

What is the purpose of a university journal of social sciences? From L'Année Sociologique to the predators of symbolic power

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When we open any issue of a journal, whether digital or printed, we may or may not be interested in the topics presented, and we may evaluate the relative importance of its articles. However, we rarely pause to consider the immense labor behind its creation—the work that made its publication possible. For that issue to have reached our hands, an enormous collective effort was required, particularly by the editorial team, but also by the reviewers and the technical staff responsible for designing and disseminating it. As readers, we are the final—though not necessarily the least important—link in the chain.

In the final decades of the 19th century, the first major sociology journals emerged in Europe and the United States. In 1895, Albion Small founded one of the most significant historical sociology journals in Chicago, the *American Journal of Sociology*. However, it was not until 1936 that the American Sociological Association founded, again in the U.S., at Columbia University in New York, the *American Sociological Review*. In 1888, in Tübingen, Germany, Max Weber, Edgar Jaffé, Werner Sombart, and other members of the German Sociological Association founded *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, where Weber himself published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1904 and 1905. The journal ceased publication in 1933 when Hitler came to power. In Spain, Adolfo Posada compiled a list of key journals where early sociological studies were published: *La Nueva Ciencia Jurídica* (Anthropology and Sociology), *Revista de Derecho y Sociología* (founded by Posada himself), *La España Moderna*, *Revista de Legislación y Jurisprudencia*, *Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, *Revista Contemporánea*, *Revista Internacional*, and *Revista Blanca*, the latter closely

associated with libertarian movements. For the most part, these publications disappeared quickly, reflecting the considerable challenges sociology faced in its attempts to establish itself as a science under the dominant conservative ideology of the time.

One of the first major sociology journals founded in France during the nineteenth century was *L'Année Sociologique*, under the editorship of by Émile Durkheim, which was first published in 1898. It emerged from a proposal made by Célestin Bouglé to Durkheim in 1896. The following year, Durkheim himself negotiated with the publisher Félix Alcan for the journal to be published annually in Paris, gradually adding new names to the editorial team. Among the contributors, Durkheim's young nephew, Marcel Mauss, stood out for his enthusiasm, idealism, socialism, and cooperative spirit. He was instrumental in attracting other young scholars to the journal, such as Paul Fauconnet, Henri Hubert, and Albert Milhaud. A pivotal moment for the journal occurred in June 1897 when Durkheim's book *Suicide*, published by Alcan, generated significant controversy.

For its relevance and expressiveness, we include here our translation of Émile Durkheim's letter to his nephew Marcel Mauss, written at a time when Durkheim was on the verge of abandoning the collective project of founding a sociology journal—when a 'growth crisis' had become apparent, nearly a year before the first issue was published. This correspondence is included in the book *Émile Durkheim, Lettres à Marcel Mauss* (pp. 66-70), edited by Philippe Besnard and Marcel Fournier, and published by Puf, 1998.

LETTER FROM ÉMILE DURKHEIM TO HIS NEPHEW MARCEL MAUSS

Monday morning, June 1897

My dear Marcel,

Please do not be upset by what I am about to say, but I feel an overwhelming need to express my frustration. Your list, the one I received recently, has caused me one of those unbearable mornings. Let me explain why.

I am sure you cannot fully comprehend the distress *L'Année Sociologique* has caused me. It has been a tremendous source of anguish. That said, I do feel somewhat better now. Although several books are still missing, their number is relatively small. I have begun to glimpse what our publication could become; each contributor has completed their section. Yet yours is still missing—yours, the one I trusted most, because I thought I wouldn't need to worry about it at all. And amidst all of this, your list arrives, which has become, for me, a true cause of despair. I am shocked to see that you have no idea of the sheer volume of work involved, and instead of helping me resolve these difficulties, you have made them even worse, exacerbating them. Just when I thought I had overcome the obstacles, I found myself, for a brief moment, seriously contemplating abandoning the project altogether.

Don't you think you could handle this with a bit more sense, considering that such a list is simply unreasonable? I have compiled an inventory of the books you have flagged as important, and combining both lists, I find over twenty-five books—and still missing are works on Assyria, Egypt, primitive peoples, folklore! In total, we're talking about forty volumes. One does not need to be a genius to realize that a single person cannot possibly study and analyze such an immense quantity of works in three or four months, let alone a year. Furthermore, it would take almost an entire book just to compile a proper review of such a vast body of literature.

From this, it follows that if you cannot find any alternative course of action, there is nothing more to be done, and it would be simpler to acknowledge that our project, at least as far as you are concerned, is unfeasible. If the only alternative is to address everything (i.e., only what you consider to be important), or nothing at all, then it is better that we abandon the project completely. Why didn't you make this clear sooner?

Nevertheless, I believe there is still much to be done. If you reflect on it and 'get your act together', as they say nowadays, I am confident you will come to realize that this endeavor is both necessary and feasible. But for this to happen, it must start with you. It is difficult to convey all of this in a letter, but I will try my best.

Let us assume that religious sociology truly exists. In that case, we would not need to account for every work you've mentioned. Does that not seem reasonable? Studies on the Church in the Roman Empire before the year 170, or on St. Paul's sin, should not necessarily be presented as works of sociology. This religious sociology is still in its infancy, and we cannot invent it, but we can certainly contribute to its emergence and help advance it in the following manner: A science only exists when there are problems that need to be addressed. Currently, there are many problems emerging from the existing works in the field of religious sociology and from historical studies that closely approximate it. Presenting these problems to sociologists is already a valuable service.

We can also do more. By grouping works that advance these issues, clarifying them, and presenting them through an analysis that brings out the essentials, we can begin to shape the body of religious sociology that must be created. Even the simple juxtaposition of works would already be instructive. Finally, the third service—the 'review', as you call it—could be far from passive; while reviewing each book individually, it could also clarify the connections between related works, thus bringing us even closer to the development of religious sociology. From all this, it follows that the primary selection we must make depends on the relationship between the published works and the problems we aim to address. Hence, it is the works that engage most directly with the issues that should form the core of our project.

There is nothing definitive in what I've said so far. In my view, the essential points are clear, but there is still much to consider. These groupings of related works do not exclude general works that must not go unnoticed if they hold genuine importance, as well as certain historical studies that, by their scope or unique characteristics, warrant the attention of sociologists so that they may be used in their research. This is a matter of categorization. In sum, we could compile a complete bibliography with the idea that those addressing different questions or exploring different areas will benefit from it. However, this bibliography and the purely historical works should occupy only a limited space, particularly in the first year.

Beyond the considerations above, understand that only in this way will we be able to truly engage the public. Otherwise, sociologists will dismiss the project, claiming it has no relevance to their work. Gradually, things will change, but given their indifference and ignorance, achieving what I've outlined will already be a significant accomplishment.

Now, turning to the application of this approach to law, what will this section consist of?

- An analysis of Steinmetz and Kohler on punishment.
- Analyses by Grosse, Kohler, and Leist on the family.
- A selection of works on primitive organization among different peoples in Germania (Maurer), Italy (Battaglia), Egypt (Révillout), and the Incas (Cunow), along with Kovalewski's pamphlet. This seems to me the most important focus.

And well, wouldn't it be possible to do the same for religion? You know the issues better than I do. Here are the main categories I envision:

- Generalities.
- Sacrifice.
- Negative cults.
- Prayer.
- Myths.
- Funerary rites.
- Domestic cults.
- Collective works on primitive cults.
- Collective works on primitive beliefs.

It seems to me that during the first year, we should avoid overemphasizing studies, even important ones, on particular religions. This will be done gradually, through the group, but also as you gain a clearer understanding of how the different types of religions were formed. Needless to say, it is not necessary nor feasible for all these categories to appear in every issue of *L'Année Sociologique*. This will depend on the works published. If we apply this principle to the list, you sent me, here is what I find:

- Generalities: Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion* (Methuen). Sabatier [*Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion Based on Psychology and History*, 1902]. Koch, *Psychologie der Religionswissenschaft*. Crozier, *History of Intellectual Development*. Following that, if you agree, I would include general histories: [Cornelius Petrus] Tiele [*Outlines of the History of Religion to the Spread of Universal Religions*, 1876; *Elements of the Science of Religion*, 1897-99], Chantepie [de la Saussaye, *Manual of the Science of Religion*, 1891]. Only what is necessary.
- Beliefs, rites related to the dead. Domestic cults: Caland, *Die Altindischen Toten und Bestattungsgebräuche*. Kaufmann, *Die Jenseitshoffnungen der Griechen und Römer*. Goldziher, cited article [*Mythology among the Hebrews*, 1877]. Percy Gardner, *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas*. Dietrich, *Die Grabschrift*. De Marchi, *Il culto privato di Roma Antica*. The indicated article on German archaeological institutions.
- On prayer, if you consider there is something of interest: Simpson, *The Buddhist Praying Wheel*. Magani, *L'Antica Liturgia Romana*.
- Primitive religions in general: Le Crooke. Philpot, *The Sacred Tree*. And anything else you think is appropriate.

So far, this accounts for twelve or thirteen volumes. Once your list is complete, we will make progress. Wouldn't twenty volumes suffice?

Please, I urge you, once you receive this letter, if we agree to this approach, write to reassure me. I am quite concerned. You must understand what is essential, what is feasible, and proceed accordingly. Do not get bogged down in minutiae or unnecessary details. Tell yourself that this task is necessary, that it will improve over time, and do not abandon what is achievable to pursue what is unattainable. So, please write to me immediately regarding the core issue. Then, begin working to complete the list I have sent you based on the same principle, even to correct it. Please send me a list with full titles, as many are unclear due to your handwriting. If you could send it by Friday morning, I would still have enough time to address the necessary tasks the same day.

I embrace you warmly,

Émile Durkheim

P.S. Please respond promptly before you leave Épinal.

By the end of December 1897, the manuscript for the first issue of the journal had been sent, and after proofreading, it was printed by the end of February 1898. The issue consisted of approximately one thousand pages. Durkheim wrote the preface and consulted with Marcel Mauss, Bouglé, and Simiand. *L'Année Sociologique* thus embarked on a successful journey, rooted in effort, collective work in a cooperative framework, and, ultimately, a deeply altruistic and moral sense of solidarity. In Durkheim's time, sociology was taking its first steps toward consolidation as a new social science. Years later, Durkheim himself noted that the primary aim of the journal was not only to socialize the research team in sociological inquiry but also to highlight the complexity and richness of social reality, distancing itself from the prevailing ideology. As Marcel Fournier pointed out, the publication of *L'Année Sociologique* was the result of a collective effort that helped

establish sociology as a new scientific discipline. Durkheim and his school were not unique. Consider, for example, the progressive path taken by the School in the Faculty of Law at the University of Oviedo, around the same time, as well as the broader expansion of the university.

However, times have changed. We now live in a transitional period, marked by crisis, where not all academic practices should be accepted. One example is the emergence of a citations 'black market', or the troubling rise of excessively prolific authorship—a phenomenon connected to the rapid growth of publications in MDPI journals, *Frontiers*, and other emerging publishers. Professor Juan Manuel Corchado, who remains Rector of the historic University of Salamanca, has been associated with these practices and others involving fraudulent citations, which have led to retractions by publishers such as Springer. His case, one of the most notorious,

has shocked academic campuses worldwide, unfairly tarnishing the reputation of the rigorous and creative scientists in our universities and research labs.

It is also unacceptable that the transformative agreements with large publishers have led to universities paying to publish and read scientific material—often exorbitant sums. CRUE and CSIC paid over 170 million to Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, and the American Chemical Society to provide the public university and research community access to the contents of the journals published by these companies between 2021-2024, as well as covering the additional costs for our community to publish research in open-access format, making it available to all, not just subscribers, all under the guise of impact.

Instead of a strong commitment to a culture of open science, as outlined in the National Open Science Strategy (ENCA) 2023-2027, which promotes publishing in open and free journals and repositories where articles, data, and research resources are accessible to foster scientific progress, CRUE is negotiating a less costly deal with these publishers following the expiration of the previous agreements. In this growing dependency on the lucrative

publishing business, our universities will once again choose the easy path—purchasing access and impact for their publications. Renewing these agreements not only means a questionable use of public funds but also aligns with practices entirely unrelated to the transformative agreements they are meant to foster.

The flip side of these institutional practices is found in what are known as 'predatory journals'. The activities of these journals and the editorial groups behind them are not entirely disconnected from the discourses and practices fostered by these agreements. Rather, they feed them off, directly or indirectly. The only difference, if anything, is that they make the costs of publication explicit, depending on the type of journal and its position in the impact rankings of different academic fields. It is no surprise that, if our authorities promote the seemingly benevolent practice of supporting their academic and research communities in accessing leading journals and publishing in high-impact journals, the market will find ethically questionable opportunities to exploit and profit from this demand for impact and knowledge transfer—often driven by evaluation agencies and university rankings.