

AN ASPECT OF BOUGLÉ'S SOCIOLOGISM.<sup>1</sup>

Through the work of Dumont and Pocock, Bouglé's contribution to Indian sociology is well known. Pocock's recent English version of the "Essais sur le Régime des Castes" will make this aspect of his work completely accessible. This paper is an attempt to present one aspect of Bouglé's thought. This aspect might loosely be called his theory of cognition, though the term is inadequate.

Bouglé's philosophic position is implied in his own remark, "La science est avant tout un perfectionnement du langage, lui-même produit d'une élaboration collective". (1929: 190). He was an academic and an eclectic. He chose not to present his thought in a rigid, systematic form. In such circumstances, it would be foolish to pretend to give anything better than one interpretation out of the many possible.

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For Bouglé, sociology was not a synthesis of all the branches of the study of society, but was a study of "forms". He uses the word in a number of ways. Firstly, the forms can be physical (the spatial distribution of the members of a society, for example). Secondly they can be ideological (a classification, for example). Thirdly, Bouglé speaks of "the forms of the mind", meaning a structure which actively forms ideas. In general, he seeks to provide an account of the "formation of ideas", and so is trying to practise the "formal psychology" which Durkheim advocated. In doing this, he in fact does synthesise all the branches of the study of society, but in a way which is not quite like that of Durkheim or Mauss.

Though he diverged a little from the "party line" of the *Année Sociologue*, this did not prevent him from taking a place at the spearhead of the attack. He contributed reviews to every number of the *Année* from its inception till his death in 1940, and he produced the first full length book to be sponsored by the *Année* (1908 b). Such persistence came from the ambitions he had for sociology: sociology might be the base for a well-founded sociologism, which was "a philosophical effort to crown the specialist, objective and comparative studies ... with an explanatory theory of the human mind" (1951: viii). The methods of sociology alone could ensure the objective concepts necessary for the construction of such a theory: "the sociologist is by definition a relativist"...and, at the same time, a comparatist (1935: 120). Self-doubt combined with empirical classification would generate universally applicable concepts. Then, (and then only), sociology could formulate theories capable of bearing the full weight of rational criticism, and then it would be a true science. History and sociology only stopped being "popular", or ethno-sciences when their explanations were couched in terms sufficiently rigorous and universal to be rationally and universally criticised. (1925, pp.47-9, 55-6). Explanation had to be by means of "laws" of the highest generality. Any other sort of explanation was "the adoration of a mystery", or merely an empirical correlation devoid of explanatory power (1908 a: 66, 80).

None of the contributors to the *Année* believed that sociology could be anything but historical. Bouglé agreed with Simiand that history alone provided the laboratory conditions necessary for experimentation. It was only in an historical perspective that the specificity of sociological variables could be determined, because it was only in history that extraneous variables (presumably such as ecology) could be seen to be constant, and so eliminated. (*Annales S.A.* 2: 27-8). Inasmuch as sociology had to be historical, it was most important to refute certain historicist doctrines. The most objectionable of these doctrines was the doctrine that history never repeats itself, that every event is unique. Bouglé pointed out that no human being could really believe this: if they did, the writing of history would itself be impossible (1925: 48).

Other historicist doctrines that had to be refuted were Evolutionism in its rigid form, and "historical materialism". Evolutionism appeared to be untrue on empirical grounds, and when it appealed to the old biological Anthropology, it was aligning itself with a lost cause (1908 a. 57, 68-71; 1908 b; 129-42). The refutation of materialism was a difficult one to phrase: on the one hand, sociology had to be rid of mechanistic associations; on the other hand, the theory that a man of genius appears and spreads his ideas is "the adoration of a mystery". A certain freedom had to be allowed to the human mind, but the freedom had to be shown to be regular in its action. "The Division of Labour" was not absolutely clear on the point, as Bouglé ruefully remarks. In order to escape from this nasty fork, Bouglé chose to stress the "hyperspiritualist" aspect of Durkheim's sociology, using the "Représentations Individuelles et Représentations Collectives" as his authority (e.g. 1951: xv; *Année S II*: 152-5). More important, he stresses the "relative autonomy" of the mind vis-à-vis its data (1935: 4-5). The mind is not a passive mirror of reality, it transforms it (1929: 186). The mind has its own "forms", but mental forms are themselves instances of an adaptive mechanism: "To know is not to reproduce; it is always to transform. And the order which the mind, by means of the concept, introduces into the chaos of sensory impressions, is, first of all, a revelation of its own forms. Now, are these forms eternal and given from the beginning ne varietur? Do they not themselves undergo a progressive elaboration which takes account of the successes obtained or the disappointment experienced by some idea when put to the test?" (1929: 186-7). The ambiguity of the word "form" is here most unfortunate, but Bouglé must mean that the mind is free to reconstruct the forms of reality, but is not free to choose (or create) reality. The same is true, at a higher level, of the social mind. It is free to create concepts, but cannot in any sense create reality itself. No "collective enthusiasm" can create the nature of things, nor the nature of the mind. The fact that the right hand is generally socially preferred does not mean that "hand", neither the thing itself, nor the idea that man has of it, is created by society. (1929: 192-5).

There is a certain divergence here from Durkheim, and there are other points on which Bouglé is unwilling to interpret Durkheim too literally. He maintained that the passage from reality to collective awareness is always mediated by the individual consciousness. Indeed, strictly speaking, there was no such thing as a collective awareness, only a reforming of

individual awarenences. He did, however, accept the notion of the collective mind as a useful locus for all the mental activity which could not exist in pre-social man. He notes cautiously that the notion is only heuristic, and in particular, a search for a collective unconscious, as opposed to a collective conscious raised more problems than it would solve (1935: 11-12).

Collective representations are a re-ordering of individual interior states: for example, to say that social density leads to social differentiation presupposes that the physical condition passes through individual representations before becoming a collective representation (1925: 156-7, 160-1; cf. 1908 a: 85-6; Année S I: 126-35). Thus, the individual mind reconstrues material drawn from what may be called "Nature" (set of real effects), and the metaphorical "collective mind" reconstrues material drawn from individual representations. In effect, Bouglé sees man as a three-part being: he is at the same time, social person, individual being, and vital organism. (This, clearly, is a variation on a familiar theme. Durkheim generally sees man as a social person grafted onto a vital organism, so finding it often difficult to calibrate the two. Tarde also posits two levels, but they are mirror-images. Blondel adopts a three-tier psychology, for which he alleges the authority of Comte. The important point is that the psychology of the individual being in Bouglé's scheme is a psychology which is common to the whole species of man. It is possible, therefore, for Bouglé to give a "psychological demonstration" which is really a series of logical operations, as in "Les Idées Egalitaires".

It must be stressed at this point that Bouglé regarded constructs such as a three-level being as no more than heuristic concepts. To oppose bio-mechanical and psycho-social functions was a way of posing the problem, not of answering it. (e.g. Annales S.A.l. p.148). What was more, the three parts of man were inextricably interwoven: "to perceive is already to conceive, and to remember still" (1925: 42), i.e. perception, that most individual of interior states, depends not only on sensations, but also on socially derived concepts.

For the sake of clarity, I will sum up the major themes so far:

- 1) There are three types of mental activity - bio-mechanical (sensation), psychic (individual representation), and social (collective representation).
- 2) There are three types of "form" or pattern - forms in Nature, forms from the act of individual representation, and forms from the act of collective representation. They are not reducible one to another.
- 3) Collective representations of Nature are formed via individual representations.
- 4) Representations do not create the reality to which they refer (i.e. collective representations do not create individual representations any more than individual representations create Nature). On the contrary, they tend to greater conformity with it by a process of testing and experience.

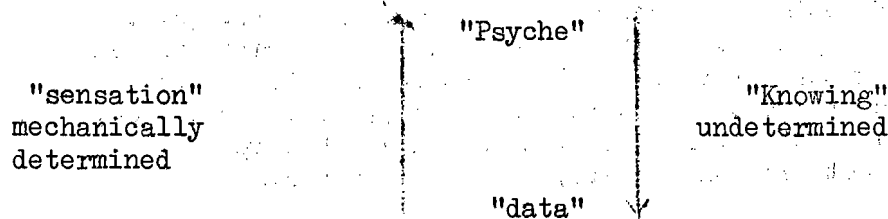
The last point is of particular importance. It implies that representation is in some way translated into behaviour. (cf. the

statement 1908 a: 30-1 that in order to know what a person is thinking, it is best to interpret his actions). In the case of a (hypothetical) pre-social individual being, such "cognitive behaviour" would allow feed back, and a consequent adjustment of the forms of cognition. However, since man is, in fact, always a social being, it follows that his representations are never solely "individual". Collective representations should adjust because of the feed-back of collective behaviour; but collective behaviour is unlikely to be in grave disaccord with the facts of individual representation, because the individual representations in this case are not of non-human events which might, or might not, be regular, but of human events which are motivated by a formal system. (This would help to explain the fact that sociological correlates appear to be causal of each other, as noted, without comment, 1925: 30).

Aberrant behaviour poses a problem to any theory of equilibrium such as the one sketched above. Bouglé hints at a solution in his remarks on the logical category of chance. This is expounded later, but it can be said now that Bouglé saw reason as a need for harmony, that the need for harmony manifested itself both in the individual and in the social mind, and that a system of cognition can accomodate considerable disharmony.

Most of this argument can be represented in a diagram. It is not necessary to draw in three levels of mental activity, since the relation nature/individual representation is analogous to the relation individual representation/collective representation.

Fig 1:



The arrows of the diagram are to be understood as referring only to relations. In such a scheme, "reality" is a flexible term which refers to anything on a lower level, but Nature is the "basic reality" because it can "know" nothing else, i.e. nothing is lower than it. Man is defined as the combination of all the elements of the diagram, except the natural data (but some of this natural data is of his own making, i.e. the results of what Bouglé calls man's "offensive adaptation", 1929: 162). The interest of the scheme is that it can be telescoped upwards, simply by supposing that representations of any sort can furnish the "data" for a higher level of representation.

If "knowing" is never absolutely determined, it follows that all science and the science of sociology in particular, can only be sciences of possibilities and tendencies. Bouglé never claimed sociology to be anything more than this (e.g. Annales S, A.1: 188-91). Why then bother with correlations of patterns lying at different levels? "Let us allow that conscious meditation transfigures and 'denatures' the materials furnished to it by the milieu: it is nonetheless true that, by showing, for example, how certain social conditions were to lead the minds of

philosophers, in accordance with the general laws of the formation of ideas, to (the idea of) egalitarianism, we are biting into the unknown" (1908 a: 80).

The theory of levels is held to account not only for "easy" concepts, such as judgments of existence, but also for "hard" concepts such as judgments of value. Values are defined as conceptions of possibilities of satisfaction. (This presupposes the existence of teleological categories in the psyche). Values are ranked inside a level (by definition), but they are also ranked by the height of the level in which they are situated. Thus individual values are, as a set, lower than social values, and these, once social activity starts to separate out into law, religion and so on, rank, as a set, lower than legal or religious values. Moreover, concepts which are "polytelic" (which can convert into many other values) tend to be seen as "autotelic", and hence as very high values. "Gold" or "Science", for example, tend to become the highest values, because of the indetermination of their ends. (1929).

It is easy to see that such a theory of values tends eventually to agree, to some extent, with the functionalism of Durkheim or Mauss; but, because values, like any other concept, must always be supposed to relatively unmotivated, there could never be any question of postulating a perfect functional fit between social and individual representations, let alone between "culture" and "nature". Indeed, the fit of one level to another can only be termed functional to the degree that teleological and functional criteria are involved, and to the degree that such criteria derive from logical categories.

To show how Bouglé developed and refined his theory, I shall offer very brief comments on the two monographs, "Les Idées Egalitaires" (1908 a) and "Essais sur le Régime des Castes" (1908 b), and on the article "Les Rapports de l'Histoire et de la Science Sociale d'après Cournot".

Les Idées Egalitaires was first published in 1899, when Bouglé was 29. It is an attempt to fill the first part of the programme "relativism and comparatism". Theories of Equality were to be seen as folk-systems, and correlable with demographic data. Explanation was to consist in a "reconstitution of the mental work" involved in passing from a state of demography to an ideology. To do this, Bouglé uses some of the arguments of the "Division of Labour" (as he understood them), and adopts Simmel's argument that individuation (of social persons, that is) results from a very advanced degree of intersection of unilateral classes. These theories are both taken as premises, so that what is assumed by Bouglé is roughly this:

- 1) a high "density" involves a high degree of competition, which is resolved by
- 2) a functional differentiation of the self and competitors by each individual. This differentiation is in some way converted into
- 3) a collective representation of the division of social labour by means of a classification.

- 4) Where classification is by unilateral classes, intersection must take place; if there are enough unilateral classes, this will result in individuation.

This corresponds to the scheme (i) Nature (real effects) / (ii) individual representation / (iii) collective representation. What Bouglé tries to show is that, on a fourth level, that of philosophers of law, a transformation of the individuations of level (iii) will most likely involve a predication of "equality" between "individuals". He proposes that "heterogeneous individuals who participate in one quality are equal", and the rest of the book is spent showing that the right mix of heterogeneity and homogeneity occurs only in the societies which are egalitarian. In fact the whole argument is marred by the fact that the proposition "individuals homogeneous in one respect are equal" is quite fallacious: the "individuals" of which Bouglé is speaking are not "real objects" but are one-member classes produced by intersection. Thus individuals can be equal in respect of A-ness, while remaining unequal in all other respects. All depends on the rules of the classification. However, even though the work raises more problems than it solves, it retains a true interest precisely because it rephrases the problem of egalitarianism as a question about the logic or psychology of classification. Especially interesting is the notion that equality is a special case of inequality (probably a deliberate inversion of the atomistic philosophy of law).

"Essais sur le Régime des Castes" was a meditated contrast to "Les Idées Egalitaires". The argument "differentiation from density" still held, but unlike the Western system, the system of classification that was implicit in caste was such that the classes did not intersect. Thus there was no individualism, and, as yet, no egalitarianism. Bouglé was still confused about the notion of "individual", and maintained that the British by creating towns, speeding communications, and imposing a sense of unity, would eventually motivate an egalitarian ideology. (This follows from the theory of levels, where a sufficient change of natural data should promote a reformation of ideas at all levels). In a sense, however, it is fortunate that the confusion remained: believing that caste was surviving when it should not be, he came to the conclusion that some social representations tended to equilibrium. The resilience of caste came partly from the fact that the "data" was human behaviour which was already "formed", and partly because the system could be so constructed that even exceptions proved the rule: "It can be maintained that the theories of Manu, although they have not expressed the Hindu reality exactly, have managed, to a large extent, to impose their form on it. (The theories) triumph as "idéés-force"; they furnish opinion with the frameworks in which it is led instinctively to class groups whatever they are" (121. "idée-force": "force" force-piece, load-bearing channel in an electric circuit, or, improbably, dynamic force; cf. 'prescriptive categories'). "Opinion will not allow you to transgress the traditional order, except on condition that you demonstrate that this order has been skewed; when you do that, you are only breaking the law so as to respect it all the more." (121).

Though the Law exerts an influence on the castes, the system of caste itself (= system implicit in jati) is a collective representation. The Law is a system motivated by the products of the system of caste. Similar remarks apply to religion,

economics, and art. They are all, as systems, re-formations of the products of collective representations, (which are not confined to caste: it is important that Bouglé does not claim to explain Hinduism by deriving it from caste, he merely claims that part of the peculiar coloration of Hinduism can be explained by reference to caste. Similarly law, economics and art. In the case of law and religion, the peculiarities can also be explained by the fact that they are the creations of the Brahmins).

The category of natural data is widened so as to comprise not only demography and behaviour, but also racial and ecological data, but the demographic data remain the most important.

The levels are now, therefore, as follows:

- (i) natural (=demography, behaviour, ethnography, ecology) /
- (ii) individual (iii) collective (iv) legal, economic, religious, philosophical, and artistic.

To the fourth level could be added other types, science, for example. As far as Bouglé is concerned, terms like "law", "economics" etc. refer only to functions which have separated out. Thus if it makes sense to talk of "social representations" when what is meant is the representations of men thinking as members of a society, it makes the same sense to talk of a "legal psyche" or "legal representations". It also explains why Bouglé assumes the "general laws of the formation of ideas" can explain the "mental work" not only of individuals but also of societies, the law, etc. If even the sciences are liable to be treated like any other sociological phenomenon, then the "study of forms", the "sociologie stricto sensu" is in reality the most general of all sciences.

"Les Rapports de l'histoire et de la Science Sociale d'après Cournot" is a presentation of some themes of the thought of Cournot (the man Tarde apparently "set a hundred cubits above Comte"), principally so as to insist on a rationalist explanation in history, but also so as to comment on the category of "chance".

Cournot affirms that chance exists in Nature, and that chance, though not itself rational, is a category of Reason. An accident is a "pure fact", a fact at the intersection of a concurrence of systems of causality. Bouglé accepts these arguments.

For Cournot there are two types of science: 1) the contemplation of a law-bound nature (e.g. physics), and 2) the contemplation of a law-like cosmos (e.g. biology). The second type has a greater preponderance of historical data. Bouglé observes that all sciences are historical, in the sense that the time through which their data extend is not infinite, and makes the distinction between History, the science into which contingencies enter, and all other sciences, which consider contingency to be eliminated. He is, in fact, reviving a very old distinction: between what may be called "natured nature", which is a nature in the process of a law-like becoming, and "naturing nature", which is a nature in a process of random, law-less becoming.

The implications of this are far-reaching. If chance is held to be a category of the reason, then human beings represent the world as law-like, for the law-less events are discounted as Accident. Now, sociology had to be historical for Bouglé.

That means that sociology had to take account of contingency. The reason must be that contingency alone could provide the test for the epistemological theory. For, if it is assumed that, on the one hand representations are relatively undetermined, and on the other hand relatively adapted to their data, then major change in representations would have to be motivated by a fairly violent change in the order of nature. Such a change would, by definition, have to be the result of an accident - and the accident would have to be not an accident without permanent consequence (such as an unforeseen, but ephemeral catastrophe), but an accident which changed the order of things (such as conquest and settlement by aliens). If sociology wished to find such accidents it would have to look to history.

Bouglé's epistemology, then includes a definition as to what is to count as 'natural data'. Pure accidents which do not change the forms of nature, are not included into any system of knowledge, because they are so amorphous that they are relegated to a special category. This asserts again most forcefully the lesson that Bouglé learnt from Simmel: that sociology appeals to reality only to claim the forms in reality as the sole legitimate objects of study.

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