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1 From his apartment at 62 Saint Placide, Gabriel Tarde was at a mid-point between the two principal geographic poles of the Dreyfus Affair: the Military School and the Sorbonne. Like his contemporaries, he was a witness to that new crisis of the Third Republic that started as a judicial error and quickly became an ideological conflict and a political crisis. However, more than the event itself, which mobilized passions and deeply divided the French, the Dreyfus Affair was above all, an important part of Tarde’s thinking about the relationship between the press and public opinion. Indeed, between 1892 and 1899, Gabriel Tarde published four articles outlining the concepts of the crowd, the public and opinion—“Les crimes des foules” (The Crimes of Crowds), Archives d’Anthropologie Criminelle, 1892; “Foules et sectes au point de vue criminel” (Crowds and Sects in Criminal Terms), Revue des Deux Mondes, November 15, 1893; “Le public et la foule” (The Public and the Crowd), Revue de Paris, July 15 and August 1, 1898; “L’opinion et la conversation” (Opinion and Conversation), Revue de Paris, August 15 and September 1, 1899. The articles from 1893, 1898, and 1899 were re-published in his 1901 work L’opinion et la foule (Opinion and the Crowd). However, it is important to note that the first two articles—“The Crimes of Crowds” and “Crowds and Sects in Criminal Terms”—were accounts of research by a criminologist concerned with pathological crowds, and that the final two—“The Public and the Crowd”, “Opinion and Conversation”—were analyses of social events as made by a sociologist. Between 1893 and 1898 there was a rupture, or at least a turning point in Tarde’s perceptions of social phenomena relating to crowds—a turn from a penal to a sociological perspective.

2 From 1892, Gabriel Tarde began to apply his concept of “imitation” to “crowds” and “sects”. In an early article entitled “Les crimes des foules” (The Crimes of Crowds), he presented a still vague interpretation of “imitation” as a suggestion and of the crowd as
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a group physically gathered. In a second article, « Foules et sectes au point de vue criminel » (Crowds and Sects in Criminal Terms), he enlarged his view and range of the penal responsibility of collective offenses. He based this on several contemporary events such as the bakers’ crisis (1889), the Panama financial scandal (1892) and the anarchist attacks (Ravachol-March 11 and 27, 1892, Emile Henry- November 3, 1892). Tarde perceived the Dreyfus Affair as being part of a succession of tests of the Republic: he thus explained the rapid dissemination of the Affair and its influence on a capricious and malleable public opinion. The Dreyfus affair could not be completely understandable if the Panama affair had not preceded it (...) To explain the persistence of the public in its wild juxtaposition of ideas, its usual stupidity and credulity in relation to newspapers may suffice—but to account for the ease with which all of the supporters of Dreyfus (Dreyfisards) were imputed to be corrupt, how these imputations spread and took deep root, it must be understood that the terrain had been admirably prepared by the Panama affair, which gave the world the spectacle of parliamentary and other corruption that was anything but imaginary.

In light of these contemporary events, Gabriel Tarde distinguished between two forms of influence or social action: the crowd and its physical actions on the one hand, and the public and its actions at a distance, on the other—both entities being built on this elementary social rapport—the conversation—something quite neglected by sociologists. However, one has to wait for his 1898 and 1899 articles in order to see a clear and effective presentation of the concepts of imitation as interaction and the public as a physically dispersed group—the Dreyfus affair returning to the centre of all conversations and marking its impact on French public opinion in such a way was above all, for Tarde, a terrain for:

- comprehending the sentiments and emotions of the public as « crimes of crowds »;
- comprehending the « invention » processes of new objects of hatred by certain publicists and highlighting the emergence of public opinion through the dissemination of a newspaper;
- heralding « the era of the publics » and of modern public opinion;
- showing that the safeguards against such collective obsessions depended on the figure of the independent « intellectual ».

How did the Dreyfus affair lead to an evolution in Gabrielle Tarde’s intellectual approach from criminology to sociology, and the related shift from political abstention to engagement? More specifically, how did this crisis of the Third Republic act as a mirror between the introspective intuitions and experimental fieldwork that it provided Tarde with?

The Dreyfus affair marked a double displacement in the life of the man of thought that was Gabriel Tarde, as much from the point of view of his intellectual approach as his positioning in relation to the political and social questions of his time.

Firstly, the Dreyfus affair appears as a transformation from a penal perception to a sociological analysis of crowds. From « crowd » to « public » and « opinion », Gabriel Tarde saw the Dreyfus affair as a direct source of inspiration and conceptualization, as a fieldwork for experimenting on and validating his sociological theories. Indeed, we can establish a clear connection between the two articles by Tarde, « The Public and the Crowd » and « Opinion and Conversation », reprised in Opinion and the Crowd (1901), and the affair itself.
Secondly, the Dreyfus affair, was seen by Gabriel Tarde as a « violent crisis ». Although Tarde had probably never taken a definite public political position and although it is therefore difficult to find a tangible trace of it in his life and work, this new political crisis of the Third Republic, which threatened democracy, stimulated Tarde to adopt a position, to commit himself as a Dreyfus supporter, but also, more latently, as a Dreyfusist.

At the end of 1894, Captain (on the General Staff) Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew of Alsatian origin, was arrested and accused of espionage. In 1895 he was found guilty and condemned to deportation for life to Devil’s Island. The degradation of Captain Dreyfus, on the 5th of January, 1895, resulted in the headline « The Traitor » in the *Petit Journal* of the 13th of January. However, in 1896, his family succeeded in convincing some politicians and journalists of his innocence and the Affair exploded in 1897 when Col. Picquart, chief of intelligence, also became convinced of his innocence. The Affair then tore public opinion into two camps: on the one hand, the dreyfusards, intending to struggle for « justice and truth », and among them Clemenceau and his newspaper *L’Aurore*-they gathered around the « League of Human Rights » (June 1898); and on the other hand, the anti-dreyfusards, led by the anti-semitic Edouard Drumont and his newspaper *La Libre Parole*; they gathered around organizations such as the « League of the French Homeland » (December 1898). The decisive moment when public opinion was alerted to the Affair was with the January 13, 1898 publication, in the newspaper *L’Aurore*, of an open letter by Emile Zola entitled «j’accuse» (I accuse) which denounced the judicial error and demanded a review of the trial. Zola, found guilty and condemned in mid-July, escaped to London to avoid imprisonment. It was in the same week that Gabriel Tarde published his key article « The Public and the Crowd » in the *Revue de Paris*, after having proposed it to his director, Ernest Lavisse, in a letter dated the 3rd of May, 1898. The Affair took a new turn in June-July, 1899 when Zola returned to Paris and Dreyfus was returned from his exile to attend the retrial of his case by a second military tribunal. The following month, Tarde published his other article, *Opinion and Conversation*. It was not until September 1899 that Dreyfus was given a presidential pardon and freed after having been found guilty again in Rennes in August 1899.

The effects of the Affair on public opinion can historically be explained by several phenomena. Firstly, the public relied on the press, which, day after day, reviewed the development of the Affair and spread its own myths- and did so while inflaming passions. But the press was also the medium by which the Affair occurred. In addition, the main figures in the Affair were writers, « intellectuals »: the new figure of the committed intellectual created the Affair, engendered the struggle through the use of polemic, resisted institutions and power by means of the written word. The Affair therefore, represents an evolution in the history of democracy: it displaced decision making from the secrecy of ministries to a public forum: it established the power of opinion (assemblies, the press, local authorities) over traditional sources of power (elected leaders, the military, the judiciary).

The references in Tarde’s article *The Public and the Crowd* deserve closer study. There are two explicit references made to the Dreyfus Affair and two more directly related to Edouard Drumont and his antisemitism. A more analytical reading of this article can identify at least a dozen allusions made to the Affair.

For Tarde, every type of communication matches a corresponding type of sociability: to the traditional communication of mouth to ear-the crowd; to the modern communication...
by newspaper—the public. Each type of sociability has its own type of leader. Thus, the invention and dissemination of the newspaper introduces the idea of the « public ».

12 The public is a community that is intangible, a distribution of physically separated individuals with a cohesion that is purely mental12. The public is therefore the opposite of a crowd, which is like an animal herd in the sense that connectedness is based on physical contact and visibility. Thus, the « currents of opinion », these « social rivers », do not result from gatherings of individuals but rather from a simultaneity of conviction that is no less real: the newspaper is a bond between people sharing a common ideology; what gives it its strength is the awareness of each person that with the simultaneity of their conviction and passion, this idea or this will is shared, at the same time, by a large number of people14. Thus, the power of the news does not only rest on the events that have just occurred, but on what actually inspires a general interest (...) Throughout the Dreyfus Affair, there were events well worthy of our interest in Africa and Asia, but they appeared as if they had no newsworthiness. Passion for the news is a manifestation of sociability (...) One must not be surprised to see a type of association develop and strengthen among readers of the same newspaper, an association that is too little noticed yet very important15. And according to Tarde, it is this form of association—impersonal and of indefinite extension—that characterises the public. The emergence of the newspaper thus produces a transfer of thought at a distance16 and therefore implies some modifications in psychological reactivity: one can only belong to one crowd at a time; but we can, because of the distancing, belong to a plurality of publics whose weights counterbalance.

13 Taking the French Revolution as an example, Gabriel Tarde believed that the political strength of 1789 was in no way connected to « torrential », « rebellious », « seditious », « incendiary », and « murderous » crowds that were intrinsically limited (physically limited to voice and sight) and not innovative17, but rather, to what the past had not seen, this swarm of newspapers, eagerly devoured, that bloom in this day18. It was the space for debate produced by the revolutionary movement that created the political strength of 1789. The crowd, an outdated form of social expression and incapable of dissemination, naturally cedes its place to the public: the public is almost infinitely expandable and since, as it grows, its particular energy becomes more intense, it cannot be denied that it is the social group of the future19. From which arises the conclusion: I can not then agree with that solid writer, Dr. Le Bon, that ours is « the age of the crowd ». It is the age of the public, or the publics—and that is quite different20.

14 In order for a « public » to become criminal21, other elements must be taken into account. The public generally has as its instigator the journalist who produces a daily or weekly column. His action will be less intense than that of a leader facing a crowd, but by its continuity, it will exercise an influence that is greater and more durable: the readers see their beliefs and passions fanned by the same forge bellows on a daily basis22. He gives as an example, the anti-semitism aroused by the articles of the journalist Edouard Drumont. Do doubt, his articles corresponded to the diffuse ideas of a certain population (his public); but as long as no voice arose to give a common expression to this state of mind, such a state would remain purely individual, less intense, even less contagious. In expressing this state of mind, the journalist revealed the public as a collective will—caricatured, no doubt, yet nevertheless real23.

15 We can also add to this example of Tarde’s, that of the famous « I accuse » by Zola that had a vibrant effect on public opinion. According to the statements of Guillaume de Tarde as reported by Jaap van Ginneken, when Gabriel Tarde read Zola’s sensational
attack against the high command of the military in the newspaper L’Aurore, he exclaimed: *That’s extraordinary!* But in the case of Drumont, his journalistic activities were, according to Tarde, criminal. And the public itself can become a « criminal crowd » in certain circumstances (riots, attacks...).

16 These processes of « creating » new objects of hate by some journalists thus raised the issue of the responsibility of the press. *To those who doubt the harmful power of the press, one need only mention these two aberrations of average public opinion produced by journalism: French opinion during the Dreyfus affair; English opinion before and during the Transvaal [sic] war. Here, a great people has been persuaded that the Boërs [sic] are rebels and that the monstrous injustice committed against them is a just punishment; there, another great people sees black instead of white, day instead of night, in a criminal trial painful until the end²⁴.*

17 At the end of his study on the public and the crowd, Tarde concludes that individuals are always superior to publics and to crowds. *The danger for new democracies is the increasing difficulty for men of thought to avoid the obsession of the seductive agitation²⁵*. Tarde therefore relies on « intellectuals », and their will to resist, to « bear high culture always higher » and to struggle against « the destructive and levelling effects of democracy »²⁶. The Dreyfus affair crystalized the « intellectuals » as an autonomous group, as a lens to apprehend the social world and as a political category²⁷. Through petitions, subscriptions, leagues and associations, the engagement of the intellectual community thus illuminate a situation where the practices of knowledge impose a social responsibility and a political conscience.

18 The other article, entitled *Opinion and Conversation*, was published by Tarde in the August 1899 issue of *Revue de Paris* is also linked to the Dreyfus affair but the references are only indirect ones. In late August, 1899, Zola returned from his exile in England and Captain Dreyfus was again found guilty with extenuating circumstances, by the military tribunal of Rennes.

19 In his article, Gabriel Tarde presented and analysed the transformations that had occurred in conversation, from that of village gossips to that of literary and worldly salons during the Enlightenment, while highlighting the concomitant expansion of written correspondance and postal services. He believed that conversation could have a hypnotic effect²⁸, but in dialogue, there is an assumption of reciprocity, divergence, a possibility of changing the other’s opinion; that is why despots mistrust conversation²⁹.

20 As early as 1899, in his work entitled *The Transformations of Power*³⁰, Gabriel Tarde was concerned with public opinion in the context of the evolution of power: *the evolution of power is explained by the evolution of Opinion, which is, in turn, explained by the multiplicity of its different sources³¹*. For Tarde, power is not just the conceptual support of his sociological ideas applied to politics, but a sociological object in its own right, completely separate and distinguishable from all the others. Indeed, studying power comes to question the very texture of the social, and of the conditioning to which that society submits the individual: researching the « political domain » facilitates above all the study of the « social domain »³², for it is, writes Tarde, *the only one that matters in the end³³*. What primarily pre-occupied and inspired him was therefore society. The latter was seen as a partitioning and entangling of different « prestige » domains³⁴ based on the “belief”³⁵ that creates the relationship of power and in which the sociologist decodes the emergence, evolution, associations, and the conflicts that oppose them.
Gabriel Tarde highlighted the role the press has in shaping public opinion. According to him, in shaping public opinion, the newspaper finished the long age-old work that the conversation had begun, that correspondence had continued, but that was always in a rudimentary state, scattered and disjointed; the work of blending personal opinions in local opinions, from those in national and world opinion, the grand unification of the public spirit. Opinion, we declare, is a momentary, and more or less logical, cluster of judgements, that responding to actual problems, are multiplied in numerous people of the same country, the same time, the same society.

This emergence of public opinion profoundly changed the foundations and the nature of politics. It eliminated the conditions that made possible the absolute power of governments.

Indeed, it was helped very much by the fragmentation of local opinion. Universal suffrage and the omnipotence of parliamentary majorities have been made possible only by the prolonged and accumulated action of the press, a sine qua non of a great egalitarian democracy.

And this impact on politics was noted by Tarde even during the Dreyfus affair. According to him, the triumph of public opinion in favour of Dreyfus was the manifestation of the action of desires and beliefs, of the social logic as a dynamic free of all corporatist or social contingency: The Dreyfus affair allows for the study on a vast scale of the true connections between desires and beliefs, to see the reality, the enduring strength of their reciprocal influences, and, in spite of everything, their partial independence, which alone can explain the triumph of pro-Dreyfus (or anti-Dreyfus) public opinion in spite of the overwhelming majority coalition of parties that formed against it.

To say that Gabriel Tarde was absent during the debates surrounding the Dreyfus affair and that he took no position, now seems incorrect to us. His position was admittedly not at the heart of the conflict, but neither was he absent and even less was he indifferent. Regarding the question of whether Gabriel Tarde was pro or anti Dreyfus, it is important today, at this stage of our research, to answer this with nuance and precision. His silence about this question, so crucial to the time, may be surprising or at least curious.

The statements of his youngest son, Guillaume, shows him as fervently pro Dreyfus. However, one century later, the memory of a famous father is possibly biased and particularly at the brink of an anachronistic reading of the Dreyfus affair, it is obviously politically correct to be seen as pro Dreyfus. Nevertheless, this testimony should not be totally discredited, but rather be put into perspective and compared to other documents, such as Tarde’s working papers and correspondence. Indeed, after studying his few scattered thoughts on the Dreyfus affair, it seems to us that Gabriel Tarde favoured the supporters of Dreyfus not out of any political or ideological adherance, but because of a rejection of sectarian anti-semitic thought: There is no conception more odious or stupid than that which can find its way into the mind of crowds blinded by anti-semitic passion. The thinker who believes in « sympathy », in « difference » and in « universal harmony » cannot conceive of a thought based on the biological determinism to which he was always opposed, since his debates with Lombroso on the born criminal and social darwinism.

The publication of two articles referring to the Dreyfus affair - The Public and the Crowd, Opinion and Conversation - in the Revue de Paris as well as the correspondence of Gabriel Tarde with Ernest Lavisse confirms the hypothesis that his position towards Dreyfus was positive. To be more precise, we base our hypothesis on the fundamental distinctions of
Tarde’s contemporaries that define three identifiable forms of positive commitment to Dreyfus: the dreyfusards, the dreyfusists, and the dreyfusians.

- The dreyfusards comprised the group of defenders that was committed, between 1896 and 1899, to publicly recreating the circumstances of the trial of 1894 in order to prove the treason of justice and the innocence of Dreyfus.

- The dreyfusists perceive the Dreyfus affair as a means of explaining society, as a referential event to create a new politics, as a principle for the formation of an ideal society.

- Finally, the dreyfusians, who did not appear until the moment when, in December, 1898, the clash between the dreyfusards, dreyfusists and nationalists became so intense that it threatened the parliamentary system and the interests of the republic’s elites. In defending Dreyfus, they were only trying the end the affair in order to return to normalcy (...). This powerful conservative force was publicly revealed in the « Appel à l’Union » (Appeal to Unity) of 1899.

The « Appeal to Unity », Gabriel Tarde the Dreyfusian

According to this typology of positive commitment to Dreyfus, Gabriel Tarde clearly seems to be a dreyfusian. In fact, in a letter dated December 6, 1898, Tarde asked Ernest Lavisse to add him to a list of signatories to an « Appeal to the Union », to be delivered to the Court of Cassation (Supreme Court) in the trial of Lieutenant-Colonel Picquart:

Dear Sir,

If, as I think, you are publishing a follow-up to the list of your committed supporters in the Picquart affair, I would be grateful if you could include my name. I would have written to you sooner if I had not thought, learning of the application for settlement judge, that you had abandoned your commitment. You have, however, done well in continuing to be forthcoming. Your writing has the advantage of being conceived in such terms that do not produce an effect that is directly contrary to the aim pursued— which could well be the fate of other writings, as justified as they may be.

Please accept the renewed assurance of my highest regard;

G. Tarde
Professor at the School of Political Science
Paris, December 6, 1898.

Please do not mention my official title of Chief of Statistics at the Ministry of Justice.

On January 24, 1899, the newspaper Le Temp, a fairly dreyfusard newspaper known for its objectivity, published an Appeal to Unity proposing to its signatories that they abide by the future decision of the Court of Cassation (Supreme Court). In the context of the tension and struggles between the different leagues—The League of Human Rights, The League of the French Homeland—in affirming that Justice and the Army were not in mutual opposition, this Appeal was a demonstration in favour of respect for legality. It asked the French to work towards « reconciliation and healing ». Since it was impossible to be launched by a politician, it was incumbent upon accepted public personalities and those « esteemed by all the parties » to proclaim it. The initiators of the project are mostly members of the Institute: Ernest Lavisse, Gaston Paris, Joseph Bertrand, Sully Prudhomme, Paul Janet, Alfred Croiset... In the days that followed, numerous personalities joined the succession of lists that were published in Le Temps and the Petit Temps between January 24 and February 9, 1899. Gabriel Tarde’s was mentioned in the February 1, 1899 edition of Le Temps alongside Alfred Espinas. By signing this « Appeal » and by rallying in this way to the dreyfusians, Tarde seems to have taken a position at that time on the Dreyfus affair.
The miscarriage of justice and falsifications of evidence probably troubled his judge's conscience, for it was on the field of justice that Tarde was commenting, although he did not want to be seen acting here in his « official title of Chief Statistician for the Ministry of Justice ». An important clarifier that might partially explain Tarde's silence during the Affair: his status as a highly placed bureaucrat in the Ministry of Justice probably encouraged him to choose a reserved attitude while the Dreyfus affair was quickly becoming a crisis able to destabilize the existing political order. But more than his professional status, it was, above all, Tarde's belief in the duty of the intellectual elite towards democracy that justified his lack of engagement in the Dreyfus affair and more generally in politics: Mr. Gabriel Tarde, who was one of the great minds, one of the lucid intelligences of this period, did not accept that « the thinkers and men of letters had the duty to waste their time in active and real politics, rather than in elaborating ideas that might allow future policies to guide their progress »49. However, Tarde continues: according to me, there is no exception to this rule of political abstention that I would impose upon a thinking man, except at times of violent crisis where the duties are imposed upon every citizen to leave his workshop and take to the streets50. The Dreyfus affair is thus perceived as « a violent crisis » by Tarde. Therefore, it is as a citizen that he is committed to a script of reconciliation in order to defend the democratic system and struggle against the risk that the body politic might be torn. Haunted by the episode of the revolutionary Commune51, Gabriel Tarde probably feared the repetition of such events. The awareness of civic duty brings him out of his silence in order to engage against the anti-dreyfusard crisis and indirectly denounce the League of the French Homeland, that had just been created, for its policy of national division. Gabriel Tarde thus appeared as part of a liberal current, a genuine intellectual establishment in favour of the review of the trial of 189452.

For Tarde, the Appeal to Unity was a chance for a minimal commitment for the « undercover dreyfusards » (according to a an expression attributed to Lavisse) openly incapable of taking the step of joining the League of Human Rights (Gaston Paris) or taking a political decision to refuse all contact with the socialists (Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu)53. We can see this discreet commitment thanks to the correspondence between Tarde and Lavisse that puts into good perspective the relationship between the private and public spheres in the realization of such an event. The correspondence of Ernest Lavisse at the National Library very richly reveals the crystallization of the dreyfusian commitment. Rejecting the alliance of the League of the French Homeland, but choosing prudence by virtue of his social milieu and his professional position, the « Appeal to Unity » is a compromise for Gabriel Tarde whose commitment thus converges towards an alliance with the dreyfusards in the resistance to nationalism and anti-semitism.

We may also propose the hypothesis that Gabriel Tarde was a « dreyfusist » since both his articles that we have placed in perspective through the Dreyfus affair in the first part of this article and his unedited notes are driven by an effort to analyse the Affair. Indeed, Tarde initially wanted to develop a more extensive analysis of the Dreyfus affair: I had gathered documents in order to make a study of the Dreyfus affair, once its conclusion had been reached. But once closed, it was impossible for me to re-enter the Affair. I said that this evening to Mr. Paléologue54, who made this very correct observation: although it showed mediocrity of mind and spirit not to take a passionate interest in this affair for as long as it lasted, one must be mentally and morally crippled to continue now to take an interest in it. It seems as though, since the close of this affair, the nation's elite has awakened from a bad dream, or rather suddenly come out of a long bout of madness of which it is still painful to think, as it would be for a man who has
left a psychiatric ward to remember his stay there. Too sensitive a topic, the Affair inspired Tarde theoretically more than it became an empirical topic of research for him. Tarde’s withdrawn position can also be seen as that of a sociologist analyzing different social manifestations, that of the observer of the social.

Tarde’s analyses of opinion and the public were stimulated, articulated and validated in light of the Dreyfus affair but never explicitly presented as such. Thus, not formulated during the Affair, they could still not be after its denouement. So, Tarde as dreyfusian, certainly; Tarde as dreyfusist, probably, from the fact of his sociologist’s approach in analyzing a social fact, but not as committed as some of his contemporaries.

In his work, *Opinion and the Crowd*, Gabriel Tarde developed his concepts of « opinion », of « public » but also of « leader » and of « medias » and posed a clearly formulated question: from the Revolution until the Commune, what were the chances of seeing established in France a democracy that maintained the social order? In response, Gabriel Tarde pleaded for a « democracy of publics » that the press, and more generally the media, make and re-make according to newsworthy issues; that is to say, a multitude of publics formed around a hierarchy of leaders-administrations, political parties...ranked up unto the highest judicial functions. In fact, the democracy of publics acknowledges a fragmented nation, with each part following its own traditions and resting upon the consensus of individuals. The stranglehold on the media and the possession of the talents necessary to use them became one of the issues of political struggle—thus, the development of the leader who could organize and control his publics in order to have a decisive influence upon public opinion.

To broaden our perspective, it seems important to clarify the sociological relevance and political impact of the concept of opinion within a democracy.

First, Gabriel Tarde rehabilitates opinion by according it a prominent place in sociological thought. For him, opinion exists in itself as a fluctuating aggregate, fickle and changeable—different from weighty social determinants such as the concept of class. Therefore, opinion implies a freedom and a vitality that is immanent to individuals who can express their opinions, rectify them, change them based on their desires and beliefs. The political consequences are therefore clear: Tarde chose—consciously or not—a conception of democracy as a liberalism that is opposed to marxist conceptions of belonging to social classes and of a general will that is superior to that of the individual, in other words, that the total is different from the sum of its parts. Opinion should not therefore be considered as a misrepresentation or accorded a lower explanatory status because its variable nature adapts itself to the play of social forces; because it exists as such and represents a social and political phenomenon that must be taken into account, opinion has its own legitimacy and one equal to other realities of social life. Finally, the political relevance of this theory of public opinion appears to be considerable. In the context of the 1900’s, which were marked by the rise of socialism and of modern political parties—the Radical Party was founded in 1901—the concept of opinion completely delegitimized the party of emerging classes. For Tarde, the equilibrium of parties and the government of one party is a deceptive peace: the real government, he writes, is the opinion of the group of leaders or of the group of military or civilian terrorists. This is why Tarde rejects both state socialism and the idea of a class oriented party that subordinates everything by subjugating the individual to the group. As well, he rejects the idea of « republican party » for it tends to segment the political field according to a collective legitimacy deriving from the Revolution of 1789. The Republican party, in presenting
itself as the sole inheritor of the republican tradition of 1789, favoured an opposition of
two Frances and does not leave any place for the national opinion—and it is not a
coincidence that a new journal created in 1907 by young intellectuals of the right is
titled L’Opinion.

In June 1899, allowing his thoughts to run free, Gabriel Tarde had this reflection: in the
middle of such a profound anarchy in government, I walk through Paris turned upside
down by the Métropolitain’s construction and I admired the order, the precision, the
marvellous coordination of the workers…and I ask myself how a people so easy to
organize industrially could be so politically un governable. Let us allow Tarde, the
eternal optimist, to answer himself by proceeding to an inversion of Leiniz’ system: a
harmony of interests, a harmony of powers—is not a dream. These things do not grow in
agreement but they become so…and this universal tendency towards order, this universal
harmonization is something much more significant and re-assuring that an innate
harmony would be.

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Odile Jacob.


NOTES

1. This article was translated by Uri Bne-Gal.

2. On Gabriel Tarde, see the classical works of Miletus, 1970; Joseph, 1984; Mucchielli, 1998. See also the conference proceedings on Tarde of the AFC at Agen in September 2004, put online July 3, 2005, http://champpenal.revues.org/. Lastly, the works of Gabriel Tarde have been re-edited at Empêcheurs de penser en rond since 1999 under the direction of Eric Alliez.

3. We have relied here on the precursor work of Jaap Van Ginneken, 1985, 1989.

4. “Sects are the fermenters of crowds. All that a crowd accomplishes that is serious, grave, for good as for bad, is inspired by an organized group.” Tarde 1989, 164.


7. The existence of a connection between the writings of Tarde and the Dreyfus affair was established by Guillaume de Tarde in an interview with Jaap Van Ginneken. Van Ginneken interviewed Guillaume de Tarde about his father in Paris on November 18, 1981. He cites this in his paper at the conference of The International Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences, Paris, September 1985.

8. “It immediately distinguished itself by its republican orientation, so identified by the presence in its editorial secretariat of Lucien Herr and Fernand Gregh who tried without success to persuade Lavisse to commit to the dreyfusard fight. The journal, however, only belatedly espoused the cause of Captain Dreyfus”. Julliard, Winock (dir.), 2002.

9. Ernest Lavisse (1842-1922). Historian and professor at the Sorbonne. Long reserved with regard to the republic, he remained a moderate. More of a dreyfusian than a dreyfusard, he above all wanted to limit the damage to the nation, and argued for
“reconciliation and appeasement” in rejecting the opposition between justice and the army. At that time his prestige and power reached their highest point. Entering the Académie Française in 1893, editor in chief of the Revue de Paris since 1894, he advised Louis Liard with regard to the reform of the universities in 1896. Julliard, Winock (dir.), 2002.

10. “Dear Sir, I accept with gratitude the article that you kindly sent us. It might be a bit long for an article, and it could not be cut in two, but I dare not choose among the possible deletions. Perhaps the beginning could be tightened: I will let you judge. I hope you will agree. I assure you my highest regards. E. Lavisse”. Correspondance of Gabriel Tarde. Gabriel Tarde Fund. CHEVS, GTA 89.

11. For an analysis of L’opinion et la foule of Gabriel Tarde see also Reynié, 1989, 7-28; Moscovici, 1981.

12. Tarde, 1989, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17 and pp. 52, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61.

13. Tarde, 1989, 29. Or else, a dispersed crowd, where the influence of minds, the ones upon the others has become an action at a distance, at distances that are greater and greater, 30.


15. Ibid., 33-34.

16. Ibid., 35.

17. Impressed by the descriptions that historians like Taine and Michelet were able to make of movements and collective revolts, Gabriel Tarde became interested in the criminogenic powers of the crowd: he demonstrated how it generates violent and criminal actions by a process of contagion.


19. Ibid., 38.


21. For Tarde, some associations are “born criminal” if they were shaped from their beginnings to commit crimes. However, others are only “occasional criminals”, in other words, they were created for a noble purpose, but one that was later perverted.


23. Ibid., 40-41.

24. Handwritten notes of March 1900. « About the Affair, April 1899 » Gabriel Tarde Fund. CHEVS, GTA 22.


28. Familiar with the writings of Bernheim and Charcot-particularly through his friend Joseph Delboeuf, Gabriel Tarde established a connection between his theory of imitation and hypnosis, and tried to apply them to sociology: society is imitation and imitation is a form of sleepwalking (…) the social state, like the state of hypnosis, is nothing but a type of dream, a dream of control and a dream of action. To only have ideas suggested by others and spontaneous beliefs: such is the illusion that is natural to the sleep walker as well as the social person, 1895 second edition [1890], 72-73. In his study of social relationships, Tarde emphasized the role of consciousness and inter-human psychological
relationships. From sociology to interpsychology, Tarde highlights and formulates a science of relationships between consciousnesses, a science that had as its object the interactions between the different faculties of consciousness, as well as those between consciousnesses. For more precision, see his posthumous article entitled “L’interpsychologie” 1904a.

29. Indeed, the voice that must be heard above all- is the voice of the leadership- it orders, warns, condemns...then it is copied, it is then the voice of the follower which approves, flatters, repeats. In removing the conversation and therefore the meetings, opinions therefore seem to be uniform, and therefore the protests are stifled.


32. Knowing that for Tarde, power is based on obedience- power is, finally, nothing more than the privilege of making yourself obeyed (Les Transformations du pouvoir, 2003, 59)- obeying someone is lending that person a power and then believing in that power. Just as imitation is a form of obedience, the social realm is also very much a realm of power (Ibid., 154sqq.).


34. Prestige comes from the relationship of obedience based on the attribution and a belief in the power held as such.

35. Let us recall that for Tarde, the ideas of “beliefs” and of “desires” are fundamental. Desires and beliefs animate the social, they are the engines of perpetual motion between repetition (imitation) and differentiation (opposition). All power is granted by desire and belief, and to govern is to manipulate beliefs and desires. To make political power more intelligible Tarde goes back to the family where he locates the formation of a certain emotional system—“pleasure at and desire to be protected and directed”. This dual need is satisfied in the related habit of obeying and imitating.


37. Ibid., 76.

38. Ibid., 78.

39. Ibid., 83.

40. Handwritten notes of July 1899. « About the Affair, April 1899 ». Gabriel Tarde Fund. CHEVS, GTA 22.

41. Tarde, 1884.

42. Duclert, 1994, 82-84.

43. Ibid., 82.

44. Ibid., 83.

45. Ibid., 83.

46. BNF - 321 - Text of the appeal to unity, “Appeal to Unity”. The undersigned agree upon the following declarations: the current crisis cannot continue without putting France at risk; it was sought to give the conflict the character of an opposition between Justice and the Army; it is important to make it understood to all French people that this opposition has no reason to exist; the judgements of the Court of Cassation, the highest court in the land, must be accepted immediately and without reserve: otherwise there would be neither law nor justice in France; it is an essential principle of our national
constitution that all French people are equal before the law; any advantage or exclusion that benefits or injures a French person is an attack upon the unity of the homeland; a strong army, disciplined, respected, subject to the law, is necessary to France for the defense of its territory and its rights and for the safeguarding of justice itself. To contest this principle is to offend the most profound and legitimate sentiments of the country and place France in danger; the great civic duty of the moment is to work to reconcile France with itself in liberty, equality and fraternity”.


49. Gabriel Tarde’s reply to the question submitted by the Revue Bleue on the duty of the intellectual elite towards democracy. Revue Bleue, 21, 28, 4 June 1904, 220. Heartfelt thanks to Laurence Saquer who informed me of this quotation which has the great merit of explaining the absence of a clearly affirmed political commitment on the part of Tarde.

50. Revue Bleue, 1904.

51. “And everyone was screaming: Long Live the Commune! Long Live the Commune!-And I saw that they were walking a large red flag, freshly died [sic], and of the most beautiful imperial red-on the steeple, on the Palace of Justice, the red flag also fluttered. I understood then why the devil is painted completely red, and why boiled crayfish are also red, the same with harlequins. There was a time when the cries increased, when the music began to play: “The day of glory has arrived”. So then the bayonets began to stir, the swords lengthened as made of rubber, unfortunate defamed Jesuits lit up some more, and the cries of: “down with the Chouans” made a noise like the cawing of a committee of crows tearing up a field of corn”. Between absurd dream and satirical story, these words highlight the uncontrollable nature and the violence of revolutionary crowds. The references to both the Revolution of 1789 and the commune reveal the perception filter and Gabriel Tarde’s dread of crowds disturbing order, destabilizing the existing power and being the germ of civil war. Un cauchemar politique, manuscript of Gabriel Tarde. Gabriel Tarde Fund, CHEVS.

52. Duclert, 1994, 82-84.

53. Ibid., 83.

54. Maurice Paléologue, Ambassador Secretary and responsible for “Reserved Affairs” at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Dreyfus affair.


56. Other “scholars” such as Bernard Lazare, Gabriel Monod, Emile Duclaux, Albert Reville, Michel Breal... have thought about the reasons for the anti-semitic and nationalist violence, trying to understand the reactions of society and the government and at the same time following the gradual revelation of the illegalities of the trial of 1894. Duclert, 1994, 86.

57. On Tarde as a thinker about opinion, see Reynie, 1989.


60. A partisan of the values of 1789, such as the recognition and celebration of individual freedom-and certainly also the universality of those values- Tarde believed that state socialism betrayed the principles of the French Revolution: our state socialism opposes the individualism that inspired the principles of 89. However, to speak truthfully, the term used for this socialism and this individualism, is rationalism. Our fathers of 89 had, above all, reasoned and reasoned on the facts, as we do. They had faith in logic, like us, but it was a social logic, and thus I
mean the static and the dynamic of convictions, currents of opinion in a competition in a nation, we in an isolated brain, which is the rule. They take as a guide the logic that is simply individual. (...) The abasement of France has helped to discredit the principles of the revolution, in Working Papers from April 1889. « Implementation of My Ideas in Politics, 1899 ». Gabriel Tarde Fund. CHEVS GTA 22-23.


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