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Tiina Arppe, *Affectivity and the Social Bond: Transcendence, Economy and Violence in French Social Theory*. Surrey, UK and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2014. vii + 248 pp. Bibliography and index \$110.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4094-3182-4 (cl.), ISBN 978-1-4094-3183-1 (ebk-PDF), ISBN 978-1-4724-0313-1 (ebk-ePUB).

Review by Brady Brower, Weber State University.

What distinguishes French social theory of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the political theory that preceded it is the centrality that social theory gives to affectivity. This is the major argument by which Tiina Arppe gathers together a set of densely written critical analyses of four of the key French social theorists of the past two centuries: Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Georges Bataille, and René Girard. Historians interested in emotions as objects of discourse or as modes of lived experience should be cautioned that this is not a history of the emotions or even of emotions as objects of social theory. Arppe's conceptualization of affectivity is deliberately broad. She means by it not just the bodily performance and response to emotional states but something more like the capacity to be affected in ways not determined by rational calculation. Taking each theorist in turn, Arppe considers affectivity and the question of the social from the perspective of Comte's altruistic love of Humanity, Durkheim's ritual effervescence, Bataille's theories of attraction and repulsion, and Girard's mimetic desire.

What underwrites Arppe's principle of selection is the fact that affectivity serves in the thought of these four theorists as the normative ground of society and as a means of transcending the merely immanent forms of the social found in "economic" relations. By "economic" Arppe means not only the production, exchange, and consumption of goods, but also those theories that originally drew upon the terms of physics and thermodynamics in order to describe affectivity as the energy of individualized bodies. By "transcendence," Arppe means not so much a beyond of the worldly domain, but an autonomous social realm beyond these individualized bodies. Thus, for example, Comte's Humanity, with its notion of past generations contributing the contemporary forms of human existence and experience (in technology, language, or culture) circumscribes a transcendent state even if this state can only be brought into individual consciousness by the moral education of the Comtean "religion." The problem here as with the other theories analyzed is that transcendence seems always to be figured immanently in historical terms, a conceptual impasse that seems at the end of Arppe's analysis to be an inalienable characteristic of all social theories that take transcendence as their ideal.

H-France readers should know that Arppe's book is a study of French social theory only to the extent that the emphasis on affectivity is what distinguishes this body of social thought from what Arppe broadly defines as an Anglo-Saxon tradition originating with Hobbes and reaching its most influential state with Adam Smith. This latter tradition recognized affectivity of course, but only as a socially corrosive force that needed either to be dominated by political sovereignty or channelized into interests that could be bounded by mutual and voluntary legal constraint. Sociology began, by contrast, with asserting that affectivity was a mostly positive force in structuring human social relations, and it is here that the difference in the two traditions lies. Arppe's book is not, then, an overview of French social thought like that which one might find in the work of Mike Gane. [1] Nor is it, she admits, a work of

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intellectual history concerned with the questions of context, influence, or field that usually preoccupy historians or sociologists of knowledge.

Readers concerned for instance with the relation of ideas to nationalized intellectual cultures or institutions will find that much is left unsaid in Arppe's book about the professional, political, and cultural contests shaping the ideas of her four theorists. Arppe is concerned with the history of philosophy and political theory, but she takes this history only in the broadest and most general terms, attending very little to the specifically French conditions imposed on the development of social thought. Historians might object that if French social theorists sometimes invoked the classical theorists of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, these were hardly their most immediate points of reference. Given the long-lived ontological status of the Cousinian *moi* or "self," one might argue that the obstacles that academic philosophy in the French university presented to the articulation of an autonomous social realm were much more important in understanding the particular ways in which French sociology developed. French "sociologists" were for all of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth really still "philosophers" trained in an official curriculum that had its origins in the liberal compromises of the 1830s. Even as late as 1946, one still finds Bataille complaining about the *lycée* philosophy of his youth with its "heritage of a humanistic culture where every value was related to the individual." [2] It was this that motivated his post-surrealist experiments in sociology more than any Anglo-Saxon political theory. Taking into account this context, it's not surprising that French sociology would look to transcendence as a counterpoint to the philosophy of individual consciousness and that it would borrow from disciplines like biology that were not fettered by the Cousinian hegemony. These strategies of course posed problems to the long-term effort to institutionalize sociology. If Comte and Bataille could cultivate their sociological concerns outside the university field, Durkheim's "heroic efforts" (p. 1) can only be fully understood as strategic maneuvers within it.

As a sociologist, Arppe is interested less in the historical development of a set of ideas or a specific intellectual tradition than in understanding what potential persists in social theory for reconceptualizing human relations in the midst of the perils posed to them by liberal and neo-liberal principles. Here again Arppe's efforts are calibrated to a different set of problems than those that would concern French historians. For her, the historical course taken by the Anglo-Saxon model has proven disastrously unsustainable, and she argues in sympathy with other sociologists for whom "some sort of affective element seems to be needed if the association of human beings is to be founded on something other than a simple rational calculus of utilities" (p. 1). Arppe argues that the great problem that this calculus has posed today is not that it submits one to a totalitarian regime of bare life or to universalist abstractions that justify the often violent suppression of particularity, but that it reduces all existence to a logic of "bare production" (p. 222). A moral regime in which productivity serves as the only index of collective value has not, as the classical theorists imagined, eradicated rivalries by eliminating scarcity. Indeed, the logic of productivity has led to even more insidious violence against populations deemed "useless." Left in the immanence of individual desire and calculation, the social remains, in Arppe's estimation, in a permanent state of crisis.

These are then the concerns that present the occasion for Arppe's re-evaluation of the place of affectivity in the thought of Comte, Durkheim, Bataille, and Girard. Much of what Arppe says in her synopses of the ideas of these four thinkers will be familiar to intellectual historians and to sociologists who know their own history. Indeed, one of the great assets of the book is the way in which Arppe so elegantly summarizes and renders coherent the ideas of complex and, in some cases, conflicted thinkers. Arppe's extensive use of paraphrase provides her with the sort of schematic clarity she needs in order to make her comparisons between the four theorists. Of course, from the intellectual historian's perspective, the disadvantage of this approach is that it tends to elide the ambiguities in which one most often finds ideas in the process of development.

Arppe's synoptic approach also tends to foreclose analysis of the rhetorical and figurative tropes that constitute the discursive links and shared points of reference between the four theorists. Thus Bataille's reflection on "polycephalic society" is quoted by Arppe (p. 128), but without any specific consideration of the ways in which this trope draws upon the anatomical and physiological science that informed French conceptions of the social from Comte to Durkheim.<sup>[3]</sup> Arppe acknowledges this conflicted heritage in general terms, but if one of her aims is to "trace a line of continuity between themes, imageries, and approaches" (p. 7) one wonders why closer attention was not paid to the rhetorical strategies of the texts themselves, since it is often through these rhetorical devices that the unarticulated theoretical assumptions of a given discourse are revealed. Here the old debate among intellectual historians about the limits and virtues of synoptic reading would still seem to be relevant and instructive.

Less focused on issues of context or genealogy, Arppe's mostly taxonomic approach nevertheless does suggest an intriguing means of periodizing French social thought. Affectivity serves in her schema as a bellwether as compelling as those other paradigm-changing concepts in the human sciences like the unconscious or heredity that have guided historians in marking the transitions in the major conceptual apparatus of a given period. The historian would have little trouble in correlating the shifts in the valuation of affectivity with those familiar moments in French history when the promise of transcendence in social relations gave way to disillusionment and doubts about the coherence of the social bond. Thus, during the labor crises of the 1890s, the positive role that affectivity had once performed in the biologically-based schema of Comte was compartmentalized in the *homo duplex* model of Durkheim which sought to distinguish infinite human from finite animal desire. In the interwar period, affectivity was further problematized by the increased consideration given to the role of negative affect in the work of Bataille and Girard. For the twentieth-century theorists, affectivity and transcendence increasingly emerged as dangerous problems. If Bataille still sought in the 1930s to redeem affective transcendence from its misappropriation by fascism, in Girard, affectivity resumes an avowedly negative form in mimetic desire. The key change for the twentieth-century theorists would seem to come in the ways in which, for them, violent negation was recognized as the nucleus of the community-forming effervescence of ritual, and Arppe points revealingly to the influence of Kojève's Hegel. Sacrificial violence, which Bataille would posit as a source of a transcendent social bond for his secret society in the 1930s, would in Girard's postwar work become only a provisional solution to the intersubjective rivalries that form the social fabric at the level of desire. Because these rivalries can only intensify in the absence of a surrogate victim, transcendence is finally attainable for Girard only in individual conversion to and emulation of a Christian model of ascetic indifference.

One of the striking features of Arppe's comparisons is the way in which religiosity figures in each of the four theories as the mode of transcendence, as if a social bond that exceeds rational calculation could not, in the end, be imagined in genuinely secular terms. Arppe's analysis hangs very much on the problem posed by the "demise of the ancient instances of transcendence" (p. 8) because the symbolic terms in which transcendence can be figured in social theory has remained in the prototypical forms given by religion. In the political aspects of her project, she proposes not a simplistic return to these ancient forms, but rather a theoretical and practical opening for other possible configurations. What shape these might take is left unresolved, for none of the standard sociological solutions seem to Arppe to offer a means of elevating the social above the contemporary morass of competitive interests. The organizational belonging imagined by Durkheim to integrate individuals into both a social and cosmological order now seem to function only as another instrument of particularized interests. A Maussian anthropology that traces the origins of transcendence to the symbolic meaning reproduced in social practices only succeeds in describing a kind of "historicized transcendence" precisely because transcendence can only be seen as the product of immanent performances. In the final analysis, Arppe suggests that transcendence in the strictly philosophical sense of the term is not realizable because the social is already so "contaminated" by its historicity.

Arppe's reflections end then with a figurative ellipsis by proposing that transcendence is intelligible to us only as an "ever absent condition of possibility" (p. 227). Arppe suspends, on the basis of this intuition, any further conclusions about the possibilities of a transcendent social order. One wonders to what degree understanding transcendence in this way might necessitate a shift out of the sociological register and into something more like that of psychoanalysis which is concerned less with the divide between the individual and the social (between the individual manifestations of the unconscious and social language, Lacanians would see only similarity) than with the conditions structuring all manifestations of desire. By transmuting sociology's concern for affectivity, immanence, and transcendence into something like the psychoanalytic relation between desire, prohibition, and *jouissance*, one might see differently the impasse in social thought that Arppe's work analyzes and, to a certain extent, reenacts. By framing desire not only as a political problem to be found "out there" in the immanence of economic relations between individuals but also as something inherent and necessary to the sociological enterprise (in which the desire of the sociologist is also at issue), the impediment to transcendence that Arppe and her theorists attribute to the historical advent of *homo economicus* might be better seen not simply as a problem to be overcome by social theory, but as the very condition of its possibility.

#### NOTES

[1] Mike Gane, *French Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2003).

[2] Georges Bataille, "Le Sens moral de la sociologie," *Critique* 1 (1946), reprinted in Denis Hollier ed., *Le Collège de Sociologie, 1937–1939* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 877.

[3] See Claude Blanckaert, *La nature de la société. Organicisme et sciences sociales au XIXe siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

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