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A PRACTICAL TURN: ELIE HALEVY'S EMBRACE OF POLITICS AND HISTORY

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Elie Halévy's legacy is bounded by the two primary objects of his scholarly interest: the history of modern Britain and the study of French socialist doctrines. Taken together, his writings on temperate English politics and occasionally intemperate French socialists cemented his status as a leading French liberal of his generation. Read out of context, the tone of his criticism of wartime socialization and the growth of wartime governments has given him a conservative reputation in some circles and inspired a backlash among historians seeking a more progressive Halévy in his prewar writings. Meanwhile, the depth of his historical study of Britain has elicited several discussions of Halévy's turn from philosophy to history at the end of the 1890s. The portrait of Halévy that emerges in light of his historical studies of England and of French socialism is detailed, accurate, and flattering, but, like any portrait, it is incomplete. Before he was a historian, Halévy was a philosopher, and before he mastered his craft in the early twentieth century, Halévy struggled to find his voice in the late nineteenth.

In what follows I focus on three themes emergent in Halévy's early work, which add color to the image currently in circulation: over the early 1890s, Halévy shifted from an attitude of concern about the definition and status of metaphysics, which he initially saw as a lightning rod of philosophy, to a concern with secular morality, which he came to understand as both worthy of study and in need of precise articulation and defense. Over the same period, Halévy moved from an outright rejection of politics to a guarded engagement with it. Finally, his intellectual commitments rapidly refocused as he went from dismissing contemporary questions to embracing practical issues of the day. Taken together, these emergent areas of interest—morals, politics, and contemporary debates—form an overarching change in attitude in which Halévy abandoned "timeless" philosophical questions in favor of matters more concrete and particular. In light of the changing direction of Halévy's scholarship it is not hard to see how Halévy fits into the wider project of articulating discrete, empirical sciences of the

individual and of society that could serve as the foundation of a secular ethics for the Republic.[1] Halévy did not found a new social science, nor was he a positivist in the mold of Durkheim or Ribot, but his mature engagement with historical particularity, political decision making, and ethics all have roots in a generational turn from metaphysics that marked the 1890s.

Halévy's change of course from abstraction to engagement happened, for the most part, in the journal that he and two childhood friends founded in 1893. This journal, the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, quickly became a dominant voice in its field, attracting contributions from leading scholars across Europe. Within France, the *Revue* played a part in redefining the relation of philosophy to both the natural sciences and the emerging social sciences at a time of major intellectual innovation in both areas. The *Revue*'s early emphasis on mathematics and the exact sciences opened the doors to the study of science that constituted a defining strength of French academic philosophy for the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the *Revue* was not only a periodical, it was the center of a dense web of personal, professional, and familial connections that gave rise to international philosophy conferences and regular salons, that attracted the brightest stars of French intellectual life, and that spawned a major philosophical dictionary project and a regular bulletin devoted to philosophical discussion.

Halévy's engagement with the *Revue* began before the first issue appeared; he spent the fall of 1892 gathering prospective contributors and discussing article ideas with the journal's cofounder, Xavier Léon. Halévy's first articles for the *Revue* were largely dedicated to describing the state and structure of French academic philosophy and, in the process, articulating something resembling the official position of the journal. Three of his early articles, all written with journal cofounder Léon Brunschvicg, are clear attempts to stake out territory for the *Revue*. They are written in a tone of youthful confidence, overbold in their rejection of broad swaths of philosophical practice, and certain of the righteousness of their vision. After an initial flurry of four articles in the first two years of the *Revue*, Halévy slowed the pace of his published contributions, perhaps to concentrate on his doctoral thesis or perhaps because, once off the ground, the *Revue* no longer relied on content by its editors. In the second phase of his engagement, Halévy's primary contributions consisted of his work behind the scenes gathering additional collaborators, writing and editing unsigned

[1] Durkheim gave a lucid description of this moment: "The various philosophical sciences are becoming increasingly detached from one another and freed from the grand metaphysical hypotheses that tied them together. Psychology today is no longer spiritualist or materialist. Why should it not be the same for morals?" Emile Durkheim, "La science positive de la morale en Allemagne," *Revue philosophique*, 24 (1887), 33–58, 113–42, 275–84, 33.

reviews, and creating and curating a new recurring section, entitled "Questions pratiques."

The "Questions pratiques" first appeared in January of 1895, inaugurated with a brief introduction likely written by Halévy. The section was intended to fill a lacuna that had opened in the first two years of the *Revue*, when articles on the philosophy of science and mathematics far outnumbered works on ethics and the *Revue* was in danger of entirely losing track of the "et morale" of its title. The "Questions pratiques" section gave space to practical moral issues of the day, and was clearly aimed at influencing broad public debates, not just scholarly philosophical discussion. It took an immediate stand in the culture wars of *fin de siècle* France and provided a ready-made response to the Dreyfus affair, which burst into public view two years after the "Questions pratiques" were launched.

Creating the "Questions pratiques" was the capstone of Halévy's second period at the *Revue*, and it was, in a sense, the last act of Elie Halévy before he was Elie Halévy. It is, nevertheless, important to understanding Halévy's mature work because it was the creation of the "Questions pratiques," and not his engagement in the affair, that was Halévy's first political act. Halévy grew up in a generation for whom disengagement from politics was an aesthetic and social marker of the elite. Even among Halévy's circle of liberal Jews, the repeated scandals of the early Third Republic (the only government they had known) reinforced both by a parental disdain for democratic politics and by a rejection of positivism (the quasi-official philosophy of the Republic) made support for the government tepid and interest in politics nonexistent.[2] Among Halévy's circle, political engagement was displaced by the hope that timeless philosophical questions could engender a national intellectual renewal. In this sense, Halévy, though more of a "university intellectual" himself, is perfectly captured by Venita Datta's description of the literary avant-garde, who "agreed in defining contemporary French society and parliamentary democracy as corrupt and decadent ... [and] on their desire to play an active role in contributing to their nation's regeneration."[3] The *Revue* had been founded in the spirit of apolitical regeneration, aimed at purifying French thought and assuming, without much consideration, that the salubrious effects of philosophical renewal would trickle down to the rest of the nation. Halévy began to reevaluate his received political cynicism around 1895 as a culture war between Catholic and secular France taught him to see the world

[2] Myrna Chase attributes his early dislike of politics to his father's disillusion with his own political activity under the Empire; this paternal inheritance may have been important, but is too limited to explain the attitude displayed by so many French students in the 1880s. See Myrna Chase, *Elie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 1980), 15.

[3] Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (Albany, NY, 1999), 19.

in an increasingly politicized light. While Halévy's turn away from philosophy is well chronicled, his descent from an Olympian disdain for politics to cautious engagement has received little attention. In what follows, I review Halévy's first years as a professional scholar, looking at his activity from 1892 to 1896 to provide a clearer picture of his engagements in politics and philosophy before he became either a historian or a Dreyfusard.

Halévy's engagement with the *Revue* presents something of an enigma with respect to his larger career trajectory. Several scholars have pointed out that Halévy seemed to be dissatisfied with philosophy by the late 1890s, viewing it as sterile and less intellectually compelling than the study of history and economy. His move from philosophy to history is particularly striking in light of the consistency with which Halévy dismisses history in his early writings, where he frequently uses "historical" to denigrate philosophers who are too beholden to the study of older systems. Two authors in this forum have addressed Halévy's turn to history in different ways. Ludovic Frobert makes a compelling case that Halévy shifted from philosophy to history around the pivot of economic thought beginning in 1896.[4] Steven Vincent has argued that Halévy's recognition of the paradoxes of British development, in which economic and political instability failed to create expected social strife, agitated for historical rather than philosophical explanation.[5] Halévy's articles on philosophy speak to this debate, highlighting his early antipathy to history and providing an understanding of where he saw gaps in the structure of academic disciplines in the 1890s and where he thought that he could add value. Addressing Halévy's growing interest in political and social issues, which he had seen from a philosophical perspective as impure and transitory, hints at a gestalt shift in which Halévy rejected an early intellectual commitment to purity and permanence in favor of openness to the importance of the particular and the messy. This sea change in Halévy's thought cleared space for his eventual turn to historical scholarship, and it is, I would argue, more fundamental and more important.

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If we take Halévy's *Revue* contributions of the early 1890s as a cohesive body of work, a clear project emerges, one that links metaphysics and moral philosophy to the natural and social sciences respectively. In the first years of the *Revue*,

4 Ludovic Frobert, *Elie Halévy: République et économie (1896–1914)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2003).

5 Steven Vincent, "Elie Halévy: English History, Thought, and *Moeurs*; and Reflections About France," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History, 2012, 2.

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Halévy was a frequent contributor and a literal adherent to the journal's founding mission. Riffing on the title of the *Revue*, a title he had argued against to the last minute, Halévy constructed a framework for understanding French philosophy that became the foundation for future editorial decisions of the journal. In order to articulate his vision, Halévy took the introduction of the *Revue*, written by his mentor Alphonse Darlu, as his starting point. Darlu's opening statement laid a heavy emphasis on the metaphysics of the review's title, predicting that the journal would "put aside the special sciences that neighbor philosophy, [and] call the public's attention to the general theories of thought and of action that have been waning for some time. These theories go by the currently disparaged label of metaphysics, and they are the only source of rational beliefs."[6] The mission of philosophy, articulated in the first issue, was to examine the ideas implicit in the structure of the natural and social sciences without delving into the details and internal debates of these fields (as the *Revue's* primary competition, the more psychologically inclined *Revue philosophique*, was wont to do).

Halévy adhered to Darlu's vision, but loosely. In all of his early writings Halévy maintained a distinction between the natural and social sciences on the one hand, and philosophy on the other. In a break with the totalizing impulse of academic philosophy under the Empire, Halévy relied on the content of the natural and social sciences, as well as on their position within an intellectual field, to cordon off space for an engaged philosophy, even as he moved away from the core of his discipline. Halévy's *Revue* contributions made it clear that he did not think it likely (as many positivists did) that philosophy would be supplanted by psychology or sociology, yet he also did not, in Darlu's words, put the special sciences entirely aside. Instead, he articulated a framework that remained consistent across several years and a number of articles, in which metaphysics had a special relationship with the natural sciences, and morals had a special relationship with the social sciences. The linked pairs of metaphysics–natural sciences and morals–social sciences formed the rails along which his thought travelled from formalist philosophy toward increasingly practical, political, and particular approaches to knowledge.

If Halévy turned away from philosophy in the late 1890s, what was he turning away from? Very early on in his intellectual development, Halévy had settled upon a definition of philosophy as the study of intellectual relations with particular emphasis on the ideas developed by the sciences. The emphasis on science is notable both for its provenance in the work of Emile Boutroux and for its legacy. Halévy's frequent collaborator, Léon Brunschvicg, went on to make a career of the philosophical investigation of the most pure of the natural sciences: mathematics

6 Alphonse Darlu "Introduction," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 1 (1893), 2.

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and physics. Halévy's path took him on an extended journey through history, the most particular of the social sciences. It is speculative but not unfounded to suggest that Halévy and Brunschvicg spent their careers exploring their bifurcate definition of philosophy, one branch each. Returning to their earliest work, the definition that Halévy and Brunschvicg laid out left room for what Halévy referred to alternately as a rationalist metaphysics or logic on the one hand, and ethics or morals on the other. It did not leave room for much else under the roof of philosophy.

Halévy's first clear definition of philosophy came in a letter of late 1892, written to his friend, the future sociologist Célestin Bouglé. Halévy spends much of the letter responding to Bouglé's excited reaction upon his first reading of Leibniz, only at the end articulating his own vision of the task and form of philosophy. After an extended discussion of Spinoza and Leibnitz, Halévy announced that

> between two untenable positions there is only one option: to define philosophy as an effort or as a method for describing being in ideas. By which I mean: a method because philosophy, no longer taking an ontological viewpoint, will be purely and simply a general method of thinking, the method that the scientist uses to describe a natural system or the method that a legislator uses to construct a system of laws.[7]

In its early form, this definition, which belongs more to Darlu than to Halévy, conflates the activity of the philosopher with that of the scientist.[8] Philosophy is the same method whether it is used by the physicist, the political theorist, or the sociologist (not to mention the logician or the ethicist). By the time of his first writings for the *Revue* Halévy had more clearly articulated the differences between philosophy and the sciences, arguing that philosophy does not so much reproduce the intellectual activity of the sciences as it accentuates the inarticulate assumptions embedded in the natural and social sciences, clarifying the thought processes that are implicit in scientific practice.[9]

In his letter to Bouglé, Halévy already roughed the outlines of an argument, pointing to the scientist studying nature and the legislator systematizing law as analogues of philosophical practice. Several months later, once the *Revue* was in print, he clarified his position. Much of Halévy's writing for the *Revue* was constructed around a limited and precise definition of the journal's scope. His

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7 Elie Halévy, *Elie Halévy: Correspondance (1891–1937)*, ed. Henriette Guy-Loë (Paris, 1996), 72.

8 This conflation is made explicitly in a letter to Bouglé and became the subject of a debate between the two: "I hold that philosophy and science are the same, once science ceases to be defined, as contemporary positivists would do, either as the science of a material reality or as practical science." Halévy, *Correspondance*, 105.

9 Brunschvicg would argue at length that philosophy feeds on the lessons it learns from the sciences, allowing reason itself to evolve over time.

first articles were broader than I will construe them here, but they can be taken as an extended meditation on the title of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, which makes the conceptual pair of metaphysics and morals a useful metonym for Halévy's definition of philosophy.

Of the *Revue*'s two titular terms metaphysics was far the slipperier. Moral philosophy was sufficiently clear to all of the founders that it did not merit much conversation or explicit definition. Metaphysics, on the other hand, was the source of some debate before the *Revue* was born, and Xavier Léon had to defend the term against the assumption that it was a cipher for religious thought. Halévy argued against the inclusion of metaphysics in the title, relenting only so long as it was understood that it was "not a hermetic science, discussing in isolation a limited number of special problems, but a method opposed to the positivist method of observation."[10] The struggle to define metaphysics continued in the first issue of the *Revue*, where Alphonse Darlu dedicated most of his brief introduction to distinguishing the metaphysics of the *Revue* from the positivist scholarship of the *Revue philosophique*. To do so, Darlu reduced the positivist vision of science to the mere observation of facts and claimed that metaphysics was the reflection on ideas that relate facts, arguing that it does so in the form of logic: "We must declare at the outset: here, we will not deal in facts, but in ideas. We readily repeat a variant of Plato's words, 'no one will enter here who is not a logician.'"[11] The reduction of metaphysics to logic was a handy hedge against religious interpretations of the former term, and it was conducive to the mathematical bent of many *Revue* authors.

Several months after the first issue appeared in January of 1893, Halévy (writing with Brunschvicg[12]) picked up Darlu's thread in an article on philosophy at the Collège de France. After discussing the chair holders working in philosophy and related subjects, whom he variously dismissed as antiquarian, as purely scientific, or as ideologues, Halévy declared that philosophy teaching at the Collège lacked only one thing—philosophy. The pernicious influence of Victor Cousin's long reign over the French academy, with his emphasis on the history of systems, had been compounded by the recent positivist backlash in which philosophy was rendered "merely" historical by the advent of the natural sciences, making a Collège de France in which dusty histories of philosophy had displaced the living thing. (Halévy's distaste for history is, at this stage, palpable.) In attacking the historicist and scientifically minded philosophers at the Collège, Halévy was recapitulating, in essence, the founding argument of the *Revue*, perhaps best captured by Halévy's comment to Léon as they prepared to launch their journal,

[10] Halévy *Correspondance*, 65

[11] Darlu, "Introduction," 3.

[12] For the sake of brevity I refer to the co-authored articles under discussion as Halévy's.

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that "we must strike against the miserable positivism that we are escaping and the aggravating religiosity that could suck us in. We must found a philosophy of action and of reflection, we must be rationalists with a rage."[13] They were also acting as their mentors' faithful guardians, clearing space between the failing orthodoxy of eclectic spiritualism and the rising tide of positivism for the kind of rationalist neo-Kantianism that Boutroux espoused. That they could, in the same motion, take a swipe at the editor of the other significant philosophy journal in France, Theodule Ribot, who had only been installed at the Collège five years earlier, was an added bonus.

Halévy and Brunschvicg's dissection of the Collège was so clearly a maneuver in the struggle for control of their discipline and for readership of their journal that it is easy to be blinded to the content of their argument by the glare of its sociological significance. The piece did make a positive suggestion for resolving the lack of philosophy at the Collège, though, which Halévy hoped to fix by creating chairs in ethics and logic. In other words, he argued that the core fields of philosophy, the inclusion of which would rectify a lack of philosophy at the Collège, are precisely the title terms of the *Revue*: morals and metaphysics, Darlu having already translated the latter as logic. The history of systems is rejected as antiquarian, psychology is pushed away as an emergent science no longer truly philosophical in its methods, and what is left is metaphysics and morals. By the middle of 1893, moral philosophy was unproblematically obvious in its definition and was from the start linked to legislation. Metaphysics needed clarification, but Halévy seemed provisionally willing to adopt Darlu's translation: metaphysics was the logic of ideas implicit in the natural sciences. Together these two fields defined the breadth of philosophy.

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If philosophy should consist of metaphysics and morals, it remained for Halévy to explore the operation of each in detail and, in the process, to lay an editorial path for the *Revue*. While the two subfields are ostensibly given equal weight in Halévy's *Revue* writings, in practice logic takes the lead, reaffirming the impression given by Halévy's letters that metaphysics presented more compelling problems in 1893 than did morals. In the Collège de France piece, and in two articles Halévy and Brunschvicg published on the state of French philosophy, discussion of logic and the natural sciences both precedes and structures discussion of ethics and the social sciences.[14] So what is logic? The clearest indication comes in Halévy's

[13] Halévy, *Correspondance*, 65.

[14] Halévy was explicit in a letter to Bouglé: "the doctrine of science precedes the doctrine of morals; the physical world precedes the moral world." Halévy, *Correspondance*, 107.

discussion of philosophy at the Collège, not incidentally in relation to Emile Boutroux's thesis, *De la contingence des lois de la nature*:

> to place the mind face to face with nature, and show how it organizes phenomena by the simple development of fundamental laws, in brief, to teach reason to rediscover herself in the science that she has created. This is the problem of logic. Logic does not remake science, it supposes science already made, its point of departure is the practical solution because every practical solution provokes theoretical reflection.[15]

Boutroux was, by 1893, a well-known Sorbonne professor whose work on chance and free will had a considerable impact on religion; Boutroux was a practicing Catholic who helped soften the implacable hostility that French Catholics showed toward science in the nineteenth century; on science, Boutroux's brother-in-law Henri Poincaré drew inspiration from Boutroux's thesis in his development of an early version of chaos theory; and on philosophy, Boutroux was one of the first serious readers of Kant in the French academy.[16] Both Brunschvicg and Halévy were inspired by Boutroux's teachings; in "La philosophie au Collège de France," however, Brunschvicg and Halévy take exception to Boutroux's core argument even while drawing upon his thesis as a model for philosophical investigation.

In *De la contingence*, Boutroux attacked the problem of free will, a pressing concern in the 1860s and 1870s. Before Boutroux, French philosophy had stagnated in a polarized debate between a positivist position that denied that free will could exist in a world that was determined by mechanistic, causal relationships (the only world, it was thought, in which science could have predictive power), and a series of religiously inflected metaphysical arguments favoring free will at the expense of science. It was Christian metaphysics of this sort, which was both antipositivist and antiscientific, that gave Halévy fits over the use of the word "metaphysics" to title the *Revue*. Boutroux's innovative middle ground between positivism and Catholic theology was built on the claim that tiny chance events break chains of cause and effect. The insight in this move is not the content of the argument but the appeal to science itself, primarily to mathematics and physics, to defend a form of free will. By looking to recent

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[15] Anonymous, "La philosophie au Collège de France," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 1 (1893), 369–81, 375. I owe the attribution of this article to Halévy and Brunschvicg to Ludovic Frobert.

[16] On Boutroux's thesis see Joel Revill, "Émile Boutroux, Redefining Science and Faith in the Third Republic," *Modern Intellectual History*, 6 (2009), 485–512; on his relations with Catholicism and with Poincaré see Mary Jo Nye, "The Boutroux Circle and Poincaré's Conventionalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40 (1979), 107–20; Mary Jo Nye, "The Moral Freedom of Man and the Determinism of Nature: The Catholic Synthesis of Science and History in the *Revue des questions scientifiques*," *British Journal for the History of Science*, 9 (1976), 274–92.

mathematical discussions of the formidable impact of seemingly insignificant events, Boutroux defended a free will that was compatible with both science and Catholicism. He was, in other words, drawing philosophical lessons from the practice of science as he knew it.

In describing logic as the effort to "teach reason to rediscover itself in science," Halévy articulated the brilliance of Boutroux's thesis while taking a jab at his mentor, arguing that reason "doesn't allow for luck or miracles."[17] Our reason is imperfect, or we would not need to confront it with the science it has built, but it is not imperfect because of God or because of chance, as Boutroux would have it; rather, the imperfections of reason lie at the limits of our knowledge. As science expands, rationality confronts itself in the externalized form of scientific discovery; it improves, and it becomes, in Brunschvicg's term, "flexible."

If there was any doubt that Halévy drew his understanding of the workings of logic (which, to reiterate, stood in for metaphysics as half of Halévy's vision of philosophy) from Boutroux, he repeated himself a year later, once again in reference to Boutroux: "to unleash this liberty of the thought, it seems that we must resolutely place the mind face-to-face with nature, we must consider in its totality the activity of thought that organizes the universe, and follow all of its paths across the various sciences."[18] Logic is tied inextricably to the natural sciences. Only by analyzing the ideas implicit in scientific work, by examining the relation of our ideas to the external world as we know it through scientific discovery, can logic grow. When metaphysics unfolds as logic, which is in turn the study of scientific reason in action, the first rail of Halévy's thought is in place. Halévy tried to construct the second rail, morals, in strict symmetry to metaphysics, but here he was not so successful.

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Halévy's pair of 1894 articles on the state of French philosophy is explicitly structured around the parallelism of logic–natural science and ethics–social science. The first article covers the progress of French philosophy in relation to the natural sciences of the day. The second posits that once "mechanist science claimed to be a complete synthesis of the universe" it was only a matter of time before someone would attempt to put ethics on a scientific footing.[19] This

[17] Anonymous, "La philosophie au Collège de France," 375.

[18] Léon Brunschvicg and Elie Halévy, "L'année philosophique 1893," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 2 (1894), 473–96, 489.

[19] Léon Brunschvicg and Elie Halévy, "L'année philosophique 1893: Philosophie pratique (suite)," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 2 (1894), 563–90, 564.

someone was Emile Durkheim, whose sociology shares, for Halévy, some of the promise and all of the hubris of the early iterations of mechanistic natural science.

While Halévy is less than sympathetic to Durkheim's vision of morality, stripped, as he sees it, of individual agency and with that the capacity for ethical judgment, he does accept that Durkheim's sociology is "a science and an ethics," though he quickly adds that "extend it as Durkheim has done, and it quickly ceases to be either."[20] This admonishment of scientific overreach echoes Halévy's description of humility in the natural sciences, which first claimed that the key of mechanism turned every lock, but quickly recognized some limits, becoming more temperate in triumph than in the ascent. Moving from Durkheim through social theorists Gabriel Tarde, Herbert Spencer, and Paul Desjardins, Halévy reproduces for morals the format of his earlier article on logic, ending with a conclusion similar to that of his prior piece:

> ethics thus consists of the cultivation of reason, and this cultivation of reason will mean the application of the general method that philosophy applies to all of experience [nature], to society. It will be a dialectic: after having stripped the moral being of all elements of reality that are exterior to it, such as the social being identified by sociologists ... it is a matter of rediscovering the principle of rational organization, the law of a community of minds, in this moral being who appears at first as a pure natural individuality.[21]

Halévy could hardly be more explicit in laying the second rail of his thought in parallel to the first. Yet in the first case, logic expands in dialogue with the natural sciences, developing reason and improving scientific practice. In the second, philosophy draws on the social sciences only for negation. Sociology shows us what is not fundamental for rational individuals acting in concert, the object of moral philosophy. Ethics is the logic of a surprisingly asocial society of minds. Lest his first iteration be unclear, Halévy would quickly repeat,

> the relation of moral philosophy to particular moral actions is like the relation of the philosophy of sciences is to the invention of particular sciences. Theoretical philosophy does not produce the sciences, it does not create them, it organizes them: it is the truth of the sciences. In the same manner, moral philosophy does not produce particular virtues, but it includes them, justifies them, and interprets them: it is the truth of virtue.[22]

Here, where Halévy's argument for the strict parallelism of ethics and logic is at its most explicit, he falters. Physics and mathematics are sufficient grist for a fully formed logic, but sociology cannot perform an analogous role for ethics; indeed, the second passage above dispenses with sociology entirely. Halévy provisionally

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20 Brunschvicg and Halévy, "Année Philosophique," 566.

21 Brunschvicg and Halévy, "Année Philosophique (Suite)," 587.

22 Ibid., 589. On Halévy's use of a Platonic dialectic in his later work see Frobert, *Elie Halévy: République et économie.*

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retreated to a neo-Kantian moral position, but this, too, proved untenable and created a gap that he would struggle to fill both with practical moral reflection and with historical scholarship.

The breakdown of the parallel structure of Halévy's argument begins with his critique of Durkheim. In a limited reading of the sociologist's project, Halévy argues that Durkheim seeks universal laws governing human behavior that correspond to the laws of physics or chemistry. In his search for the universal, Durkheim begins by excluding the particular and reducing individual actions entirely to the work of social forces. By understanding individual human action through general social laws, Durkheim recapitulates the failures of mechanist natural science. If the weaknesses of mechanism were apparent in the natural sciences, they are particularly poignant in the social sciences. By mimicking a dated version of the natural sciences, Durkheim leaves no room to answer fundamental ethical questions. In abolishing individual agency, Durkheim forecloses the possibility of making a meaningful contribution to moral philosophy. In Halévy's words, "that this issue of individuality cannot be neglected, if sociology hopes to be an ethics as well as a science, should be obvious."[23]

On Halévy's reading, Durkheim's primary commentary on individual ethics boils down to a discussion of the normal and the pathological, in which Durkheim substitutes for "the moral idea of the desirable end, the biological idea of the normal type; for the biological idea of the norm he substitutes the mathematical concept of the average ... an objective morality is thus founded on the concept of social health."[24] Halévy is quick to point out the absurdities that result from an ethics in which "normal" phenomena like crime are considered "healthy" in light of their ubiquity. Because Durkheim's methodology is collectivist, his morality is too; his is an ethic for societies rather than for individuals, and it is anathema to Halévy.

While he is an exemplary case, the problem that Durkheim faced pervaded the social sciences. Halévy rejected political economy as a substitute for ethics on account of its insistence on divorcing facts from judgments, and he thought that sociologists were stuck between the poles of universalizable scientific claims with no purchase on ethics, and particularist claims that pull the discipline away from science.[25] In every case where Halévy engaged with a contemporary social thinker through the mid-1890s, he saw them pinned on the horns of the same dilemma. Either social thought could be a science making generalizable claims that were uninformative as moral philosophy, or it could be an ethics, telling us little about

[23] Brunschvicg and Halévy, "Année Philosophique (Suite)," 568.

[24] Ibid., 569.

[25] On political economy see Anonymous, "La philosophie au Collège de France," 377.

society as an object of analysis. That sociology could not be both a science and an ethics is no surprise as this conclusion is already implicit in Halévy's structural map of philosophy. Just as logic was needed to rearticulate the discoveries of natural science, sociology would at best have to rely on moral philosophy to translate general observations into ideas that could ground practical action and ethical judgment. Durkheim's failure, in Halévy's eyes, lay in his intellectual imperialism. As scientists of an earlier generation had dreamed of intellectual autonomy, of a world where science would answer every question, so Durkheim and other social thinkers of the 1890s chased a chimera when they hoped to free themselves from philosophy. There is a historical irony in Halévy's implication that philosophy is necessary rather than sterile, coming as it does at the cusp of his turn from philosophy to history. As I suggested earlier, however, the key move is not Halévy's rejection of philosophy, but his embrace of particularity. The failure of sociology as ethics is, for Halévy, precisely its success as a science; the more generally applicable, the more universal, the sociologist's aims, the less well he succeeds as a moral philosopher.[26]

Halévy ends his discussion of ethics and sociology with an appeal to reason that does not resolve his search for a parallel to the natural science–logic pair:

> thanks to reason alone, the will can find within itself its own substance and free itself in its absolute purity. Reason is thus the true will, only sacrifice made to reason is an elevation as well as an abnegation. Individuals must only humble themselves before themselves, universality lies within us.[27]

Instead of successfully tying the discoveries of social science to morals, Halévy withdraws to a neo-Kantian, universalist ethics. He has retreated from a dialogical development of ethics and sociology, to an asocial collection of reasoning individuals, finally to the isolated rational individual. Where logic was explicitly related to the development of the natural sciences, Halévy hedges on ethics, relying on a universal vision of reason that is inconsistent with his other writings of the period. Reason, if it were universal and generated by every individual, would create obligations that come from within us but that are also consonant with the obligations of others. Such a reason would overcome the dilemma created by the need for universal laws that can govern particular individuals in a just manner, but it really doesn't address the weakness of sociology that Halévy identified in Durkheim's work. Precisely because of its universal nature, this reason has

[26] On this point, Halévy and Durkheim were working toward the same conclusion from divergent starting points. Durkheim argued several years earlier that the failure of Kantian and utilitarian ethics was their claim to universality, when ethics actually arise from concrete social and economic situations. Durkheim, "La science positive," 42.

[27] Brunschvicg and Halévy, "Année Philosophique (Suite)," 587.

little to say about the particularity of the individual placed in a discrete social setting. In replacing the particularities of individuals and societies with trend lines running from organic to mechanical, from homogeneous to highly individuated, Durkheimian sociology took a major step toward generating law-like claims, but it left no content for moral philosophy to grapple with. Articulating a universalist ethics, Halévy ignored his own concept of reason in science, sociological study, and eventually even social interaction, failing in the attempt to create a rationalist account of social science that mirrored that of the natural sciences. Within a decade, Halévy would explicitly recognize this failure, praising John Hobson for escaping "both the formalism of Kantian doctrine on law and the sometimes abstract, sometimes metaphorical, formalism of contemporary sociology" in a way that he had been unable to do in his early articles.[28] Even in the mid-1890s, though, he felt a need to speak to the political and moral problems of the day, and while the messy particularities of political engagement did not fit neatly into Halévy's argument structure, they turned out to be propitious for completing his thought. At the moment that he turned away from explicit study of moral philosophy, he discovered a significant means of ethical action.

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Halévy wrote little on practical ethics, and he did not express his most profound early political engagement—in the Dreyfus affair—through extended philosophical reflection. But he did use his editorial role to push contemporary issues to the foreground under the rubric of the "Questions pratiques." The justification for launching the "Questions pratiques" was the editors' sense that, in failing to address ethics, they had ceded the ground of morals to Catholic reactionaries; but if the meaning of "metaphysics" had been up for debate in 1893, the content of the "Questions pratiques" and several asides by the *Revue*'s founders suggest that "morals" was a contested term with an increasingly unstable meaning in 1895. For Alain (Emile Chartier), one of the early contributors to the *Revue*, the ethics that the journal should discuss were abstract, with an emphasis on such virtues as chastity and temperance.[29] Célestin Bouglé, on the other hand, used the new section to address politics and, in particular, democratic governance. Halévy's editorial decisions in the "Questions pratiques" hint at negotiation between the poles of Alain's abstraction and Bouglé's engagement, but taken in contrast with his initial rejection of politics, they suggest a significant

[28] Quoted in Ludovic Frobert, "Halévy's Lectures on European Socialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68 (2007), 329–53, 334.

[29] Alain, *Correspondance avec Elie et Florence Halévy*, ed. Jeanne Michel-Alexandre (Paris, 1958), 392.

evolution toward the practical and the political. Whether the content of the "Questions pratiques" was the ethereal or the concrete, however, the section was stocked with social scientists and philosophers writing on ethics and politics. In form, it brought to life the vision of moral philosophy that Halévy had sought in his first period of writing for the *Revue*, turning the inarticulate discoveries of social science back upon the world in a rationalized form.

The decision to engage practical questions marked a sea change for Halévy. Just two years earlier, he had argued in a letter to Léon that they should leave contemporary issues to others while concentrating on eternal moral questions: "either we believe nothing or we believe that the ethicist has a duty to satisfy not the 'needs of the day,' but eternal needs."[30] The desire to take shelter in "timeless" questions rather than engage with contemporary debates echoes the dismissive attitude towards politics and social issues that typified Halévy's generation, an apolitical affect that the founders of the *Revue* wore lightly in their youths. Timeless and eternal questions turned out to be, however, a passing fancy. The *Revue* founders never became men of politics (despite several quixotic attempts by Bouglé) or activist intellectuals; they did, however, reevaluate the haughty disdain for worldly issues that typified their first writings. In Halévy's case, the subtle shift from disregard to cautious engagement that began with the "Questions pratiques" continued to resonate in his mature writings.

"Questions pratiques" was added to the journal on Halévy's suggestion.[31] The section was launched with an anonymous introduction (written in what sounds like Halévy's voice) in January of 1895.[32] Taking the second anniversary of the founding of the *Revue* as an opportunity to rethink its mission, the author of the introduction takes pride in the *Revue*'s success in illuminating the development of logic and metaphysics, but admits that "we have not sufficiently succeeded in cultivating this other half of philosophy, moral philosophy, which should guide action. Aside from one or two articles, notably a remarkable study on Utilitarianism, we have received nothing truly important on the principles of ethics."[33] The new "Questions pratiques" section would redress the lack of moral reflection in the *Revue*, providing a voice of rational, secular ethics that was constructed in explicit counterpoise to the Catholic Church and its conservative

30 Halévy, *Correspondance*, 139.

31 Chase, *Elie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography*, 24.

32 The introduction rehashes Halévy and Brunschvicg's arguments about the paucity of philosophical scholarship at the Collège de France and is structured along the same parallel tracks of logic–natural science and social science–ethics that Halévy had used repeatedly elsewhere.

33 Anonymous, "Introduction," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 3 (1895), 112–14, 112.

fellow travellers who were in the midst of a strident attack on secularism and science in 1895.

The backlash against scientific thought in France that served as the backdrop for the "Questions pratiques" had gained a new intellectual coherence and a reinvigorated rhetorical force in the 1890s. Emerging from widely read literature, including Paul Bourget's *Le disciple* and François de Curel's *La nouvelle idole*, a critique of scientific overreach converged with the long-standing Catholic rejection of scientific world views and a pervasive discourse of social and political atomization to form a potent defense of Catholic ethics that appealed beyond the boundaries of the faithful, captivating social conservatives who feared democratization more than they did unbelief.[34] The invective against scientific hubris peaked only days before the introduction of the "Questions pratiques" with the publication of Ferdinand Brunetière's famous rapprochement with the Church. Halévy's engagement in this dispute provides a clear example of how the struggle over control of ethics and moral education in turn defined and hardened political positions that had been amorphous and, at least subjectively, irrelevant only a few years earlier. The evolution of the "Questions pratiques" traces a direct line from the apolitical stance of a self-conscious and internally unified intellectual elite, through a particular struggle over the place of science in society, to a divided intellectual elite who nonetheless agreed that politics (broadly conceived) was a topic worthy of interest. By engaging in this struggle, Halévy settled on a more satisfying solution to his search for an ethics than he had found in his earlier articles on philosophy.

Over the first several years of its existence, the "Questions pratiques" covered debates on demographic shifts, international conflict, colonial policies, materialist concepts of history, and the solidarist political movement, among others. But in its first year, Halévy devoted the entire section to a single issue: Brunetière's call for the reimposition of a Catholic morality in France. Halévy followed up a biting introduction to the "Questions pratiques," which lent the full rhetorical force of the journal to the defense of secular morality and, implicitly, secular education, with articles by Alphonse Darlu attacking Brunetière, and Frédéric Rauh, acting as a voice of moderation in defense of flexibility in ethical teaching in primary and secondary education.

[34] See Harry Paul, "The Debate over the Bankruptcy of Science in 1895," *French Historical Studies*, 5 (1968), 299–327. The phrase "bankruptcy of science" seems to have originated with Paul Bourget. See Jacqueline Lalouette, *La république anticléricale XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris, 2002), 264.

Before delving into the "Questions pratiques," it is worth taking a momentary detour through the battle lines mustering opposite the *Revue*.[35] In the year's first issue of the *Revue des deux mondes*, conservative, Darwinist, and secular literary critic Ferdinand Brunetière published "Après une visite au Vatican." The article was nominally occasioned by Brunetière's audience with the Pope the previous November but it reads like a belated response to the fight over positivism of earlier decades. Brunetière articulates a simplistic vision of public morality in which the two possible sources of ethical knowledge are the Church and "science." Cherry-picking citations from secular scholars at their most enthusiastic, Brunetière argues that "science" had promised to pierce the fog of mystery and religion with the light of reason, to answer the fundamental questions of the human condition. "Science" had failed to live up to its lofty goals, proving "powerless not to resolve, but even to pose in a suitable way the only really important questions, those questions that touch on the origin of man, on the laws of his conduct, and on his destiny."[36] The inability of "science" to pose the most pressing questions facing humanity left, to Brunetière's mind, only religion as a viable source of public morality. "Public" is the operative term, for Brunetiere was himself still a nonbeliever. He was a nonbeliever, though, who thought that he had diagnosed a malaise in the young Republic that could not be cured with reason alone. After proving to his own satisfaction that the time was not ripe for a purely secular morality in France, Brunetière concluded that

> for all those who think that a democracy cannot be disinterested in morality, and who know, moreover, that religion still holds a considerable place in governing men, it is only now a question of choosing between the forms of Christianity that one which we can best use for the purposes of moral regeneration, and I do not hesitate to say that it is Catholicism.[37]

In short, Brunetière used his editorial role to drive France back to the arms of the Church, for political purposes. He sought a more Catholic France even if he could not yet muster a Catholic Brunetière.

"Après une visite au Vatican" caused a stir beyond the pages of the *Revue des deux mondes*. It generated responses from the clerical right, but the more fervent reaction came from the left, in the particularly French form of a "banquet for science" organized in April of 1895. The banquet venerated science in the body of one of its best-known practitioners, Halévy's cousin, the chemist Marcellin

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35 The martial rhetoric both overstates the clarity of the division between what it is tempting to call left and right, and accurately captures the mood of the time. It is, after all, Brunetière's own metaphor. Ferdinand Brunetière, "Après une visite au Vatican," *Revue des deux mondes*, 127 (1895), 97–118, 118.

36 Ibid., 99.

37 Ibid., 113.

Berthelot. The banquet itself consisted of a series of toasts to science, to Berthelot, and to the other "great men of science" of the day.[38] Berthelot had responded vigorously to Brunetière in the *Revue de Paris*, and the banquet in his honor, in turn, elicited a reply from Brunetière on the front page of *Le Figaro*. Brunetière began the day of Berthelot's banquet by accusing science of inflating military budgets and throwing workers' wives into prostitution while their children were driven into factory work; he singled out the leading representatives of the left and center-left, Jaurès and Clemenceau, for particular opprobrium.[39]

Published just after Brunetière's first salvo, the introduction to the "Questions pratiques" responds forcefully to Brunetière; it also marks a turning point for Halévy and the editors of the *Revue*. No longer were they careful to couch their rationalist ethics in terms that avoided open conflict with religion. For the first time, they openly disparage the Church as not only irrelevant to contemporary ethical thought, but inimical to it. The introduction was unequivocal: every moral (and social) advance of the nineteenth century was made "despite the Church, and against it."[40] Halévy privately expressed concern about the new tone of the *Revue*, but seemed resigned to its inevitability:

> with respect to the "Questions pratiques," I've been thinking about the Introduction, which suggests for better or worse that we are now devoted to anticlericalism, and that bothers me, because anticlericalism is neither a position nor an opinion. Still, it's the clericals' fault: why is there a clerical party?[41]

Halévy's private qualms aside, the *Revue* pulled no punches in its swingeing attack. The journal aimed its jabs less at the Church itself, which seemed to be viewed as irrelevant to serious ethical debate, than at nonbelieving supporters of the Church like Brunetière:

> today they pursue [*instruit*], even in the daily papers, a trial of laic ethics. Pundits raise their voices to condemn secular wisdom, and taking pride in leading the masses, they lead them to the doors of the Church, where they themselves do not enter. They declare: Morality is purely the business of faith, it has nothing to do with reason, the concept of nonreligious virtue is absurd[42]

The *Revue*'s answer to the challenge from the Catholic right was an appeal to education, and to the universities in particular, as a source of moral guidance. Secular and rationalist ethics emerge from the canon of Western philosophical

38 Lalouette, *La république anticléricale*, 281.

39 Ferdinand Brunetière, "En l'honneur de la science," *Le Figaro*, 3rd series, 41(94), 1 (1895), 1.

40 Anonymous, "Introduction," 114 n. 1.

41 Halévy, *Correspondance*, 144.

42 Anonymous, "Introduction," 113.

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thought, from Pascal to Bentham, and, above all, from educational institutions. The foundation of ethics is not religious dogma, it is reason; the institutions that develop ethical thought are not churches, they are colleges and universities.[43]

Following the combative "Introduction," Halévy published two articles that explicitly responded to Brunetière. First, Darlu was called upon to rebut the core of Brunetière's argument. Darlu's article refutes, one by one, Brunetière's three main points—that science has failed to keep its promises, that the time is not yet ripe for a secular ethics, and that Catholicism is better suited to French society's needs than is Protestantism. In the end, Darlu concludes plausibly, if uncharitably, that Brunetière suffers from the crushing disappointment of the disillusioned zealot. His simplistic infatuation with Darwin, which took the naturalist's work as a master key, had run aground on the shoals of scientific uncertainty, and in his despair, Brunetière fled to the Church seeking solace.

After Darlu's blunt rejection of Brunetière, Halévy tapped Frederic Rauh to present a more moderate response. Rauh was a moral philosopher whose work tended toward pragmatism, and who was an increasingly frequent contributor to the *Revue*. His "Science, morale et religion" focused on the pedagogical utility of religion.[44] While fundamentally disagreeing with Brunetière, Rauh presented each difference in a conciliatory form. Science hadn't failed, as Brunetière would have it, but scientism had distorted the claims of true scientists. France did not require that Catholicism exercise a monopoly on moral education, but religion (any religion) was a useful pedagogical tool for teaching ethics to children too young or too simple to grasp the nuances of secular and rationalist ethics. Nor was Rauh afraid to mark his differences with the editors of the *Revue* in suggesting that their rationalist ethics was beyond the ken of most people and therefore, perhaps, less useful than well-directed religious teaching.

After addressing Brunetière and the fight over secular ethics in the first three "Questions pratiques," Halévy put the section on hold for the remainder of 1895—probably as much because he was in Germany for several months as from any meaningful editorial decision—then rebooted it in 1896 as a forum for discussion of contemporary issues. Writing to Bouglé, Halévy pushed his friend for articles on the emancipation of women, neutrality in international politics, and economic ideas of freedom, all topics that lean more heavily toward the engaged conception

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43 The debate over science was one battle in a larger war over secondary education that pitted a classical curriculum against a modern curriculum based on the study of science and living languages. That Boutroux and Brunschvicg were active participants in this forty-year struggle on opposite sides of the issue suggests that while the education debate conditioned the fight over science, the two debates did not line up neatly.

44 Frederic Rauh, "Science, morale, et réligion," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 3 (1895), 367–74.

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of ethics than toward Alain's ethereal timelessness.[45] Bouglé responded with half of a two-part "Questions pratiques" segment on "Sociology and Democracy," in which he argued that social science had a vital role to play in studying the limits and potential of democratic governance and in maximizing the capacities of that much-discussed creature of the 1890s, the crowd. Anticipating the pro–con debate style that typified meetings of the Société française de philosophie, Halévy placed Charles Andler opposite Bouglé, arguing that sociology was not yet sufficiently mature to add much to political questions. The next several years of the "Questions pratiques" repeated the point–counterpoint format with debates between Rauh and Gustave Belot on the place of religion in society and between Henri Dagan and Dominique Parodi on depopulation. With the format and tone of the "Questions pratiques" firmly in place, Halévy had laid a cornerstone of the *Revue* that would last well into the next century.

* * *

By 1896, before his engagement with the Dreyfus affair and at the very beginning of his professional turn from philosophy to history, Halévy had used his articles and his editorial position in the *Revue* to make several important moves. First, in his articles on the state of French philosophy, Halévy articulated a structure for understanding the relationship of natural science, social science, and philosophy. Halévy paired natural science and metaphysics to argue that metaphysics consisted in clarifying the thinking implicit in natural-scientific discovery. This expansion upon Darlu's definition of metaphysics as logic effectively eviscerated the "meta-" in metaphysics and placed Halévy in the anti-spiritualist camp. Using the structural pair of natural science and metaphysics as a model, Halévy tried to form an identical argument for the social science–ethics pair, but he failed to integrate individual responsibility into a framework better suited for generating claims about means than for articulating ethical maxims. If Halévy's first engagement with ethics was authorial and analytical, his second was practical and editorial. In launching, likely introducing, and certainly curating the "Questions pratiques," Halévy called upon social-scientific and philosophical thought in the service of ethical argument, first as a rebuttal to Brunetière's call for French adherence to Catholic moral doctrine, and later as a means of illuminating a broad range of political and social issues including, eventually, the Dreyfus affair.

In the journey from disdain for politics and contemporary issues, through the partially failed attempt to envision rational ethics as an analogue to the logic of the natural sciences, to the endpoint of social engagement as practical ethics,

[45] Halévy, *Correspondance*, 145.

Halévy made a gestalt shift; he moved from apolitical philosophy to politically engaged practicality. That this "practicality" eventually became concretized as historical scholarship has been well argued elsewhere. That it emerged from the complications of moral philosophy, from Halévy's willingness to rethink the affected disdain for contemporary topics that typified his generation, is, however, equally important to understanding Halévy's unique position as a French liberal historian.

With the "Questions pratiques," and the *Revue* itself, firmly established as a major voice for both philosophical reflection and social commentary, Halévy turned his energy to his own academic work in the late 1890s. After the peak of his engagement in the Dreyfus affair, Halévy expressed a desire to retreat from politics and engrossed himself in his studies of English history and philosophy, writing his first truly historical work, *La jeunesse de Bentham*, in the late 1890s.[46] By the end of the decade in which he had helped found the eminently philosophical *Revue*, Halévy's intellectual course was largely set. Over the 1890s, Halévy had made two turns, the first, from an ardent and vocal distaste for history to a historical avocation is well known; the second, from an equally profound commitment to "timeless" philosophical questions to an engagement with ethics that included social and political components, has received less attention. Having made these two turns, Halévy moved on to the history of economic doctrines and to English radicalism, and left philosophy, though not ethics, behind; at least for him, the rest was history.

[46] Chase, *Elie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography*, 46. Thanks to Mary Gluck for pointing out the particularity of Halévy's choice of Bentham as a subject: a philosopher who was deeply engaged in contemporary social questions.