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## Two Paths to a Psychology of Social Action: Gustave LeBon and Georges Sorel

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In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt speaks of the rise of the modern authoritarian political tradition in the context of the Dreyfus Affair in France. The era of the Affair marked, she says, the first appearance of the "mob" on the larger stage of national politics as an organized force which saw its leaders as heroic figures.<sup>1</sup> This "mob" is the nineteenth-century precursor, and later partner, of the twentieth-century "mass"; together these collectivities supplied the shock forces for modern totalitarianism. Her suggestion that France provided the stage for the first "dress rehearsal" of totalitarianism seems altogether warranted, and yet, though she sees the need for an understanding of collective behavior and its role in the Affair, she seems to allege that contemporary thinkers failed to understand the nature or meaning of the "mob" phenomenon for either political theory or violent social change.

In a way she has been victimized by her own rather artificial distinction between "mob" and "mass."<sup>2</sup> Though she concedes that the former group played a large role in pre-World War politics, she insists that it is a social phenomenon tied closely to nineteenth-century liberal democracy; the emergence of totalitarian political theory had to await, she holds, the formation of the "mass" society which followed in the wake of the war itself. In insisting on this terminology and on 1914-18 as a dividing line in the growth of political theory, Arendt necessarily overlooks clear evidence that the elements for a theory of mass political behavior were conspicuously present in France well before the watershed of the Great War.

Contrary to Arendt's assumption, many social theorists were concerned about the implications for politics of massive popular involvement in great national issues, and two of them, Georges Sorel and Gustave LeBon, made a vital connection between mass man and politics which allowed them both to view the political upheaval of their own age in more dramatic relief and enabled them to serve as prophets for the epoch to come. In their writings they laid a groundwork for a theory of mass action composed of elements from the French intellectual milieu which,

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, 1958), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

when combined with their own extreme solutions for the problems facing French society, produced a foundation on which the twentieth-century authoritarian tradition could build a finished structure. Relying on a philosophic conventionalism, which became pragmatism when transposed from the natural to the social sciences, and the conviction that the psychology of emotion had important social ramifications, both men reached a roughly equivalent position on a politically utilitarian psychology of collective action by the crucial juncture of 1908–10, the years of their closest personal rapport.

At first glance there seems hardly any intellectual liaison more superficially improbable than that between the prophet of the syndicalist myth of the general strike, Georges Sorel, and Gustave LeBon, the theorist of crowd psychology whom Phillip Rieff has called a “notorious racist and intellectual servitor of the French military class.”<sup>3</sup> The bonds uniting them, which we will examine here, comprise a complex system of intellectual currents which frequently flowed in the same direction but whose composite definition has most often been conceived negatively: the “revolt against positivism,” the “revolt against reason,” or the “idealistic reaction against science.”<sup>4</sup> Though of particular interest to developments in France, such an apparent *mésalliance* suggests for European social thought a unique reorientation which is crucial for a clear understanding of the ways in which the authoritarian political tradition of the twentieth century utilized insights gleaned from social thought and social science. Entirely convinced that social change might be accelerated or retarded by an elite leadership, LeBon and Sorel studied the mechanisms which moved mass man and openly spoke to men whom they hoped would benefit from a knowledge of their operation. An examination of their writings will perhaps clarify the ways in which they believed that principles, or ideas as such, could be transformed into effective action: both men posited similar theories of group action based on a certain conception of mass behavior.

But of equal importance is the meaning of a relationship between two such *enragés* as Sorel and LeBon for the political elite of the Third Republic, the “Positivist Generation” whose embrace of democracy and the political heritage of the Revolution had succeeded in alienating an entire generation of French intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> From left and right, this disparate

<sup>3</sup> Phillip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> Respectively, in H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958), p. 37; Irving L. Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt against Reason* (New York, 1961); Antonio Aliotta, *The Idealistic Reaction against Science*, trans. Agnes McCaskill (New York, 1914).

<sup>5</sup> As Michael Curtis has said, “If the republican positivist school of Renouvier and Littré is excluded, there were no major thinkers who were not reacting in some fashion

couple offered a surprisingly unified critique of the republican politicians who sought to rebuild France following the disasters of 1870–71. In view of their criticism, Thiers's comment that the Republic's main strength was in being "the form of government that divides us least" still seemed to apply to a France just emerging from the agonies of the Dreyfus Affair. It underlines the plight of a politician class whose only rallying cry was a virulent anticlericalism and better explains the stimulation such an appearance of weakness gave to the enemies of the regime on both extremes of the political spectrum. It was during the crucial years 1895–1914 that Gustave LeBon and Georges Sorel developed their remarkably similar critiques of French society and proposed, through the intervention of the masses, to set things aright. That they could agree and partially collaborate in this venture is both a sign of the times and an omen for political theory in the twentieth century.

Men of the same generation, LeBon (1841–1931) and Sorel (1847–1922) wrote their seminal works in the span bridging the years 1895–1914, a period of time lying across a turbulent era of French history which saw the disruption of the Dreyfus Affair, the wave of anticlerical legislation fostered by the parliamentary victors of that cause célèbre, a vast outbreak of syndicalist strikes and working-class unrest, and the great nationalistic revival of the last prewar decade. For Sorel these were the years of the *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908), *Les illusions du progrès* (1908), *Introduction à l'économie moderne* (1903), and *La décomposition du marxisme* (1908). For LeBon, this period marked the appearance of *Psychologie des foules* (1895), *Psychologie du socialisme* (1898), *La psychologie politique et la défense sociale* (1910), and *La révolution française et la psychologie des révolutions* (1913). Of the two men, Sorel has fared better with time and has been the subject of several full-scale studies and numerous articles,<sup>6</sup> while little has appeared on LeBon since his death. Yet LeBon was certainly the better known of the two during their lifetimes. His books enjoyed new editions and more frequent translations,<sup>7</sup> he edited a major collection of semischolarly books with Ernest

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against the revolutionary or democratic current stemming from the French Revolution" (*Three against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès and Maurras* [Princeton, N.J., 1959], p. 3).

<sup>6</sup> In recent years, Pierre Andreu, *Nôtre maître, M. Sorel* (Paris, 1953); Richard Humphrey, *Georges Sorel, Prophet without Honor* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951); James H. Meisel, *The Genesis of Georges Sorel* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1951); Irving L. Horowitz; and Scott H. Lytle, "Georges Sorel: Apostle of Fanaticism," in *Modern France*, ed. E. H. Earle (Princeton, N.J., 1951). For the complete bibliography consult Paul Delesalle, "Bibliographie Sorélienne," *International Review for Social History* 4 (1939): 463–87, and as a supplement for the period after 1938, the bibliography of Meisel's *Genesis of Georges Sorel*.

<sup>7</sup> *Psychologie des foules* is now in its forty-fifth French edition, has been translated into sixteen languages, and has undergone, as *The Crowd*, three reprintings in the United

Flammarion, and his notable *déjeuners du Gustave LeBon* attracted a glittering circle of friends and admirers, including representatives from the intellectual and political elite of France.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, while Sorel spent the years of his early manhood and maturity with the engineering corps, reading much but writing nothing, LeBon was establishing a reputation of sorts in Paris as a *voyageur*, ethnographer, scientist, and inventor. When Sorel retired and found the time to publish the *Procès de Socrate* (1889), LeBon had already published over fifteen volumes on diverse subjects. The slightly older man had, however, through an incredible series of importunities and a fundamental misanthropy, managed to alienate much of the established intellectual community of Paris. For all his popularity with the public and certain right-of-center politicians, he had run afoul of the Sorbonne mandarins and those he contemptuously termed the “imbecile” literary establishment. A renegade posture vis-à-vis the “intellectualist” *universitaires* was a crucial element in LeBon’s attractiveness to the equally obdurate Sorel.<sup>9</sup> In a nation where the public university circles were as hierarchical and as sealed off as those of France, and where official

States since 1960. Nearly all of LeBon’s books after 1894 (seventeen before his death) enjoyed multiple editions and translations. In French editions alone his total output of forty books sold about half a million volumes. Until recently, the *Psychologie des foules* was probably the world’s best-selling scientific book. Sorel’s popularity was much more limited, with only the *Réflexions* experiencing any great longevity. It is now in its eleventh French and sixth foreign-language editions.

<sup>8</sup> Among his regular guests were Aristide Briand, Louis Barthou, Raymond Poincaré, André Tardieu, Édouard Herriot, Paul Deschanel, Gabriel Hanotaux, André Siegfried, Paul Valéry, Generals Mangin, de Maud’huy, Bonnal, Jacques Bardoux, Henri Poincaré, and Paul Gaultier.

<sup>9</sup> A few of Sorel’s letters to LeBon are explicit on this point. On December 10, 1907—one of the first letters—he expressed surprise at LeBon’s not being *agrégé*, and sympathized, “I guess you might say that the dominance of the *universitaires* is greater than that of the former *noblesse*.” And, on May 21, 1910, he ranted to LeBon on the French bourgeois being “hallucinated” by the “university oracles,” particularly the Durkheimian pap disseminated by men like Celestin Bouglé: “the type of *universitaire* that you detest; an intellectual who seeks to flatter the *primaires*, and whose philosophical capacity is much too feeble to allow him to understand my theories.” There was also indignation on this account in print. In a review of LeBon’s *L’évolution des forces in Mouvement socialiste* Sorel wrote: “It is true that M. LeBon has committed the great sin, in the eyes of the university professors, of not possessing the patents of an official scientist” (January 15, 1908, pp. 79–80). I would like to express my thanks at this time to M. Pierre-Sadi Carnot, a grandson of the president of the Third Republic, who allowed me to examine the manuscript legacy of LeBon’s which he holds at the family home in Nolay (Côte d’Or). All the Sorel letters cited above and later were included in that collection, hereafter abbreviated Carnot Collection. LeBon, distantly related to the Carnot clan, left the vast bulk of his papers to Pierre-Sadi’s father in 1931. I must also thank the American Philosophical Society for a generous summer grant in 1970 which made it possible to consult these letters, and the Faculty Research Committee of the University of Oklahoma. I extend a special thanks to Robert Shalhope, David Levy, Sabetai Unguru, and Jim Briscoe for suggestions.

academic honors were seldom bestowed upon those beyond the pale of the state educational monopoly, outsiders such as LeBon and Sorel felt a common bond of remarkable intensity. LeBon wanted to join the establishment and was frustrated in his efforts,<sup>10</sup> and Sorel, though he sought no honors, hated its suffocating exclusiveness.

The sense of being peripheral to the central intellectual concerns of French *instituteurs* was but one of the many paths Sorel and LeBon strode in common. Of far greater concern are the places at which their studies and observations merged and the significance of such a convergence for French thought in the crucial decades prior to the Great War. This mutual bond presents itself, however, in the form of a paradox: at those times LeBon and Sorel seem politically most opposed to one another, they are intellectually—by the canons of the social science they shared—most apposite. A closer examination of their philosophies of science will provide at least part of the answer to this riddle.

## I

From the last decade or so of the nineteenth century, European philosophers and scientists had begun a systematic reexamination of the first principles of the scientific enterprise, a task which eventually resulted in important new perspectives on the epistemological relations of science and nature and, indeed, on the entire metaphysical apparatus of science per se.<sup>11</sup> The role of French thinkers in precipitating this intellectual revolution was considerable; yet perhaps of greater significance was the accelerating effect this whole revision of the philosophy of science had on ancillary areas of French thought. The great pretensions of positivistic science in nineteenth-century France had encouraged the intermingling of social and moral philosophy with a concern for scientific exactitude. Though one product of this union was a healthy if overconfident community of social scientists, another was the ingenuous attempt by numerous French thinkers to construct—with the aid of science—a

<sup>10</sup> LeBon's correspondence indicates a lifelong effort to obtain election to the French Academy, an effort met with frequent humiliation to which LeBon responded with violent attacks in print. His political friends, Barthou, Briand, and Tardieu managed, however, to obtain for him a Grand Commandership in the Legion of Honor in 1929. There are three undated letters from the above men in LeBon's papers gathered by Mlle Antoinette Clotten, LeBon's private secretary after 1914, from the larger Carnot legacy. Mlle Madeleine Caillon, Mlle Clotten's niece, made them available to me, and these will hereafter be referred to as the Clotten Collection.

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of the empirio-critical and conventionalist movements see Peter Alexander, "The Philosophy of Science, 1850-1910," in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, ed. D. J. O'Connor (London, 1964), pp. 402-25; J. Kockelmans, *Philosophy of Science: The Historical Background* (New York, 1968); and Leszek Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, trans. Norbert Guterman (Garden City, N.Y., 1969).

morality and a polity as exact and predictable as the laws of nature. This inflated claim by some orthodox positivists had roused many angry *littérateurs*, but it was not until 1895 that the hue and cry became general—the year of Ferdinand Brunetière’s celebrated conversion and statement of faith in the *Revue des deux mondes*. It was in the wake of this proclamation of the bankruptcy of science that the French scientific community accelerated the reevaluation of its procedures.

Pierre Duhem, the Catholic physicist who was forced to remain in the provinces (University of Bordeaux) by the anticlerics in charge of education, and Henri Poincaré, the Sorbonne mathematician, were the foremost figures in this movement.<sup>12</sup> Europe wide, the effect of this retooling effort was a diminution of science’s pretention to absolute knowledge and a severe reprimand to an earlier generation’s claim that science could construct eternal general truths in such a way that they could account for all known (and unknown) facts. Instead, Poincaré and others pointed out that scientific law could be no more than conventional, to be discarded when facts arose which contravened it. Reality came now to be seen as a vast continuum, refractory to a compartmentalizing straitjacket arbitrarily imposed by a working scientist. At best, the relations of phenomena to one another could be systematically studied; the phenomena themselves, and the causes of natural law, were beyond investigation. As a rule, then, hypothesis was conceived as a utilitarian tool by this new generation of theorists, one which retained its validity to the extent it could account for the facts at hand. It was within these confines that Georges Sorel developed his personal methodology.

Sorel, educated with the rigorous concern for formal method of the *polytechnicien* and practiced in the exacting profession of civil engineer, retained a lifelong respect for precision and clarity. In the microworld of his engineering trade, a skeptical attitude toward plans which had not been constructed from exact measurements was the essence of healthy mindedness and common sense; throughout the many ideological evolutions which marked Sorel’s maturity, his intrinsic loyalty to a radical empiricism held fast.

Sorel first demonstrated his familiarity with the turn-of-the-century developments in the philosophy of science in his 1905 article, “Les préoccupations métaphysiques des physiciens modernes.”<sup>13</sup> Though he does not follow Henri Poincaré’s arguments for conventionalism in *La science*

<sup>12</sup> Duhem’s principal contribution to the literature of conventionalism was his *La théorie physique, son objet et sa structure* (Paris, 1960). Poincaré’s three principal works in the philosophy of science are *La science et l’hypothèse* (1902); *La valeur de la science* (1906); and *Science et méthode* (1908).

<sup>13</sup> Georges Sorel, “Les préoccupations métaphysiques des physiciens modernes,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 13 (November 1905): 855–89.

et l'hypothèse entirely, his sympathy with the revision of doctrinaire positivism is altogether clear. He concludes his brief survey with the conviction that science and nature form two separate laws, and that, "in truth there is no natural law, but only laws of mechanism by means of which we may reproduce, in certain very particular circumstances, certain determinations approximating those of natural bodies."<sup>14</sup> Wherever possible Sorel is at pains to point out the "illusions" of scientists who ignore the yawning chasm between the "artificial nature" of scientific theory and the "natural nature" of the real empirical world. Whatever else one thinks of them, the elaborate models constructed by "metaphysical" scientists are provisional at best, perhaps identical with nature only in the exceptional case of astronomy itself.

If there is a hero in Sorel's perspective on science it is the midcentury physiologist Claude Bernard, whose *Introduction à la médecine expérimentale* (1859) was for Sorel a model of sensible and limited prescriptions for the working scientist. Bernard's document was both a powerful antidote to exaggerated hypothesis,<sup>15</sup> and a sober reminder that each science had a special practical methodology unique to itself;<sup>16</sup> it issued a warning against the cosmic sort of generalization or law with which doctrinaire positivists had attempted to provide a unity of knowledge and matter in one great synthesis.

"The alleged coordination of the sciences," wrote Sorel in *Les illusions du progrès* (1908), "is in no way the supreme aim of modern science."<sup>17</sup> He explained the aberrant attempt to synthesize nature as a product of the salon culture of "the old French society" which had been permeated with the *esprit philosophique* and the supreme arrogance of Cartesian rationalism. The generalizations of this empty "science of the world" ("petite science") bear, by contrast, "no relation to the probing in depth of the problems posed by genuine science, which is founded on prosaic reality."<sup>18</sup> The "austere discipline" for which Sorel possessed such great respect is the "experimental science" of the working scientist: the image of his hero Claude Bernard, humbled by the great complexity of nature

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 887. Sorel claimed three years later that when the "astonishing experiments of M. G. LeBon are better understood, one will recognize that they bring to that concept of science some new support" ("L'évolution créatrice," *Mouvement socialiste*, January 15, 1908, p. 44). This comment is Sorel's affirmation that LeBon's recent volumes on experimental physics adhered to the notion of "artificial" nature as distinct from "natural" nature. These volumes were *L'évolution de la matière* (Paris, 1905); and *L'évolution des forces* (Paris, 1907).

<sup>15</sup> Sorel, "Les préoccupations métaphysiques des physiciens modernes," pp. 874-75.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, "Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 18 (September 1910): 589-90.

<sup>17</sup> Georges Sorel, *Illusions of Progress*, trans. John and Charlotte Stanley (Berkeley, Calif., 1969), p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



and unwilling in the interest of truth to extend theory beyond the domain of concrete fact.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, though Sorel has often been misunderstood on this point, he did not mean to overthrow scientific knowledge; rather, he proposed to the scientific community a certain temperance in extrapolation from the rigorous observation of nature. The scientific fraudulence of Comte and his successors—the nineteenth-century version of Cartesian metaphysics—was the true enemy of seekers after truth.

Though he had warned elsewhere against a uniform methodology for all disciplines, Sorel extended to his historical method an embarrassingly similar task to that which he had assigned to his working scientist. His *Système historique de Renan*, which was primarily Sorel's effort to discredit Renan's skeptical version of Judeo-Christian history, contrasted Renan's erroneous "psychological history" with his own "scientific history." Again, Renan's crime was the familiar one of lending too much competence to science. For Sorel, the older man's attempt to explain the causal origins of the Jewish-Christian myths with psychological tenets broke one of the cardinal rules of true scientific method, namely, a refusal to speculate on the metaphysical problem of causation per se. In trying to discredit the Western religious heritage by "explaining" it, Renan presumed too much. At best, in history as in science, one may assume only "regularities" of development, and, posing once again the model of the natural scientists: "The physicist considers himself fortunate when he has succeeded in knowing the mathematical formulas which connect the measurable gradations in experiments; he ignores the problem of what electricity, attraction, or matter might be; he reasons neither on the origins nor the end of the world."<sup>20</sup> In his search for an exact historical method, free from metaphysical speculation on "essences," Sorel was attempting to remove the question of value from the study of nature and society; but his writings also had the effect of widening the distance between ethics and nature to a degree which presages his eventual embrace of dogmatic pragmatism and his political peregrinations from socialism to revolutionary syndicalism, to royalism, and finally fascism and Leninism.

The only systematic discussion of the methodology of social science, "this phantom of a science," Sorel has left us is his conclusion to *Introduction à l'économie moderne*. Here he extended the same

<sup>19</sup> As Sorel elaborated the argument, "People unacquainted with the methods of experimental science are fully satisfied only if someone succeeds in connecting the explanations (in an inoffensive manner) to other principles their common sense accepts with ease. They do not see that such a process involves a great deal of deceit" (*ibid.*, p. 19).

<sup>20</sup> Georges Sorel, *Le système historique de Renan* (Paris, 1906), p. 23. See also Meisel's fine discussion of this problem in *Genesis of Georges Sorel*, pp. 139-43.

generalizations to the study of society that he was assimilating from the philosophy of the natural sciences. Once more the enemy was the spirit of synthesis in general and the heirs of Comte and Spencer in the French sociological tradition in particular. He admonished social scientists to be brutally honest with their aims: to acknowledge, in other words, the provisional and artificial nature of their social models and to subordinate them to the gathered facts whenever possible. And, in keeping with the flux of social relations, the models ought to be no more than simple frameworks (*charpentes*) around which whirl vast “nebulae” of facts. Generalization is problematical, but possible, providing one does not (as Marx was careful not to do) “sacrifice the real to the requirements of knowledge by concepts.”<sup>21</sup> To grasp reality, then, we must use “ideological constructions,” bearing in mind all the while that they are “the most frequent cause of our errors.”<sup>22</sup> Here, as in other writings of the first decade of the century, Sorel preserves room for Bergsonian voluntarism and the place of will in shaping a semideterministic notion of social change.<sup>23</sup> Insofar as it applied to social and historical analysis, Sorel came to call his methodology “diremption,” a methodology that needed a creative imagination on the one hand, and an empirical sensibility of refined proportions on the other.<sup>24</sup> In summary, for Sorel generalizations came in modest *apperçues*: never too large and synthetic to be cumbersome and self-contradictory, never too inflexible to fail to change when the facts of the “nebulae” changed, and always compact enough to be useful in a provisory way.

Gustave LeBon came to hold roughly the same methodological conclusions as Sorel, but, unlike Sorel’s lifelong antagonism to the rationalist tradition, LeBon entered the twentieth century as a repentant positivist. Though educated as a medical doctor in Paris in the middle sixties, LeBon never practiced formally, but used his scientific knowledge in various enthusiastic writing projects proclaiming the ultimate victory of science over all nature. By 1872 LeBon’s personal “methodology” had been haphazardly constructed out of the flotsam and jetsam of the positivistic mode of thought, and employed elements of Bernard’s determinism, Justus Liebig’s rigorous chemical reductionism, Adolph

<sup>21</sup> Georges Sorel, *Introduction à l'économie moderne* (Paris, 1903), p. 371.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

<sup>23</sup> “Indeed, it was to Sorel’s way of thinking, Bergson’s highest achievement that philosophic speculation was not confused with empirical science. Nonetheless, both were willing to employ science to slaughter the demons of an abandoned mechanism and a precariously perched positivism,” according to Horowitz (n. 4 above), p. 49. Bergson also felt his own work to be a contribution to a “more genuinely empirical philosophy” (see his communication to Ribot, *Revue philosophique* 60 [1905]: 229–30).

<sup>24</sup> “Unity and Multiplicity,” being the appendix to the 1910 edition of *Réflexions* (see Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Holme and J. Roth, with an introduction by E. A. Shils [New York, 1950], appendix 1, pp. 259–64).

Quetelet's statistical social physics, and Herbert Spencer's evolutionary monism.<sup>25</sup> From this mechanistic conglomerate LeBon supposed that the "philosophic observer" could project the "clockwork" precision of nature far into the future.<sup>26</sup> Later, perhaps inevitably, LeBon borrowed from Auguste Comte. LeBon's *L'homme et les sociétés* of 1881, meant to be a vast compendium of knowledge on the "scientific" nature of human psychology and social relations, appropriated Comte's notion of the ontogenetical hierarchy of the sciences<sup>27</sup> and Émile Littré's "Table of Civilization," a detailed version of Comte's law of the three stages— theological, metaphysical, and positive.<sup>28</sup>

Gradually, however, as the century wore on, LeBon began to demur from the directions which the mainstream of positivism seemed to be taking. Its gradual accommodation to the political democracy and anticlericalism of the Third Republic in the service of several of its most eminent political figures, and its eventual enshrinement in the establishment sociology practiced at the hated Sorbonne, convinced LeBon of the need to seek new directions in scientific method.<sup>29</sup>

LeBon's *Psychologie des foules* appeared just as the tempest launched by Ferdinand Brunetière's conversion was at its height. His comments on the affair indicate his disdain both for the anticlerical and skeptical "official" philosophy and for those who would declare science bankrupt and return "all penitent to Rome [to] remind us of the lessons of revealed

<sup>25</sup> This synthesis was first expressed in Gustave LeBon, *La vie: Physiologie humaine appliquée à l'hygiène et à la médecine* (Paris, 1872), esp. pp. 1-10 and 818-40. By contrast to LeBon's early championing of Spencer's sociology (see esp. pp. 837-38 in *La vie*), Sorel never found him attractive and deplored his influence in France. See, for example, his letter to Croce on "ce fumiste": "Lettre de Georges Sorel a B. Croce" (January 14, 1896), *La critica* 25 (1927): 40.

<sup>26</sup> LeBon, *La vie*, n., 818.

<sup>27</sup> LeBon, *L'homme et les sociétés: Leurs origines et leur histoire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1881), 1: 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 309-10.

<sup>29</sup> Consult Terry N. Clark's illuminating study, "Émile Durkheim and the Institutionalization of Sociology in the French University System," *European Journal of Sociology* 9 (1968): 37-71. LeBon had never been particularly enthusiastic about the "scientific" potential of sociology as an academic discipline. His early works, *La vie* and *L'homme et les sociétés*, had encouraged in him a psychologistic bias, which led him to count heavily on physiological psychology and anthropology and which predisposed his social cosmology toward social psychology. He is explicit about this in a few places: "La question des criminels," *Revue philosophique* 11 (July 1881): 519-39; and "L'anthropologie actuelle et l'étude des races," *Revue scientifique*, December 17, 1881, pp. 772-82. Georges Sorel's own sympathy with social (collective) psychology, understood as a projection of individual psychology to group behavior, is well known and parallels LeBon. The sentiments of Sorel and LeBon on this issue of sociology vs. social psychology reflects a wider debate, oftentimes on the level of controversy, between the proponents of both disciplines; the best summary of the history of this dialogue is related in Daniel Essertier, *Psychologie et sociologie* (Paris, 1927).

truths.”<sup>30</sup> To jettison science because of the failure of orthodox positivism to create a secular morality in its stead would be disastrous, he warned. Science “has promised us truth, or at least the knowledge of those relations our intelligence can seize; it has never promised us either peace or happiness. . . . It is our task to live with science, since nothing can bring back the illusions that it has destroyed.”<sup>31</sup> As unsympathetic as he was with the image of science practiced by the positivists, LeBon, like Sorel, was nonetheless unwilling to dispense with an empirical methodology for grasping nature and society.

Curiously, LeBon played a direct role in the revolution in the philosophy of science which had so influenced Sorel. Inasmuch as he was himself ripe for dealing a death blow to discredited positivism, LeBon encouraged his friend Henri Poincaré to set down some of his reflections on the nature of science for his “bibliothèque” at Flammarion.<sup>32</sup> The result was *La science et l’hypothèse*. Demonstrably impressed with the new theories, LeBon devoted two articles to an elaboration of all the new revisionist theories in the philosophy of science, including the contributions of the Germans, Heinrich Hertz and Hermann von Helmholtz, and the Austrian, Ernst Mach.<sup>33</sup> He concluded, as did Sorel, that science could only function as a series of conventions which provisionally explained aggregates of facts. He underscored the purely utilitarian nature of hypothesis in shedding light on other areas of scientific endeavor and especially emphasized the role of theory makers whose limited syntheses would promote a certain degree of progress.

A central fact of great importance is that for both Sorel and LeBon, interested as they were in the *utility* of empirical data, the conventionalistic revolution in the physical sciences led eventually to prag-

<sup>30</sup> Gustave LeBon, *Psychologie des foules*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1896), pp. 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> LeBon had met Poincaré and his politician cousin Raymond at the weekly luncheon group begun by himself and Théodule Ribot about 1892. During the years after 1896 when LeBon was working in experimental physics, Poincaré had presented LeBon’s papers at the Academy of Sciences (LeBon himself was not a member) and shown remarkable loyalty to the dilettante despite the acrimonious greetings his papers received. See on this point, and on the impact of LeBon’s physics generally, Mary Jo Nye, “Gustave LeBon’s Black Light: A Study in Physics and Philosophy in France at the Turn of the Century,” in *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, ed. Russell McCormmach (Princeton, N.J., 1973).

<sup>33</sup> Gustave LeBon, “L’édification scientifique de la connaissance,” *Revue scientifique*, February 1, 1908, pp. 129-35, 169-76. In later publications, LeBon paralleled another of Sorel’s positions on the scientific enterprise by asserting that science does not seek the causes of phenomena nor inquire about the metaphysical “why” of such things as electricity or magnetism (LeBon, “Les vérités encore inaccessibles et les formes ignorées de la connaissance,” *Revue mondiale*, February 15, 1914, p. 472). He also articulated the Bernardian notion of the uniqueness of vital phenomena in “Les mystères de la vie,” *Revue mondiale*, February 15, 1914, pp. 44-52.

matism in the social sciences. The line separating utility and truth, preserved by more scrupulous practitioners of conventionalism, became eroded in the arena of social interaction by intensely “committed” men like these, whose desire, to paraphrase Marx, was not merely to study nature, but to change it.

The European reception of William James’s philosophy of pragmatism was rapid and enthusiastic, and though doggedly resisted in some quarters, especially in France, it nonetheless achieved a significant amount of success, to James’s own surprise. Curiously, both LeBon and Sorel were leery of pragmatism in the earliest stages of its popularity, 1902–8,<sup>34</sup> but, not surprisingly, eventually wrote impassioned defenses of the great insights it brought to the study of social phenomena. Concerned at first lest such a relativistic doctrine deprive them of the empirical grasp of reality so necessary to their views of social science, both LeBon and Sorel came to embrace the notion of “truth as relation.”<sup>35</sup>

Sorel, as he gradually drew away from Bergson during the war, moved increasingly toward William James and a thoroughgoing pragmatic view of reality.<sup>36</sup> By 1919 he had conceived the theme of *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* (1921), his last major book and the final resting place in his tortuous search for a philosophy of science. By that date scientific knowledge appeared to him to be synonymous with the “artificial nature” he had been previously at such pains to keep separate from “natural nature,” and a scientific generalization was true to the extent it was useful.<sup>37</sup>

LeBon had reached practically the same conclusions in his *La vie des vérités* (1914). He denied the applicability of pragmatism to individual ethics,

<sup>34</sup> Sorel, for example, wrote to Croce on January 10, 1907 concerning *Le crépuscule des philosophes* of the Italian pragmatist Giovanni Papini: “Does this book reflect a serious movement among Italian intellectuals? I swear that pragmatism has inspired the greatest doubts in me and that it has produced (with Blondel, Laberthonnière, etc.) more galimatias than the whole of ancient philosophy” (*La critica* 26 [1928]: 98). For his part, LeBon was convinced that pragmatism, in the first flush of its popularity, was a “new metaphysics” prepared to leap into the breach created by the decline of positivism. Its “subtle dialectic” could not, he held, substitute itself for science per se (“Philosophie et religion—leur évolution nouvelle: Le pragmatisme,” *L'opinion* 1 [April 1908]: 2–3).

<sup>35</sup> LeBon supervised the French translations of *Pragmatism, the Will to Believe* and *The Pluralistic Universe* for publication in his collection at Flammarion. His papers include an extensive correspondence with Henri Bergson, who advised LeBon on translators and titles.

<sup>36</sup> Andreu, “Sorel, Bergson et William James,” in *Nôtre maître*.

<sup>37</sup> As Horowitz says of this last phase: “The tantalizing doctrine of truth as relation which James developed made the myth as real, in a functional sense as any so-called ‘fact.’ Reality became a thing to be operated on by men, and not just an epistemological nicety of the metaphysician” (*Radicalism and the Revolt against Reason*, p. 55).

but insisted that for human collectivities the “pragmatic philosophy” constituted “the oldest philosophy of humanity.”<sup>38</sup> He also made the transition from scientific conventionalism to pragmatism quite clear: “It matters little to science that an hypothesis be recognized as false after it has produced discoveries. It matters little, equally, that religious, political or moral hypotheses are judged inexact one day if they have assured the life and the grandeur of the people who have adopted them.”<sup>39</sup> LeBon’s friend Henri Bergson assessed perfectly the treatment of pragmatism in *La vie des vérités* in a letter to the author: “Although you do not enroll yourself under the banner of pragmatism, the pragmatists will be certainly those who will make the best use of your ideas. . . . You see in the truth a type of social force, variable and relative as all forces of this kind. William James would have been delighted.”<sup>40</sup> The attraction of both LeBon and Sorel for conventionalism transfigured into a pragmatic view of truth in the social sciences was equaled by a congruent interest in “affective” psychology; it was the synthesis of these factors which enabled Sorel to construct his revolutionary social myths and LeBon his “political psychology” of crowd behavior.<sup>41</sup>

## II

A sometimes unappreciated truism is that because men like LeBon and Sorel studied nonrational factors in human behavior, they did not, on that account, become irrationalists. Though undeniably there were many elements in French thought which openly celebrated intuition, Sorel and LeBon were not of this genre.<sup>42</sup> It was their intention to study the role of emotion in individual and social life and to seek a generally wider recognition for the significance of nonlogical motivation. In short, *fin-de-siècle* empiricists discovered unreason with rational scientific procedures, a process which naturally quickened the currents of the revolt against reason without making intuitionists of the men who proved its existence.

<sup>38</sup> Gustave LeBon, *La vie des vérités* (Paris, 1914), pp. 212-13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Henri Bergson to LeBon, March 2, 1914, Clotten Collection.

<sup>41</sup> The study of the psychology of the emotions was a major influence in the shaping of William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and his later development of pragmatism. The same evolution from biologicistic studies to a pragmatic view of truth was followed by Henri Bergson, who acknowledged many times the powerful attraction he found for James’s work. Jean Bourdeau, a friend of both Sorel and LeBon and a popular commentator on philosophy, expected in 1909 that psychologists would welcome pragmatism because its “device” was “à bas la logique, vive la psychologie” (see *Pragmatisme et modernisme* [Paris, 1909], p. 74).

<sup>42</sup> As Meisel has remarked, “In pointing out the limitations of the intellect, Sorel was no more an irrationalist than David Hume” (n. 6 above, p. 169). Horowitz has put it even more succinctly: “Rather than characterize Sorel as anti-intellectual, it might be more prudent to note that he simply expanded the intellectualist ideal to a rational study of irrational factors in human behavior” (n. 4 above, p. 39).

The influence of “affective” psychology exercised a unifying effect on the separate strands of pragmatism, radical empiricism, and the revolt against an intellectualist philosophy and forged a final link in the groundwork shared by Sorel and LeBon.<sup>43</sup>

The systematic study of the psychology of emotion, the “empirical” foundation for both Sorel and LeBon’s social cosmologies, began in France with Théodule Ribot’s *Le psychologie anglaise contemporaine* of 1870. Ribot, who would later achieve recognition as the “founder of scientific psychology,”<sup>44</sup> intended this book to be a manifesto protesting against the “non-positive” study of mind embodied in the “eclectic” philosophy then dominant in French university circles. Denying that the crude introspection which passed for psychology in eclecticism was adequately scientific, Ribot urged students of mental phenomena to combine the rigorous observational empiricism of British psychology with the indigenous French tradition of clinical psychiatry.<sup>45</sup> His own work in physiological psychology, begun in the 1880s, provided a methodological and conceptual model for many later generations of French academic psychologists, and incidentally laid the biologicistic foundation for the radical philosophical critique of rationalist thought by Bergson and others near the century’s end.<sup>46</sup>

Traditionally, French psychiatry had depended heavily on mental pathology and the clinical study of abnormal behavioral characteristics; this influence led Ribot’s early observations in the direction of non-rational mental characteristics, with the result, generally overlooked in the history of psychology, that he discovered the important role played in mental life by automatic, nonvoluntaristic factors. “Volition,” he wrote

<sup>43</sup> The commingling of these themes is the subject of a letter Bergson wrote LeBon in 1910 on the subject of finding an exact French title for LeBon’s translation of James’s *A Pluralistic Universe*: “I have just reread James’ work as rapidly as possible to see what overall impression suggests itself and the title which presents itself to my mind is this one: *Le Monde Réel*. [The title eventually chosen was *Le philosophie de l’expérience*.] The *Pluralistic Universe* of James is in effect the universe as he discovers it, the one which he looks at without any preconceived or systematic idea of unification, and whose reality he seeks to saturate himself in. James opposes this *real* world to the purely *conceptual* world of the metaphysicians” (letter of Henri Bergson to LeBon, January 13, 1910, Carnot Collection).

<sup>44</sup> Maurice Reuchlin, “The Historical Background for National Trends in Psychology: France,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (April 1965): 116.

<sup>45</sup> Gardner Murphy, *Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology*, 2d ed. (New York, 1949), p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> Théodule Ribot, *Maladies de la mémoire* (1881); *Maladies de la volonté* (1884); *Maladies de la personnalité* (1885); and *Maladies de l’attention* (1888). On Ribot and his influence see, Raymond LeNoir, “The Psychology of Ribot and Contemporary Thought,” *Monist* 30 (July 1920): 365-94; Alexander Gunn, “Ribot and His Contribution to Psychology,” *Monist* 34 (January 1924): 1-14; Pierre Janet, “L’oeuvre psychologique de Th. Ribot,” *Journal de psychologie* 12 (1917): 268-82.

in 1884, "is not an event coming from no one knows where; it drives its roots into the depths of the unconscious and beyond the individual into the species and the race. It comes not from above, but from below: it is a sublimation of the lower instincts."<sup>47</sup> Beginning in 1896 with *La psychologie des sentiments*, Ribot wrote his most influential studies on the autonomous existence of emotional states, their relative control over intellectual functions, and the essentially automatic and unconscious nature of their appetitive expression. The school of psychology known as the "École de Paris," shaped under Ribot's steady hand, became the dominant influence in psychology during the years Ribot taught at the Sorbonne (1885-1917) and a guiding example for generations to follow.

Gustave LeBon was intimately involved in the initial stages of this great revolution in psychology, knew Ribot well, and incorporated the conclusions of this watershed into his own writings. He had attended the famous hypnotic demonstrations at the Salpêtrière of Jean-Marie Charcot in the mid-seventies, where he met Ribot, Jean Luys, Édouard Bernheim, Charles Richet, and other enthusiasts of Charcot's startling discoveries on mind-body relationships. He was then one of the initial contributors to Ribot's *Revue philosophique*, founded in 1876, a journal which endeavored to encourage the rapid evolution of psychology and the social sciences away from the traditional domination of speculative metaphysics and intellectualism.<sup>48</sup> The sections on individual psychology in *L'homme et les sociétés* reveal LeBon's enormous debt to Ribot's influence in particular and clinical psychiatry in general.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, his later works on collective psychology never fail to remind the reader of the debt that discipline owed to "modern [individual] psychology."<sup>50</sup>

For his part Georges Sorel was equally fascinated by the new psychology and welcomed any attempt to wrest the study of human psychology from its stultifying association with introspective spiritualism. He read regularly in Ribot's *Revue philosophique* in the eighties,<sup>51</sup> and his first book contains an attack on the outmoded psychology of eclecticism.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the nineties he continued to show interest in the

<sup>47</sup> Ribot, *Maladies de la volonté*, p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> Gustave LeBon, "L'étude du caractère," *Revue philosophique* 4 (1877): 496-512; "La question des criminels," *ibid.*, 11 (July 1881): 519-39; "Applications de la psychologie à la classification des races," *ibid.*, 22 (July 1886): 593-619.

<sup>49</sup> See *L'homme et les sociétés*, esp. 1: 398-440; 2: 161-73.

<sup>50</sup> LeBon, *Psychologie des foules*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>51</sup> Andreu, "Livres empruntés par Georges Sorel à la bibliothèque municipale de Perpignan durant la période 1884-1891," in *Nôtre maître*, pp. 320-23. Sorel's very first published article was entirely in the spirit of Ribot's journal, employing the new psychophysics in the study of perception ("Sur les applications de la psycho-physique," *Revue philosophique* 22 [1886]: 363-75).

<sup>52</sup> Georges Sorel, *Le procès de Socrate* (Paris, 1889), pp. 72-73. See generally, on this concern of Sorel's, Fernand Rossignol, *Pour connaître la pensée de Georges Sorel* (Paris,



pathological bias of the new science of mind, particularly when such studies indicated the general unworthiness of nonempirical methods.<sup>53</sup> Sorel's continuing concern with the psychology of emotion derived from two central fixtures of his thought: first, the notion that rationalist philosophy, as against Bergsonian vitalism, was, as a scientific method for understanding psychology, grossly inferior;<sup>54</sup> and second, that the religious sentiment in human affairs, long misunderstood even by "psychological" historians, played a greater role in social evolution than any other element.<sup>55</sup>

Prompted by his reading in Renan's histories of religion, and by his personal respect for religious devoutness, Sorel demurred from the rancorous anticlericalism of many of his socialist associates. At base he was convinced that no amount of logic or reason could erode the organic "faculté mystique" which served as the core of the human capacity to believe,<sup>56</sup> and he encouraged the church to sunder its historic concern with the metaphysics of religion and revitalize its ranks with a Bergsonian emphasis on a theology more mystic than dogmatic.<sup>57</sup>

The most important aspect of Sorel's (and LeBon's) study of the psychological basis of the religious mentality was not their desire to rehabilitate a declining Catholic faith, but their recognition that there were

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1948), pp. 133–36.

<sup>53</sup> See Georges Sorel, "Dégénérescence et alcoolisme," *Le devenir sociale*, vol. 1 (October 1895); "Sociologie de la suggestion," *ibid.*, 3: (August 1897): 673–89; "Les facteurs moraux de l'évolution," in *Questions de morale* (Paris, 1900); and his review of LeBon's *Psychologie des foules*, in *Le devenir social* (November 1895), pp. 767–68.

<sup>54</sup> A letter to Edmond Berth makes this point clearly: "Thus it is that Bergson counsels philosophy to take an active part in the work of naturalists in place of isolating itself proudly in the schools; it is by meditating on biological phenomena that he has been able to introduce into his teaching the ideas of instinct, of inspiration and mystery which have given him such a great popularity; each day I mark the progress of irrationalism, that is to say of metaphysics which does not consent to simplify experimental reality in order to reduce it to mechanical, geometrical or logical reflections" (as quoted in Andreu, *Nôtre maître*, p. 241).

<sup>55</sup> One cannot emphasize enough Sorel's radical empiricism, his willingness, like James, to consider the religious experience as a fact. Andreu calls his preoccupation with religion that of a "scientist" (*ibid.*, pp. 219–20).

<sup>56</sup> Citing Ribot's *Psychologie des sentiments*, Sorel affirmed at the height of the anticlerical crusade "that Christianity will not perish; the mystical faculty is a very real thing in man, and experience shows us that its intensity does not diminish across the ages" ("De l'église et de l'état," *Cahiers de la quinzaine* 3 [October 1901]: 31–32).

<sup>57</sup> See esp. his "Le crise de la pensée catholique," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 10 (1902): 523–51. In 1903 he stated that "the great problem of the present is whether the Catholic world is able to engender mystical forces comparable to those it had produced in the past" ("Léon XIII," in *Etudes socialistes* [Paris, 1903], p. 378). Significantly, 1901 marked a reversal of LeBon's previously intense commitment to the positivistic anticlericalism of his youth. He viewed the attack on Catholic education with dismay, because he found the "moral quality" of its instructors to be sound, and because only such an education could provide its students with a "common ideal and the spirit of devotion that all ideals inspire" (*Psychologie de l'éducation* [Paris, 1901], p. 87).

similar emotional components which inspired belief in any dogma, secular or other worldly. In 1898 LeBon wrote *La psychologie du socialisme*, a long diatribe against the disastrous results for France of a socialist regime. He advanced in this volume the notion of socialism as a religious phenomenon, appealing to the affective, dreamlike, and chimerical qualities of human nature.<sup>58</sup> Though this was by no means an infrequently alleged parallel, LeBon's treatment, larded with references to mental pathology and crowd psychology, seemed "scientific" enough to be taken seriously. Indeed Sorel, who was at this time searching out the "idealistic survivals" in Marx's writings,<sup>59</sup> wrote a full-scale review of the book, calling it the "most complete work published in France on socialism."<sup>60</sup> While he disagreed at some points with LeBon, especially on economic ideas, he acknowledged that it was "perfectly true" that socialism was "a mental state" and that there were striking parallels in Christian and socialist history.<sup>61</sup>

Later in 1899 Sorel's important "L'éthique du socialisme" appeared, his first step toward the eventual conception of Marxism as "social poetry," stripped of its mechanistic apparatus and anticipating the cataclysm. Here Sorel reduced the socialist ideal to an ethical principle located "in our own hearts," striving for a "total and simultaneous emancipation" through direct moral action.<sup>62</sup> Sorel's optimism about the moral worth of the socialist cause of these years did not, of course, bear fruit. Parliamentary socialism accepted a limited role in government, associated itself with the anticlerical legislative program of the Republican Dreyfusards, and let fall into silence the high moral principles it had espoused during the heady years when the case had not yet been won.

This ethical abdication was instrumental in restimulating Sorel's continuing quest for a new earthly vessel for his moral aspirations. It encouraged him to begin to refine the distinction he had previously suggested between myth and utopia and to define more accurately the human faculties most responsible for the creation of each. It had long been popular among the critics of the Revolutionary heritage to employ Taine's notion of the Jacobin mind as a superlogical gestator of utopias in the best eighteenth-century tradition. Both LeBon and Sorel had em-

<sup>58</sup> Gustave LeBon, *Psychology of Socialism*, trans. Bernard Miall (London; reprinted at Wells, Vt., 1966), pp. ix-x, 90-100.

<sup>59</sup> We know this from his letters to Croce (esp. April 1898) in *La critica* 25 (1927): 106-8.

<sup>60</sup> Georges Sorel, "La psychologie du socialisme," *Revue internationale de sociologie* 7 (February 1899): 155.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>62</sup> Georges Sorel, "L'éthique du socialisme," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (May 1899): 298-300.

ployed such imagery in their earlier attacks on the centralized democratic apparatus that had emerged as the main heir of Jacobinism. Late nineteenth-century studies of emotion and of the inspirations of religious belief had begun, however, a reevaluation of the origins of such vast social movements. The influence of these speculations, together with the mutiny of parliamentary socialism, led Sorel to categorize “false” socialism as the product of an (unrealistic) intellectualistic utopia and “true” socialism as the species associated with the syndicalist movement and the nonrational but “real” myth of the general strike. By 1906, therefore, though he was sensitive to polemical and indiscriminating attacks on the “religiosity” of socialism,<sup>63</sup> he was quite willing to concede that both religion and revolutionary myths occupy “the profounder region of our mental life.”<sup>64</sup>

### III

One last very critical factor remains to be examined in this analysis of the strikingly parallel thought of these two men: their understanding of the nature and place of mass or collective psychology in great historical movements. LeBon, of course, has been widely recognized as one of the founding theorists of modern social psychology,<sup>65</sup> and in the sense that his theory of the crowd mind served as the cornerstone for many conceptions of mass action, he may be seen as Sorel’s predecessor and educator. Drawing on the conception of hallucination held by French clinical psychiatry,<sup>66</sup> LeBon had reached an explanation of “collective hallucinations” as early as *La vie* of 1872.<sup>67</sup> In the seventies, from his

<sup>63</sup> In response to an attack on the “religious” character of socialism by Edouard Dolléans in the *Revue d’économie politique* (1906)—in which Dolléans relies heavily on LeBon’s concept of the crowd mind—Sorel disputed the vagueness of the notion “religious,” but allowed for many similarities between religion and socialism generally, especially the notion of commitment to social conflict as “an act of faith, I admit it freely;” Georges Sorel, “Le caractère religieux du socialisme,” *Mouvement socialiste* 20 [November 1906]: 287.

<sup>64</sup> Georges Sorel, “Letter to Daniel Halévy (1907),” in *Reflections on Violence*, p. 52. On this question generally one ought to consult Ernst Cassirer’s chapter, “Myth and the Psychology of Emotion,” in his *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, Conn., 1946), especially his discussion of Ribot’s importance to the new physiological thesis of emotion on pp. 25–27.

<sup>65</sup> For LeBon’s role, see Gordon W. Allport, “The Background of Modern Social Psychology,” in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Gardner Lindzey (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), 1: 3–56.

<sup>66</sup> See T. R. Sorbin and Joseph B. Jahasz, “The Historical Background of the Concept of Hallucination,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 3 (October 1967): 339–56.

<sup>67</sup> “Hallucination is a phenomenon which, by means of imitation or under the influence of identical excitations acting simultaneously on a great number of individuals in the same state of mind, is able to become collective. These collective hallucinations are true mental epidemics very common in history” (*La vie*, p. 582).

studies of hypnotism and hypnotic theory,<sup>68</sup> LeBon put together a germinal explanation, based on the mechanism of “involuntary suggestion,” of the formation of the crowd mind which he published in *L'homme et les sociétés*.<sup>69</sup> Finally, aided by organismic analogies from biology, LeBon constructed the definition of crowd mentality which appeared in *Psychologie des foules* in 1895. Rather than being a simple agglomeration of individual psyches, a psychological crowd was a unique generic creation overwhelmingly dominated by “unconscious sentiment,” open to hypnotic suggestion, and capable of thinking only in “images.”<sup>70</sup> In essence LeBon assumed, as did most of his fellow collective psychologists, that a collective mentality was the amplified projection of an individual mind, subject to all the behavioral laws of a single being. This convenient transposition allowed LeBon to discuss crowd behavior in the familiar terminology of “affective” and abnormal psychology, the popularity of which was already quite widespread.

In general LeBon's little book shared in the swelling popularity of the “psychology of society” during the last decade of the century, a development which led to the appointment of one of its most important theorists, Gabriel Tarde, to an academic position at the Collège de France.<sup>71</sup> During the period 1890–1914—a competitive and open-ended period in the history of the social sciences—collective psychology provided a conceptual and analytical explanation of group behavior which posed a clear alternative to Durkheimian sociology. Whereas Durkheim and his disciples sought in their work to elaborate a theory of social cohesion which could unite French society in support of the democratic institutions of the Third Republic,<sup>72</sup> collective psychologists in general exhibited a political bias which was antidemocratic, hostile to collective decision making, and pessimistic about the strictly rational action of masses and mass movements of all varieties. We have entered, wrote LeBon in 1895 “the era of crowds,” where “the unconscious action

<sup>68</sup> LeBon was particularly influenced by A. A. Liébeault and the “Ecole de Nancy” (see the discussion on Liébeault in Dominique Barrucand, *Histoire de l'hypnose en France* [Paris, 1967], pp. 90–99).

<sup>69</sup> LeBon, *L'homme et les sociétés*, 1: 396, n.

<sup>70</sup> See his introductory chapter, “The Mind of Crowds,” in *Psychologie des foules*.

<sup>71</sup> His *Les lois de l'imitation* (1890) had been the earliest systematic document in this movement. An excellent account of Tarde's role in the growth of this social science is Terry N. Clark's long introduction to *Gabriel Tarde. On Communication and Social Influence* (Chicago, 1969). Sorel had attended some of Tarde's lectures at the Collège de France in 1898–99. LeBon also knew Tarde as a correspondent and guest at his *déjeuners*.

<sup>72</sup> Moral solidarity in Durkheim's work has been examined in Melvin Richter, “Durkheim's Politics and Political Theory,” and Lewis A. Coser, “Durkheim's Conservatism and Its Implications for His Sociological Theory,” in *Essays on Sociology and Philosophy*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York, 1964).

of crowds substituting itself for the conscious activity of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age.”<sup>73</sup>

The potential for a dynamic theory of social change based on the precepts of collective psychology was not lost on Georges Sorel. He who controls the “images” in which crowds think, dictates, so the theory goes, what crowds will do. Categories of collective behavior were not, moreover, unfamiliar to Sorel, and in some ways his early reading, particularly in Renan, had helped to prepare him to think along such lines. According to Fernand Rossignol, the origins of religious convictions in Judaism and Christianity revealed to Sorel that “the worth of sentiments exists independently of the existence or nonexistence of the objects which provoke them.” This was, he says, particularly true of “intense collective sentiments.”<sup>74</sup>

When Sorel reviewed *Psychologie des foules* in 1895 he was deep in the study of Marxism and raised some objections on materialist grounds to LeBon’s idea-oriented explanation of crowd behavior.<sup>75</sup> But, one feels, his objections are peripheral and do little damage to LeBon’s central message. On the whole, though disputing fine points, Sorel found much attractive and accurate in the book. He agreed, for instance, on the extremity and trancelike unconscious nature of crowd action and on the general (whatever the cause) reduction of intellective functions in such gatherings; he acknowledged the impact of example and imitation in influencing crowds and emphasized the effect of repetition (by crowd leaders) in producing the effect of suggestibility through exhaustion. Most revealing, however, is Sorel’s opinion that crowd life, as profiled by LeBon, indicates a greater degree of genuineness, a surer portrait of natural man than any other human condition. Comparing the emotional response of such a man to the false rhetoric of parliamentary representatives Sorel says, “In political struggles men do not appear in their natural guises; each of them is dressed in a mask.”<sup>76</sup>

It appears that the major point of disagreement for Sorel involved LeBon’s contention that, at bottom, the crowd was intensely conservative, preferring tradition and even Caesarism to revolutionary doctrines. This, said Sorel in the *Reflections*, was only true for “societies which lack the

<sup>73</sup> *Psychologie des foules*, p. i.

<sup>74</sup> Rossignol, p. 47. This view also admirably expresses Sorel’s “scientific” view of history, a view which, Meisel points out, “leaves the road open to arbitrary constructions” (*Genesis of Georges Sorel*, p. 144).

<sup>75</sup> Georges Sorel, in *Le devenir social* (November 1895): 769.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 770. Such a statement reveals a surprising blend of Rousseauist imagery and Bergsonian spontaneity. See Hannah Arendt’s comment on the attraction of disillusioned intellectuals in the twentieth century for the genuineness and lack of hypocrisy of the mass (*Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 334–36).

conception of the class war.”<sup>77</sup> In balance, what is significant is Sorel’s acceptance of the reality of crowd phenomena and of the essential utility of emergent collective psychology.<sup>78</sup> Doubtless, Sorel does not directly transpose the schemata of crowd behavior onto the terrain of social revolution in the *Reflections*, but he does transform “the rhythm of history into a social psychology.”<sup>79</sup> And though Sorel never says so directly, his oblique multiple references to the “mass”—the raw material responding to the “myth”—have led some observers to conclude that Sorel saw the psychological crowd as the intrinsic unit of the social cataclysm.<sup>80</sup> Irving Horowitz has gauged the relation of Sorel’s myth to LeBon’s crowd mind most accurately, however: “LeBon’s collective hallucinations upon which men act is perhaps not as romantic a vision as Péguy’s mystique nor quite as morally worthy as Sorel’s myth, yet in psychological content they parallel one another.”<sup>81</sup> What was common to all three was the inspiration, indeed the imperative, to action. A theory of the collective behavior of social groups which could be a vehicle for myth satisfied both Sorel’s search for “empirical” social reality and his passionate desire to see his moral vision translated into action.

As Bergson had smashed the static intellectualist categories of the individual psyche, so did Georges Sorel desire to overwhelm the dogma-bound utopians of parliamentary socialism. His bridge from “principles to action” was a theory of social myths which would rouse and direct the proletariat toward the overthrow of bourgeois society. This conception might usefully be considered the collective analogy to the Bergsonist in-

<sup>77</sup>Sorel, *Reflections*, p. 133. See the similar rebuke in Sorel’s review of *Psychologie du socialisme*, p. 154. On the whole this seems to be an exaggeration for purposes of polemic contrast on Sorel’s part, for LeBon was entirely clear on the frequent manifestations crowds make on behalf of all sublime, noble, or heroic causes.

<sup>78</sup>In keeping with his enduring concern for scientific certitude, Sorel wrote in 1899, “One no longer studies men, but groups whose sentiments, desires and juridical conceptions have been formed historically and are firm enough that scientific observation of them is possible” (“Y-a-t-il de l’utopie dans le Marxisme?” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 7 [1899]: 158).

<sup>79</sup>Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt against Reason*, p. 107.

<sup>80</sup>Horowitz describes the content of Sorel’s mass action as being based on “the irrational behavior of a crowd composed of ‘rational’ men” (*ibid.*, pp. 4–5). Curtis explains this aspect of Sorel’s myth: “It was not reason that had guided and that continued to guide crowds in their passionate actions, but kinds of schematical ideological projections” (*Three against the Republic*, p. 130). Jules Monnerot, in his discussion of the nature of Sorel’s myth, makes the direct parallel: “In the crowd psychological situation the barriers which the personality’s organization opposes to suggestion and affective invasion are lowered, and this makes such crowd situations ideal conductors of myths; which explains why there are myths wherever there are masses, and why the nineteenth century, the age in which the masses appeared on the scene, was also—one has only to compare it with the eighteenth century—an age of myths” (*Sociology of Communism*, trans. J. Degras and R. Rees [London, 1953], p. 147).

<sup>81</sup>Horowitz, pp. 36–37.

tuitionism Sorel so profoundly admired.<sup>82</sup> At any event it provided Sorel with a perspective from which he could operate on social reality, in this case the encouragement of a revolutionary myth of the general strike, which, in the context of revolutionary syndicalism from 1905 to 1910, yielded high hopes for a working-class upheaval on a broad scale.

LeBon's theory of crowd behavior, a useful influence in Sorel's formulation of "myth," had already suggested to LeBon himself a more or less systematic way in which the manipulation of images by a political elite could result in controlled but thoroughgoing social transformations. In *Psychologie des foules* LeBon encouraged statesmen to learn crowd psychology because, "To know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them."<sup>83</sup> "Words," "images," and "formulas" appealing to "illusion" might, suggested LeBon, have practical political effects. In wishing to influence practical politics with his social science LeBon was merely continuing a tradition deeply rooted in the history of social theory in France, originating with Saint Simon and Auguste Comte and continuing through LePlay to the collective psychologists and Durkheimians of the end of the century.

In 1908-9 LeBon began a series of articles in *L'opinion* which eventually became *La psychologie politique et la défense sociale* (1910), his most straightforward attempt to combine social science and political

<sup>82</sup> The "responsibility" of Bergsonism, and Bergson himself, became a matter of public controversy after the article of Celestin Bouglé, the Durkheimian ("Syndicalistes et Bergsoniens," *Revue du mois* 7 [1909]: 403-17), which hinted broadly at the "syndicalist" nature of Bergson's philosophy (to which, of course, as a staunch supporter of Durkheim, Bouglé was hostile). LeBon asked Bergson about this charge and Bergson's response makes, I think, an excellent statement on his understanding of the influence of his thought on Sorel. Bergson, as will be later shown, also saw points of compatibility between himself and LeBon. The letter of July 6, 1909 (Carnot Collection) reads: "In that which concerns the philosophy of syndicalism, let me say that the theoreticians of the school, and in particular their leader G. Sorel, have never alleged to find in my writings the least justification of revolutionary syndicalism. If you refer to the works of Sorel, in particular to his *Réflexions sur la Violence*, you will see that he has simply stated that he accepts a certain metaphysics of movement and of change that I in effect have developed (especially the idea of the imprevisability and originality of the future, of the indivisibility of change, of a certain irrationality of evolutionary movement), and that he has opposed this conception to those who would aspire to construct the future as a simple rearrangement of the fragments of the past. Against that I have nothing to say, no more than I would find fault with the arguments of those who would refute the syndicalists themselves in showing them that they also aspire to dictate laws to history and that their theories are much too simplistic. In sum, there is in this whole affair a misunderstanding, but a misunderstanding which I am not about to render the syndicalists themselves responsible for; because, one time more, Sorel has not attributed to me anything that I have not said; and it is his readers (and among them perhaps principally his adversaries) who are completely in error on the sense of the allusions that he has made to a doctrine where he himself surely finds nothing syndicalist and nothing revolutionary."

<sup>83</sup> *Psychologie des foules*, p. 59; see also pp. 99-101.

theory. The model for his new book was Machiavelli's *Prince*, which LeBon now intended to update with the inclusion of racial and crowd psychology. The modern "psychologist-statesman" who would employ this "political psychology" was urged by LeBon to struggle against the dissolvants of modern French society, particularly divisive egoism, class conflict, and the revolt of the masses against traditional authority. Sprinkled throughout *La psychologie politique* are detailed suggestions on how the *patron* or the politician might use persuasive mechanisms in speaking to, writing for, or dealing with masses.<sup>84</sup>

Encompassing the whole work, however, is the pervasive theme which LeBon had begun repeating as early as *La psychologie du socialisme* in 1898: the belief that the model of the army provided the best possible example of a "moral ideal" for fragmented civil society. The military would provide France with some "patience, firmness, spirit of sacrifice, and will serve us as a sort of provisory ideal."<sup>85</sup> Whatever transitory popularity revolutionary ideas might have with crowds, the ancestral power of love of country will always be the most effective imagery available to orators and statesmen, LeBon counseled, and the most stable possible "social cement" for the French nation.

When one places *Réflexions sur la violence*, with its message of proletarian upheaval and antimilitarism, alongside LeBon's supremely conservative demand for a military and nationalist revival, one justifiably feels oneself to be viewing the diametrically opposite ends of the political spectrum in France. And yet in a variety of ways LeBon and Sorel were never again more closely aligned. They were in full agreement that France was sliding headlong into decadence; both were convinced that the root cause was the cowardice and lack of energy of the French bourgeoisie.<sup>86</sup> The governing class of the Republic had shown itself to be in roughly the same position in 1900 as the *noblesse* in 1789, with the consequent encouragement of the regime's mortal enemies.<sup>87</sup> Not surprisingly, the ruggedly individualistic, if imperious, American captain of

<sup>84</sup> Persuasive "gestures," "repetition," "suggestion," the creation of "currents" of opinion, and the removal of the leaders of mass action by police to "decapitate" a crowd are only a few of his recommendations (see esp. pp. 120-32, 140-46). Though William Kornhauser's description of LeBon as an "aristocratic" critic of mass society who feared nonelite pressures on the governing elite is largely valid, the later writings such as *Psychologie politique* indicate that LeBon is practically alone among the aristocratic critics in detailing forceful measures for the preservation of elitist control in emergent democratic societies (see *the Politics of Mass Society* [New York, 1959], pp. 21-25).

<sup>85</sup> LeBon, *Psychologie politique*, p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 198; Sorel, *Reflections*, p. 77.

<sup>87</sup> LeBon: "Bourgeois society has aged as much in a century as the former aristocracy in a thousand years" (*Psychology of Socialism*, pp. 12-13). And Sorel said of parliamentary socialists: "In the presence of a middle class which has become almost as stupid as the nobility of the eighteenth century, their power is enormous" (*Reflections*, p. 86).



industry held for both men a sort of mystique which shamed in their eyes the cautious and timid reserve of the French entrepreneur.

Moreover, the stifling centralization and the demagoguery of democratic electoral politics—the modern heritage of the French Revolution—provided for the politician class an ideal climate for pursuit of self-gain, public corruption, and the inane humanitarian rhetoric which dominated political dialogue, while at the same time anesthetizing the warrior qualities of the French nation. The grand issue of recent French history, the Dreyfus Affair, was for LeBon and Sorel a national tragedy which finalized the moral bankruptcy of the parliamentary majority and contributed to the division of French society along the false lines of anticlericalism. We have already examined their common hostility to the educational establishment, which they both felt had perpetuated the evils of rationalism and taught humanitarian socialism to French youth, as well as their mutual sympathy for the revision of positivism and the “affective” revolution which was overwhelming contemporary studies of mind and society. But there is one common nexus which serves to thrust all other shared bonds into a subsidiary position: their dual hatred for parliamentary socialism. Most of the noxious elements mentioned above were subsumed and brought to fruition, they felt, in the ambitious platform of the parliamentary SFIO.

In a letter to LeBon of October 16, 1907, apparently occasioned by Sorel's admiration of LeBon's “psychological” work, Sorel played up their common characteristics in an effort to obtain LeBon's pen for the cause of revolutionary syndicalism. Throughout he emphasized the great gulf separating syndicalists from the detestable socialists (the one moved by “esprit,” the other by “reason”).<sup>88</sup> He sketched a compelling picture of “France marching toward the socialist demagogues” which he must have known would evoke LeBon's sympathy: “We [French] are too Catholic at heart, too indifferent to the harsh reality of things, too optimistic—and, to speak bluntly—too hallucinated . . . by reason.” He ends by proposing that LeBon write an examination of the “psychology of the bourgeois who became socialist during the Dreyfus Affair.”<sup>89</sup>

In 1908 Sorel mentioned to LeBon the recent appearance of his *Réflexions sur la violence* in book form and asked LeBon if he could mention a word or two about it in *L'opinion* in view of the boycott of the volume by the socialist press. (LeBon did not.) Sorel noted that since LeBon was returning to the analysis of “psychology and socialism” he

<sup>88</sup> There follows a long section explaining organizational and philosophical dissimilarities which LeBon found striking enough to serve as the basis for his own discussion of these differences in *La psychologie politique*, pp. 188–215 (letter of Sorel to LeBon, October 16, 1907, Carnot Collection).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

could recommend to him the socialist bookstore of Paul Delesalle on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince where LeBon could find many of the documents pertinent to socialism and potentially damaging to its cause.<sup>90</sup>

As Sorel began to drift away from syndicalism, his letters to LeBon, while maintaining in clear view their common enemies, reflect his continuing search for new sources of intellectual inspiration. French civilization and its Latin race were decadent, he mused, and without ideals to lead them would continue their decline.<sup>91</sup> Sorel's major intellectual characteristic, the endless search for an ideal to support social regeneration, sustained him, however, and he proceeded to touch on the fecundity of LeBon's *Psychologie politique*,<sup>92</sup> the need for a popularization of the model of energetic renaissance statesmanship which appeared in Guicciardini's great histories,<sup>93</sup> and, much later, the general superiority of Lenin over Robespierre and the middle-class revolutionaries of the Convention.<sup>94</sup>

The high point of Sorel's enthusiasm for LeBon remained, however, 1908–10. This period marked the beginnings of his disenchantment with syndicalism. These years also corresponded to the pinnacle of internal strife in France during the prewar period, which in turn stimulated a high degree of concern by patriots and Republicans about the ability of underpopulated and divided France to defend itself against the growing German menace. LeBon, wrote Sorel in 1910, "is the greatest French psychologist," far greater than Ribot or Janet on account of the "practical" nature of his researches.<sup>95</sup> Finding the simile of the "new

<sup>90</sup> Letter of Sorel to LeBon, September 26, 1908, Carnot Collection.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, May 30, 1910. See, in general, the letters of this period to Croce, many of which reflect a similar search for a "powerful ideology" to sustain social movements (*La critica* 25 (1928): 334–48).

<sup>92</sup> Letter of Sorel to LeBon, May 21, 1910, Carnot Collection. Sorel went through a "nationalist phase" a short time after this where, as Scott Lytle has said, he found patriotism to be "a lever of energies" ("Georges Sorel: Apostle of Fanaticism," p. 287). LeBon's persuasive arguments for patriotism as a reinvigorating force may have been influential.

<sup>93</sup> Letter of Sorel to LeBon, June 30, 1910, Carnot Collection. Sorel was hopeful here that LeBon would consider translating one of Guicciardini's works for his Bibliothèque.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, February 7, 1918. It is here that Sorel first warmly mentions LeBon's violent 1913 attack on the insanity of the Revolution of '89, *La révolution française et la psychologie des révolutions*.

<sup>95</sup> The 1911 reprint of his 1910 review of *La psychologie politique* in *Le bulletin de la semaine*, January 11, 1911, pp. 13–14. See the equally enthusiastic review of *L'opinion et les croyances* the following year in which Sorel credits LeBon with understanding the "mystic-religious" forces which have such "satisfying constructions for the mind and powerful roots in the heart" ("Sur la magie moderne," *L'indépendance*, September 1, 1911, p. 4). Bergson also wrote to LeBon to praise him: "The idea that societies and individuals are not governed by purely rational motives—even though they believe they are—is an idea I myself have arrived at (although by other roads than you), and that I

prince" admirable, Sorel concluded ominously, "If Gustave LeBon does not instruct the masters of democracy, he has furnished their enemies with a singularly penetrating critique of the modern regime."<sup>96</sup>

We should not be surprised to see observers link LeBon and Sorel together,<sup>97</sup> nor to see it mentioned that the celebrants of the "national life" (nationalism) and of the worker revolution were joined together at this time by the "pragmatist idea," which "concentrates itself on a criticism of the French Revolution."<sup>98</sup> And to be sure, throughout the period 1908-10, both men had reason to believe that their respective "pragmatic" alternatives were grounded on demonstrable facts. Perhaps no more powerful proofs can be found to illustrate the extraordinary sense of instability which permeated French society in this crucial period. The possibility of a definite course of action rested on a fulcrum which was composed of the elements common to LeBon's political psychology and Sorel's revolutionary myths: a pragmatic view of social laws, an explosive mass psychology, and a profound belief that nonrational emotional components underlay the overwhelming majority of individual and social actions. A certain swing in one direction or the other came only in 1911-12, after which time patriotism and national defense had nearly universal political appeal.<sup>99</sup> The balance had decisively moved toward LeBon's "social cement," a fact mirrored by Sorel's abandonment after 1910 of syndicalism for the ancestral glories of royalism. By 1914 LeBon could praise French youth in these terms: "Having seen *La Patrie* endure somber hours and material and moral ruin, . . . understanding toward what chasms negators and destructors were leading them, they have broken with them and sought other masters. . . . Moral

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cannot prevent myself from believing to be fertile" (letter of Bergson to LeBon, June 28, 1912, Carnot Collection).

<sup>96</sup> Sorel's review in *Le bulletin de la semaine*, p. 14. LeBon's enthusiasm for Sorel is much less visible than vice versa because LeBon did not want to run the risk of alienating the bourgeois politicians whom he hoped would lead France from the brink by any ill-considered praise of a man who lauded violence. He did, curiously, praise syndicalism in *La psychologie politique*, calling it the "law of the modern age," and a "society of producers" as eminently superior to the socialist "statist" alternative. He had special words of praise for Edmond Berthelot, Sorel's colleague at *Mouvement socialiste*, so perhaps Sorel was partially successful in mediating the savagery of LeBon's attacks on syndicalism per se and concentrating them on their common enemy, socialism (*Psychologie politique*, pp. 214-24).

<sup>97</sup> "At bottom these men were made to agree with one another; both detest the *universitaires* and the present regime more than enough to make them walk hand in hand" ([H. R. de M.], "Une apologie de M. Gustave LeBon," *L'opinion*, October 1, 1910).

<sup>98</sup> R. Berthelot, "Sur le pragmatisme de Nietzsche," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 17 (1909): 409.

<sup>99</sup> Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France. 1905-1914* (Berkeley, Calif., 1959), pp. 90-109.

forces appear to them now as the true foundations of the world.”<sup>100</sup>

When Raymond Poincaré embarked in 1912 on his purposeful attempt to elaborate a nationalist myth and crush a still-flourishing antimilitarism, he met with a generally enthusiastic popular response which put the final touches to the national revival of the prewar years.<sup>101</sup> Completing the link between social science and political action, Poincaré indicated his awareness of the principles of crowd psychology to LeBon in a letter of 1911 which ended, “It is almost impossible to give birth to a collective impression in a tribunal or courtroom. But it is an entirely different matter when speaking before a crowded chamber where the psychology of crowds regains full sway.”<sup>102</sup>

The line between political truth and political belief, obscure from the origins of political theory, was nearly altogether erased in the exhortative writings of Sorel and LeBon. The social science, which at base they both felt to have an empirically correct value, provided them with the crucial nexus linking belief to truth through the intermediary of a dynamic mass psychology. Though Sorel never completely crossed the line which might have caused him to confuse social myth with “natural” nature, his ultimately pragmatic view of social reality and his Marxist faith in valid social arrangements springing from human activity and collective enterprise pushed him so close to that line that some overlapping was inevitable. For his part LeBon lacked even the scrupulousness of Sorel and admitted freely in his admonitions to the political figures who he hoped would save France that belief could and ought to become truth.

While the implications of this notion for France and French thought before the Great War are enormous, both Sorel and LeBon had a significant influence on totalitarian political theory beyond French borders in the twentieth century. Both Mussolini<sup>103</sup> and Hitler<sup>104</sup> plied the

<sup>100</sup> LeBon, *La vie des vérités*, pp. 2-3. See Phyllis Stock, “Students versus the University in Pre-World War Paris,” *French Historical Studies* 7 (Fall 1971): 93-110.

<sup>101</sup> See David E. Sumler’s arresting account of this development, “Domestic Influences on the Nationalist Revival in France,” *French Historical Studies* 6 (Fall 1970): 517-37.

<sup>102</sup> Letter of Raymond Poincaré to LeBon, February 19, 1911, Clotten Collection.

<sup>103</sup> Mussolini enjoyed claiming multiple intellectual influences, probably more for the purposes of self-justification than any other reason. See Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini* (Turin, 1965); for Sorel’s influence on Mussolini, consult Jack J. Roth’s “The Roots of Italian Fascism: Sorel and Sorelismo,” *Journal of Modern History* 39 (March 1967): 30-45. Less known is Mussolini’s claim to have been influenced by LeBon, particularly *Psychologie des foules*. See Pierre Chanlaine’s *Les horizons de la science* (Paris, 1928), p. 7; and *Mussolini parle* (Paris, 1932), pp. 20-21, 62-63. There is also my interview with Chanlaine in Paris, October 17, 1968, in which Chanlaine related Mussolini’s account of the Italian crowds responding vigorously to all LeBon’s persuasive mechanisms. W. Y. Elliot’s account of Sorel in Italy helps explain the relationship LeBon and Sorel shared very successfully: “Signor Benito Mussolini, well schooled in the Sorelian doctrines of the sublimity of violence . . . simply turned the reverse side of the shield and showed that the myth of patriotism which the syndicalist theories had considered only a war camouflage for

imagery of mass psychology to great effect and ultimately achieved a charismatic bond with their followers which fits the classic descriptions in *Psychologie des foules* of leader-crowd relationships. The penetration of the social sciences into political theory took a decisive step forward in the writings of Sorel and LeBon, indicating that the social tensions and the intellectual sources for a theory of violent social action were abundantly present in turn-of-the-century France. While it seems safe to conclude that Hannah Arendt's distinction between "modern" totalitarian political theory and older forms of authoritarian suzerainty will remain useful, the examples of LeBon and Sorel should serve to push this juncture to an earlier point in time.

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national self-interest, could be used to enlist violence more successfully than the general strike myth" (*The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics* [New York, 1928], p. 139).

<sup>104</sup> A glance at *Mein Kampf* reveals Adolf Hitler's familiarity with the kind of crowd terminology which originated in *Psychologie des foules* (see *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim [Boston, 1943], pp. 180–84, 476–79). In a speculative essay, Alfred Stein explores the many apparent parallels in Hitler's "Massenpsychologie" and LeBon's little book (see "Adolph Hitler und Gustave LeBon," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 6 [1955]: 362–68).