Durkheim's emphasis on community culminated in his conclusion that, "[g]od and society are one of the same" (1995[1912], p. 208). His earlier work hinted at this

judgement. For example, in *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]) and *The Rules of The Sociological Method* (1966[1985]), Durkheim described society as “fashion[ing]” individuals “in its [own] image”—language paralleling creation in the Bible²³ (Durkheim 2014[1892], p. 292, 1966[1985], p. 6; Genesis 1:27). Within this perspective, “offenses against god” are actually “offenses against society” (Durkheim 2014[1892]), p. 49). Later in *Moral Education* (1961[1925]), society, not god, is the ultimate authority for moral action. Society constrains individuals, “like a jealous and formidable God, the stern lawmaker allowing no transgression of His orders,” and protects individuals, like a “succoring deity to whom the faithful sacrifice themselves with gladness” (p. 92). The inner voice that religion believes is a “reflection of divinity,” is actually a “reflection of the collectivity” (pp. 104–105).

The proclamation that society is god is highly problematic in a Jewish framework. In the words of Lindenthal (1970), this is, “an absolute negation of Jewish precepts which strictly forbid the worship of any entity physical or social outside of a true living God” (p. 45). Yet, it is not difficult to see how this idea can develop if one is using a rabbinic thought-model without the need to adhere to traditional Jewish principles. It is not a far intellectual leap to move from the idea that the godly presence is represented in a group of ten, to the conclusion that a group of ten is god itself. Similarly, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]), Durkheim noted that souls are “a bit of divine substance” and “a spark of the divine,” a sentiment that mirrors a Jewish mystical view that souls contain divine sparks (p. 256). Karen Fields, in her introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]), recognized this parallel and quoted Adin Steinsaltz, a modern rabbinic scholar and kabbalist: “the soul of man, in its depths, may be considered part of God.... [W]e speak only of only an aspect of God, or of the divine spark, as constituting the essence of the inner life of man” (Fields 1995, p. xxxi, citing Steinsaltz 1980, pp.51–52). If each individual contains a piece of the divine, it is not a far conceptual leap to see a group as a representation of god. Although this conclusion would be an enormous and impermissible leap in traditional Judaism—spanning the difference between tradition and heresy—it is logical if one is not confined to conceptual boundaries of orthodoxy.

According to Edward Evans-Pritchard (1981), it was Durkheim—not the savage—who made society into a god. His “militant atheist” tendencies, his role as a “propagandist of unbelief,” lead him to create a “sociological metaphysic,” rather than a divine one (p. 157). Durkheim believed it was his task to reveal the reality that society, not religion or god, was what shaped morality (1961[1925]), p. 90). Ironically, this sociological metaphysics may have been sparked from a place of religious literacy. Durkheim’s ideas on religion were not a “secularized version of Jewish thought”; rather, they were innovative ideas generated through a traditional Jewish epistemic culture (Strenski 1997, p. 1).

Knowledge of society, knowledge of god

Durkheim concluded in *Moral Education* (1961[1925]) that the third element of morality is the ability to understand the rules that guide social behavior. Morality is

²³ “He created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him” (Genesis 1:27).

more than just behaving according to social guidelines—it requires that individuals obtain “as clear and complete an awareness as possible of the reasons for our conduct” (Durkheim (1961[1925]), p.121). A deep understanding of *why* humans must restrict their behavior will allow individuals to freely accept limitations (p. 116). They will conform because they “deem it good and have no better alternative” (p. 115). Durkheim argued that this active conformity is not a, “passive resignation” but an “enlightened allegiance” (p. 115). Rules and limits are, “no longer a humiliation and a bondage”—they are the path to freedom (p. 118). Durkheim believed that knowledge was the only means for liberation. Thus, teachers must ground moral education in explanations, not indoctrination; a child who does not understand the rules will be condemned to, “an incomplete and inferior morality” (p. 121).

Durkheim posited a moral system based on science and reason was incompatible with religious morality. Science required observable data and god is not directly observable; god is beyond the grasp of reason. An emphasis on understanding moral laws may have distanced Durkheim’s system from many religious traditions, but this third element of morality actually draws his moral framework closer to Jewish tradition. Jews are commanded to study the *mitzvot*. The *shema* blessings, recited twice a day in traditional Jewish households, commands: “You shall teach them [the laws] thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:5–9). *Mitzvot* should be studied ceaselessly and passed on to descendants. Isaac Heinemann wrote in *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought from the Bible to the Renaissance* (2008[1953]), that the: “mitzvot are the *teachers and educators* of the Jewish people” (p. 170).

Traditional rabbis, many of whom were also major Jewish philosophers—such as Judah Halevi, Maimonides, Levi Ben Gersonides,²⁴ Joseph Albo,²⁵ and Isaac Abravanel—believed that because *mitzvot* are divine law, studying them could lead to a better understanding of god (p. 170). Humans’ ability to reason provides them with the opportunity to “discriminate between proper and improper actions” (Maimonides 1912[1135–1204], p. 43). Understanding laws, such those in Tractate Pe’ah²⁶ about gifts to the poor, allows one to act righteously and start to comprehend the kindness of god (Heinemann 2008[1953], p. 4). Knowledge of god will lead one to lead a righteous life (Proverbs 3:6). Maimonides argued that even knowledge of secular subjects, such as mathematics: “should be studied for the purpose of sharpening the mind, and training the mental faculties by scientific investigations, so that man may acquire intellectual ability to distinguish demonstrative proofs from others, whereby he will be enabled to comprehend the essence of God” (p. 71). Traditional Judaism viewed Maimonides, and other influential rabbis who engaged with secular wisdom, as still holding traditional law as the path towards moral enlightenment. Their situations were similar to that of Rabban Gamliel, a leading authority of the ancient Jewish court, who was permitted to learn Greek Wisdom because it helped the community and allowed him to calculate the lunar calendar (Sotah 49b; Rosh Hashana 25a). Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder and first rebbe of Chabad Chassidut, clarified in *Likutei Amarim* (2014[1795])

²⁴ Lived 1288–1344 in France.

²⁵ Lived 1380–1444 in Spain.

²⁶ Literally, “corners.” The second tractate in Sedar Zeraim in the Babylonian Talmud.

that Maimonides and Nachmanides engaged with secular wisdom only to understand and serve god better (Chapter 8). In this stream of thought, engaging in secular and religious studies is a religious pursuit.

Many traditional rabbis concluded that the highest level of practice is when individuals desire forbidden things (i.e., milk with meat, unlawful marriages), but knowledge of the law alone restrains them (Maimonides 1912[1135–1204], p. 77). This “knowledge of law” is not always knowledge of the reason behind the law, but rather knowledge that the law exists and is divine will. Medieval Jewish rabbi philosophers, including Abraham Ibn Daud,²⁷ Maimonides, Albo, and Abravanel lauded obedience even to the supra-rational Jewish laws [*chukkim*], such as prohibitions against eating pig or mixing wool and linen, which have no clear logic (Heinemann 2008[1953], p. 167; *Sifra* 1546 on Leviticus 18:4; Yoma 67b). Heinemann (2008[1952]) clarified that, for these rabbis, obedience without knowing the rationality behind the law did not contradict the belief that a person should act out of autonomy and understanding:

On the contrary, any commander wants captains who understand his intentions, so that they can carry out his orders in accord with their proper meaning and purpose.... The educational value of the mitzvot will be diminished if we fulfill them only to discharge our obligation and earn our future reward; it will be enhanced to the extent that the intentions of the Torah, both explicit and hidden, will find an echo in our souls. (p. 4)

Thus, even *chukkim* should be studied alongside *mispatim* [rational laws] in order to come to a deeper understanding of the laws and thus god. Durkheim’s idea that knowledge of the law allows one to conform actively in an “enlightened allegiance” echoes throughout these texts (1961[1925], p. 121). Acting according to one’s obligation out of reason, not spontaneity or emotion, is paramount practice. The main divergence between Durkheim’s and these rabbis’ approach to knowledge is that Durkheim required study for the sole purpose of understanding the laws and thus society, while the rabbis required studying as an intermediary step to understanding god. However, within Durkheim’s worldview that god is society, these divergences converge.

Models of discourse

Beyond similarities in concepts and classifications, Durkheim’s overall argumentative style mirrors Talmudic discourse. Durkheim and the Babylonian Talmud employ multiple rhetorical techniques when building arguments and there are several parallels in their styles. In this section, I focus on two major similarities: (1) investigating what a word means in a particular context; and (2) presenting an incorrect argument (B) in order to disprove it and introduce argument (A). I refer to this argument style as B to A reasoning.

Durkheim carefully defined key terms at the beginning of each book. He argued that definitions are “the first and most indispensable condition of all proofs and

²⁷ Lived 1110–1180 in Spain.

verifications” (1966[1895], p. 34). Before scholars start analysis, they must meticulously define their phenomenon and clarify why their selected definition is appropriate for the question at hand. For example, in the first chapter of *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), Durkheim explained that he was using the word *function* as it corresponds to the relationship between a “life movement” and an organism’s need (e.g., “digestion fulfils *the function* of controlling the absorption into the organism” and “respiration fulfils *the function* of introducing into animal tissues the gases necessary for sustaining life” (2014[1892]) p. 11, emphasis added). Once Durkheim adequately defined function, he could apply it to his research question: “Thus, to ask what is *the function* of the division of labour is to investigate the need which it corresponds” (p. 11). Any other definition of function or word (such as aim, goal, purpose) would be “inexact or ambiguous” for his purpose (p. 11).

Similarly, Durkheim’s first sentence of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]) was: “[i]n order to identify the simple and most primitive religion that observation can make known to us, we must first define what is understood as religion” (p. 21). Without definitions, concepts become “too ambiguous to permit discussion” (Durkheim 1966[1895], p. 124). One word inadequately defined will lead to mistakes; for example, Herbert Spencer could have prevented errors in his analysis by simply defining monogamy (Durkheim 1966[1895], p. 42). Even words that are commonly used and well-known need to be defined because, “the words of everyday language, like the concepts they express, are always susceptible of more than one meaning, and the scholars employing them in their accepted use without further definition would risk serious misunderstanding” (p. 41). Thus, Durkheim’s main task was not just systematically defining terms—his goal was to determine what specific definition of a word was appropriate to answer his research questions.

When Durkheim built his arguments about the proper definition of a term or the properties of a phenomenon, he often employed B to A reasoning. He meticulously went through existing definitions and explanations of his phenomenon (the “B”)—whether it was the division of labor, suicide, morality, or religion—proved them wrong and then introduced his innovative argument (the “A”). For example, in *Suicide* (1951[1897]), Durkheim detailed existing theories of suicide (i.e., psychopathic states, race, hereditary, cosmic factors, imitation), explained the reasoning behind each theory and proved them wrong, concluding that, “exactly the reverse is true” (p. 266). Likewise, when exploring how organic solidarity contributes to social cohesiveness, Durkheim stated, “[i]t may be that the bonds resulting from the division of labor, although more numerous are weaker than the rest, and that the greater strength of the latter makes up for their numerical inferiority. But the opposite is true” (Durkheim 2014[1892]), p. 102). He then delved into the correct answer: “the measure of the relative strength of the two social ties is the different ease with which they may be broken” and bonds are easier to break in mechanical societies (p. 102). Throughout his works, Durkheim repeated the same technique: asking if it is appropriate to believe the existing theory, and then positing that “such an explanation explains nothing” or that the opposite is true (Durkheim 2014[1892], p. 33). He consistently built up arguments to break them down.

The Babylonian Talmud employs several argumentative styles in order to explore laws and religious and ethical ideas (Jacobs 1984, p. 1; Neusner 1997, p. 74). Louis Jacobs argued that these styles would be clear to students of the Talmud, as debates

“are always expressed in the same stereotyped formulae” (p. 1). In order to reveal how closely Durkheim’s two models of discourse map on to Talmudic reasoning, it is useful to share one longer Talmud passage [*sugya*] in which the rabbis were attempting to define the word “*or*” in a particular context. Talmudic methodologies often deal with the exact definition of words (Duabe 1949, p. 241; Jacobs 1984, p. 2; Strack 1996[1991], p. 16). Daube described this methodology as the “scrupulous philological analysis” of Jewish scripture, with “each word and sentence being inspected with a view to establishing its exact sense and grammatical status” (Daube 1949, p. 241). Precision is necessary because the language in the Torah is “enchanted” as it was the “principal medium of divine self-manifestation” (Neusner 1997, p. 122).

In this particular *sugya*, the exact definition of *or* was critical because it would determine the time that Jews should search their home for bread the day before Passover, the holiday that forbids Jews to have leavened bread in their possession. Given the terse manner in which the Talmud was written, Rabbi Steinshalz’s translation has the original text in bold and included further descriptions of the phrases to make the Talmud accessible to non-experts. In this passage, Tractate Pesachim 2a, the Gemara was responding to a Mishna that stated, “On the *or* of the fourteenth of the month of Nisan, one searches for leavened bread in his home by candlelight.” The Gemara responded as follows:

The Gemara asks: **What is** the meaning of the term *or*, translated as: The evening of? The Gemara provides two answers. **Rav Huna said:** It means **light**, and **Rav Yehuda said:** In this context, it means **evening**.... To clarify the meaning of the word *or*, the Gemara analyzes biblical verses and rabbinic statements. The Gemara **raises an objection** from a verse: “**As soon as the morning was *or*, the men were sent away**, they and their donkeys” (Genesis 44:3). **Apparently, *or* is day**. The Gemara rejects this contention....

... The Gemara **raises an objection:** “Praise Him, sun and moon; **praise Him, all the stars of *or***” (Psalms 148:3). **Apparently, *or* is the evening**, as the stars of light appear at night. The Gemara rejects this contention....

The Gemara continued to define and reject definitions in this manner for pages until it concluded that *or* means the evening before day in this specific context.

The *suga* above demonstrates a common pattern in the Talmud—it would (1) present an ambiguous term; (2) identify places in scripture where the same term is used; (3) attempt to apply the definition of the word in other locations to this context; (4) explain why that definition is inadequate for this context, and repeat steps (2) and (3) until it finally settled on a definition or left the discussion unresolved. Another example is found in Tractate Chulin 104a, which quoted a Mishna in which the first speaker said one who vows against vegetables may eat gourds, but Rabbi Akiva forbids eating gourds. The Gemara originally made the argument against Rabbi Akiva, but then reversed the basis of its argument to support Rabbi Akiva. The Talmud is abundant with examples of challenging and flipping arguments in B to A style reasoning. It often began with one opinion and switched to another. Jacobs (1984) described this style as not being “done haphazardly but with consummate skill”:

The argument is made to proceed step by step leading, with dramatic effect, to a climax. The presentation of the material in the form of question and answer, argument and counter-argument, affirmation and refutation, suggestion and rejection, all produce a vivid effect, as if the student is present while the debates are taking place and encourage his own participation. (p. 211)

The Talmud was structured in a way to build up arguments (p. 210). Information may have been intentionally withheld so it could be given at the precise time to tie the argument together, and even tangential discussions played a role (p. 203). Jacob Neusner recognized this indirect, and sometimes meandering, style as the “dialectical argument” of the Talmud: “the movement of thought through contentious challenge and passionate response, initiative and counterplay” that allowed the sages to encompass the broadest and most comprehensive range of rules and cases (1997, pp. 74, 93).

Durkheim’s B to A reasoning differs from Talmudic arguments in one critical way: Durkheim was always looking for one law to explain phenomena—he wanted to present a clear, singular answer to his research question. Several scholars have classified Durkheim’s distinctive B to A argument style as *petitio principii* (“begging the question” or “assuming the initial point”), a logical fallacy in which the author builds an argument based on the assumption that the conclusion is true, instead of supporting the conclusion (Douglas 1967, p. 30; Needham 1967, p. xv; Stanner 1967, pp. 237–240; Lukes 1973, p. 31 citing Lévi-Strauss 1963, p. 102). Similarly, they noticed his tendency to use “argument by elimination”—he systematically rejected alternative explanations of phenomena until only his explanations remained (Alpert 1939, pp. 87–88; Lukes 1973, p. 31).

On the other hand, the Talmud accepted that there were multiple points of view and did not always present a single answer. For example, the conflicting opinions of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai were both considered valid. Although the Talmud typically sided with *Beit Hillel* (the School of Hillel), this was not because *Beit Shammai* (the School of Shammai) was incorrect. On the contrary, sixteenth-century kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria argued that both schools were valid on a conceptual level, but their rulings were relevant to dissimilar contexts. *Beit Hillel*’s rulings were pragmatic for the present world, but *Beit Shammai*’s often stricter interpretations would reign in the messianic era (Luria 2015[1534–1572], Chapter 34:2). Mishnah Avot 5:17 referred to their arguments as “controversy for the sake of Heaven” and Bava Mezia 86a told the story of similar debates taking place in the heavenly academy, where sages could even disagree with god. In other cases in the Babylonian Talmud, arguments were not resolved and rabbis would declare *teyku* [the dilemma stands unresolved], which occurred over 300 times in the text (Jacobs 1981, p. 13).²⁸ Furthermore, the Talmud would present scenarios that could never happen in the real world—such as Chullin 70a in which a weasel enters into a cow’s womb, swallows the fetus, and then the fetus emerges alive from its stomach—to emphasize the merit of study for its own sake. As opposed to Durkheim’s B to A reasoning, the Talmud was compiled in a way that allowed for exploration, ambiguity, and ways to apply the law in dissimilar times. Later rabbis took Talmudic material and turned it into a code of law with accepted and unaccepted interpretations.

²⁸ See Louis Jacobs, *Teyku: The Unsolved Problem in the Babylonian Talmud* (1981), for a description of all of the cases.

Conclusions

Although Durkheim was far from a devout Jew when he was writing *The Division of Labor in Society* (2014[1892]), *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1966[1895]), *Suicide* (1951[1897]), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]), and *Moral Education* (1961[1925]), he still adopted a traditional rabbinic thought-model. Whether or not he was aware of the influence of his traditional Jewish background²⁹ in his writing, the style of rabbinic Judaism is bubbling below the surface in many of his major works. One could argue that I am able to find such clear connections of Durkheim's description of law, morality, community, and religion with rabbinic arguments because his definition is so comprehensive, but I find it unlikely that the way his language so closely tracks the language in traditional Jewish texts could be coincidental. For example, while other religions may share many of the classifications Durkheim outlines in his definition of religion, his initial exposure to these ideas would have been in a traditional Jewish context and this is reflected in the specific terminology he employed throughout his work. The excerpts from Christian scripture emphasize that the overlap between Durkheim and rabbinic literature should not be taken for granted—this degree of similarity is not present when comparing Durkheim to other religious doctrines. Indeed, in 1914, Durkheim had to assure a Catholic organization³⁰ that his “sociology of religion was not a threat to them” (Goldberg 2017, p. 27). Even when Durkheim espouses views that completely negate the fundamental pillars of Judaism (such as the idea that god is society), he develops the idea in Talmudic style. Although there may be other sources of influence on why Durkheim's analysis contains these classifications, hierarchies, examples, and rhetorical styles, the traditional Jewish influence should not be neglected.

Rereading Durkheim from a rabbinic perspective reveals that sociologists can gain new perspectives on influential thinkers when employing conceptual frameworks from the sociology of knowledge. Scholars' questions, analyses, and conclusions emerge from their respective epistemic cultures (Centina 2007), *habitus* (Bourdieu 2013[1979]), personal coefficients (Polyani 1958), and thought-models (Mannheim 1997[1936]). Although each of these models within sociology of knowledge has its own nuances and features, they provide insight into a general framework that pays attention to how socialization may lead to distinct and relatively enduring modes of thinking. Investigating influences on thinkers during their formative years has the potential to provide a glimpse into the “black box[es] of scientific inquiry” that inspired their innovative work (Centina 2007, p. 363). For simplicity, I use the term “thought-model” to capture this framework.

Not all thought-models will be as unified as Durkheim's traditional rabbinic thought-model, however. I speculate that the extent to which a particular thought-model can be mapped onto a thinker's work will depend on the nature of the communities of influence and the corresponding intensity of socialization. As children are socialized into communities, they learn and internalize the group's norms, beliefs, values, and bodily practices that help construct the communities' meta-narratives

²⁹ As mentioned earlier in this article, Durkheim's family belonged to a stream of rabbinic Judaism that held its ultimate authority to the Babylonian Talmud, as both the Written and Oral Torah were considered part of divine revelation at Mount Sinai. This stream of Judaism continues to hold the status of orthodoxy, and is called normative, classical, or traditional Judaism (Neusner 1994, p. 5).

³⁰ Union des Libres Penseurs et de Libres Croyants pour la Culture Morale.

(Berger 1990). Social control over bodily rituals and beliefs will vary from a loose set of guidelines to near total-control (Davidman 2015). Within stricter enclave groups, more stringent rituals and systems of thought are employed to sustain the communities' particular meta-narratives (Berger 1990; Davidman 2015). Given that these community-based practices create the foundation for embodied dispositions (*habitus*) in children that they will carry through their lives, the more distinct and intense the practices, the more deeply imprinted the dispositions (Bourdieu 2013[1979]). Durkheim spent his formative years in a tight-knit, rigid, and insular community that held the stringencies of traditional rabbinic Judaism; as such, the thinking dispositions he learned during that time were particularly domineering and enduring. A childhood spent in a more diverse and open environment may result in less enduring imprints on thinking and allow for a more malleable set of thinking dispositions. The more an environment is all-encompassing, the deeper and more distinct the imprint on thinking will be (Goffman 1961; Davies 1989; Berger 1990; Davidman 2015).

Individuals amass multiple influences on their thinking throughout their lives—likely adding those that “feel right” to their repertoire of thinking strategies; thus, the ability to trace certain patterns of thought back to their sources is not limited to only childhood influences. Those who have intense periods of interaction in closed groups during any period of their lives—particularly in settings that aim to hold authority over thought and bodily movements such as in the military, prison, or new religious groups—will have lasting marks from the period on their thinking dispositions (Goffman 1961; Davies 1989; Berger 1990; Davidman 2015; Foucault 2012[1977]). Scholars argue that minds become docile to institutional domination as minute movements are controlled, objects take on new affordances, and language becomes role-specific (Goffman 1961; Voloshinov 1973; Kroskrity 2000; Harding 2001; Keane 2003; Leimer 2008; Berger and Luckmann 2011[1966]; Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2014; Foucault 2012[1977]). Overtime new behaviors require less deliberate concentration and membership is solidified (Mauss 1936; Tavori and Winchester 2012; Patterson 2014). In the case of the military, this secondary socialization results in recruits' surrender of civilian identities and embodiment of military values (Stouffer 1949; Kellett 1982; Dyer 2002; Berger and Luckman 2011[1966]; Centeno and Enriquez 2016). The earlier these experiences occur, in one's life the more influential they will be in the formation of coherent thought-models.

For now, these criteria for the endurance and dominance of certain thought-models are speculative. Future scholarship on the thought-models of other leading sociological thinkers is required to demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of this approach. The ability to identify the cultures that facilitated past and current sociologists in conceiving innovative ideas opens the door for deeper understandings and new perspectives on their work, as well as developments in social theory. A conceptual framework that illuminates how thinkers' socializations shape their scholarship also has the potential to enhance author reflexivity during their own scientific processes.

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