

An unpublished introduction to **Un ethnologue à la guerre. Lettres de Robert Hertz à sa femme Alice (août 1914-avril 1915)**, Alexander Riley and Philippe Besnard (eds.), Paris: Éditions CNRS, 2002

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Upon reading the letters of Robert Hertz from the front in the wake of Hertz's death there in April 1915, Emile Durkheim, Hertz's mentor and one of the great intellectual figures of the twentieth century, wrote to his nephew Marcel Mauss: "Il y a dans ces lettres, avec beaucoup de noblesse, une hauteur d'âme exceptionnelle, un état d'esprit singulier dont nous parlerons un jour."¹ Indeed, Durkheim, Mauss and the other members of the *Année sociologique* team around them were powerfully affected by Hertz's demise at the tender age of 34, as they recognized in him a developing dominant figure in the intellectual scene of the early twentieth century. Yet Durkheim's comments hint at something deeper about the character and the place of Hertz in French intellectual history, something which had to do with his lived enactment of his intellectual identity and the way in which he struggled with the central questions facing French culture and society at this crucial moment in both his life and his work. The evidence of this is ultimately contained in the correspondence itself, but a brief introduction to Hertz's work and life will help make clearer the fuller import of Durkheim's remarks.

Hertz's intellectual work: a 'negative' Durkheimian?

Hertz's brief life began in the Parisian suburb of Saint-Cloud, on June 22, 1881, and ended not quite 34 years later, on April 13, 1915, during a failed attack on a German artillery line at Marchéville in the plain of la Woëvre. The period of his adult intellectual productivity was still more brief, spanning less than seven years from the publication of his first study ("Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort") to his departure for the front in August 1914. By the latter date, however, he was arguably on the way to becoming an important figure in the academic milieu, owing in part to his increasing influence on the *Année sociologique* as one of Durkheim's key collaborators. A normalien and philosopher by training, Hertz demonstrated early a great interest in a body of research questions and problems which fell within the purview of the radically new intellectual field known as the sociology of knowledge. Hertz considered of primary importance questions concerning the philosophy and genealogy of morality, the structure and development of human perception and the fundamental categories of the human mind, and the biological and social bases of reason and its limits. Previously, of course, these questions had been approachable only through purely speculative, that is, philosophical methods. Hertz and other young sociological thinkers linked to Durkheim sought to bring new tools to bear in the investigation of these ancient questions.

At the turn of the century, Durkheimian sociology presented itself as a promising and empirically rigorous new method for investigating such philosophical questions, and Hertz became interested in it from his first encounter with Durkheim as a student at the École Normale Supérieure between 1900 and 1904. Durkheim, who was the occupant of a chair at the Sorbonne beginning in 1902, was just as convinced as Hertz of the

¹Emile Durkheim to Marcel Mauss, April or May 1915, in *Lettres à Marcel Mauss*, edited by Philippe Besnard and Marcel Fournier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), p. 455.

necessity of a fuller and more scientific understanding of moral institutions and practices, as they were, in his view, the key to explaining the functioning of human societies. He went so far as to argue that all moral and epistemological questions were at bottom only sociological questions and that their solutions could be found only by reference to collective phenomena. His celebrated theory of "faits sociaux" was the means of expressing this notion of causal entities which emerge from collective life and which are not reducible to psychological or individual elements.

For the epoch, this was a revolutionary position. More, the work of the Durkheimian team pointed toward religion as the source of all forms and manners of thought by which men, even those in modern secular societies, formulate collectively their systems of belief and knowledge. This position, which indicated a clear research agenda for the new discipline of sociology, was in conflict with that of many other early sociological thinkers who saw society as essentially directed by material and economic, rather than ideal, forces. Durkheim explicitly directed his own work and that of his closest collaborators, including his nephew Marcel Mauss, to the systematic examination of religious facts with a view toward attempting to explain the origins and history of contemporary moral ideas and practices. Hertz likely had the impression on encountering the Durkheimians that he'd stumbled upon a group with precisely the same intellectual spirit as his own.

The scholarly work for which Hertz is best known, as well as his unfinished thesis, deals with themes the Durkheimian group considered essential.² Rituals and interdictions surrounding death, which Hertz examined in "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort," are the means by which the collective conscience of a society represents itself to that society. In expelling the dead and aiding their transition into the invisible society of ancestors, society affirms its own integrality. In "La Prééminence de la main droite", Hertz shows how, in the near universal preference for the right hand over the left, human societies reaffirm in a more diffuse manner the most ancient of binary conceptual oppositions, that of the sacred and the profane. Hertz discerned in practices of sin and repentance yet another mechanism by which society affirms its collective identity by the establishment of a moral code and a system of punishments, then by the reintegration into society of transgressors, always with reference to that fundamental epistemological binary of the sacred and the profane. Hertz' entire oeuvre can be considered as an attempt to unveil, via the means of an investigation of the structures of religious and moral thought, the very sources of the categories of human thought in general.

An important point distinguished Hertz's treatment of these topics from that of many of the other members of the Durkheimian team. While Durkheim, Mauss and others were interested mainly in examining the social mechanisms by which societies succeeded in integrating members and assuring moral solidarity, Hertz turned toward the ways in which social solidarity *fails* and studied the moments in social life which most explicitly indicate the precarious status of social integration and the marginal spaces in which one can find the unhappy individuals whom society has not succeeded in encircling in its

²The main published works were assembled in one volume, *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et folklore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France) in 1927 (reissued in 1970 with preface by Georges Balandier) by Mauss, in conformity with the wishes of Hertz's wife. Mauss also published the fragment of Hertz's thesis which he'd finished before his death in 1922 ("Le Péché et l'expiation dans les sociétés primitives," in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 86, pp. 5-54; reissued with introduction by Jean Jamin in 1988).

moral edifice.³ Thus, he was interested in death and sin as brutal and dangerous ruptures in the social body which show why social life must be understood in a quasi-dialectical fashion. That is, it must be understood that a 'positive' symbol or state (the right hand, for example, or social integration generally) cannot exist except in intimate relation to an opposed and 'negative' symbol or state (e.g., the left hand, social disintegration).⁴ Even in his monograph on the cult of Saint Besse which he had discovered in an Alpine region of Italy near the French border, Hertz was interested not only in the aspects of integration provided by the cult but also in the disunifying and sometimes even violent aspects of the cult wherein the community of celebrants was torn into warring factions, often to the point of actual fighting and murder between groups, by contradictory rituals or mythologies of the saint's life.⁵ In this interest in the means which prevent societies from holding themselves together and in moments wherein institutions and representations intended to ensure the adhesion and participation of individuals fail, Hertz perhaps wanted to demonstrate a theoretical necessity of sociological thought. That is, no definition of any social entity can be complete without a profound and complete knowledge of its negation and therefore a deep understanding of the functioning of the social bond demands a precise understanding of just what happens when that bond fails.

'Scientific socialism'...yet with religious overtones?: Hertz's complex effort to construct and live a Durkheimian secular morality

As essential as it is, Hertz's scholarly work was but one part of his contribution to the history of French intellectuals. His research concerns were, like those of many of his Durkheimian comrades, explicitly linked to political instincts and interests. Hertz in fact saw his work as an intellectual as at least in part a response, or rather the preliminary foundation of a response, to political problems of injustice and inequality. Durkheim noted that Hertz

comprit vite qu'on ne peut les [i.e., problèmes économiques] aborder utilement si l'on ne commence par étudier la nature psychologique de l'homme en société, la manière dont se forment et se développent les idées qui le menent, croyances religieuses et morales, conceptions juridiques, etc.⁶

Hertz's political perspective was, again like that of many of his Durkheimian fellows, resolutely socialist. As a very young man, he had become acquainted with the peculiar socialism of the English Fabian Society through his friendship with F. Lawson Dodd, a Fabian and a friend of the Society's founders, Sidney and Beatrice Webb.⁷ A long

³See Mauss's introduction to Hertz's thesis, *Le Péché et l'expiation dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Michel Place, 1988), p. 2-3.

⁴The celebrated (for some, scandalous) statement by Durkheim on crime (that is, that a certain level of criminal activity is necessary in any society and this should be considered an aspect of societal good health) touches on the same principle (Emile Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, 20th edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981)).

⁵Robert Hertz, *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et folklore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 121-6.

⁶Emile Durkheim, *Textes*, edited by Victor Karady, vol. 2. (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975), p. 440.

⁷We know almost precisely the moment of Hertz's socialist "conversion" from a letter he wrote to Dodd, dated 14 December 1899, wherein Hertz states: "Je vais vous dire franchement une chose qui peut-être ne

exchange of political ideas with Dodd led to Hertz's transformation from a radically individualist position to a socialist one by the age of 18. The Fabian Society's political program had much in common with the brand of socialism typical of the Durkheimians. Radically opposed to the revolutionary politics of the Marxists, anarchists and some syndicalists, it foresaw rather a peaceful and evolutionary movement toward socialism that would make use of the existing parliamentary and economic systems to bring about the transition to socialism. More, both the Fabians and the Durkheimians saw the intellectual class as a key participant in the creation of a socialist society. In fact, the intellectual contribution to the socialist future called for the refusal of the traditionally isolationist and elitist intellectual identity and the fusing of intellectual and political identities into one, all as part of the effort to make science and politics merge into a new secular public morality.

Inspired by the model of the Fabian Society, Hertz created the Groupe d'Études Socialistes in 1908. This group was a sort of socialist think tank designed to establish concrete bonds with the socialist world outside the university and above all to avoid the excessive abstraction and non-involvement of much of the intellectual socialism of the period. In a manifesto of the group dating from 1911, Hertz wrote:

Même s'il s'interdit scrupuleusement des initiatives pour lesquelles il n'est pas qualifié, il reste encore à notre Groupe une belle besogne à accomplir. Essayer de formuler, à propos des problèmes particuliers que pose l'action, une doctrine à la fois forme et souple, qui puisse, dans la débâcle des idées démocratiques, rallier les esprits encore soucieux de pensée organique et de construction sociale; fortifier chez les socialistes, après tant de formules creuses et de <<mythes>> décevants, le goût de la recherche méthodique et de l'effort fécond; établir ou maintenir la liaison entre les militants, les techniciens et les intellectuels; voilà la triple tâche que notre Groupe s'est assignée dès le début et qu'il cherche à remplir non seulement par ses publications, mais par le milieu même qu'il constitue. Il dépend de chacun de nous de lui donner la force qui lui permettra, un jour prochain, d'exercer sur l'opinion une action vraiment efficace.⁸

The group attracted numerous notable members of the Durkheimian team, including Mauss, Maurice Halbwachs, François Simiand and the brothers Bourgin. Hertz was its secretary (and essentially its director) until the beginning of the war. In that same year of 1908, Hertz created the *Cahiers du Socialiste*, a forum for publication of the issue papers presented at meetings of the Groupe d'Études Socialistes. This too was intended as a

vous surprénda pas beaucoup (je n'y mets aucune fausse honte): je deviens du jour en jour plus socialiste en sorte que quand vous viendrez à Paris, ce qui sera bientôt n'est-ce pas?, nous pourrons parler non plus en adversaires, mais en coreligionnaires, et ayant en vue les mêmes espérançes, discuter non plus sur les fins mais sur les moyens de réaliser l'idéal socialiste." (unpublished letter, Fonds Robert Hertz (FRH hereafter)). In his earliest exchanges with Dodd, Hertz recognized the common points of the socialist program and that of the "progressistes individualistes" like himself, but he rejected the extreme collectivism of the former. Hertz also knew Sidney Webb and in fact translated two of his works on socialism ("La base nécessaire de l'organisation sociale" and "Examen de la doctrine socialiste"), although only the second of these was actually published (in the *Cahiers du Socialiste 14-15*, 1912).

⁸From the minutes of a meeting of the Groupe d'études socialistes, undated (FRH).

means to avoid intellectual socialist 'ivory towerism' in furnishing to socialist political parties and trade unions theoretical information which could be utilized practically. Mauss, himself a well-known and engaged figure in socialist circles, recognized Hertz as the prime organizational figure in these activities in speaking of the network of individuals associated with them as the "groupe Robert Hertz."⁹

Hertz launched himself into political activity with the same ardor which marked his intellectual work. Beyond his organizational contributions to these various groups, he wrote and gave conference papers on theoretical and practical problems which menaced the socialist movement and the nation. His study on the dip in French birth rates (*Socialisme et Dépopulation*, published in the *Cahiers du Socialiste* in 1910) and his translation in 1912 of Sidney Webb's seminal essay, *What Syndicalism Means (Examen de la doctrine syndicaliste)*, in which Webb defined the goals and means of the Fabian movement, contributed to reflection on pressing political problems. He busily attended socialist conferences and gave papers on socialist topics, both in France and in England, throughout the entirety of his adult life.

The peculiarities of Hertz's socialism, and its intersection with his intellectual interests in religious topics, merit further explication. Christophe Prochasson has identified a particularly French kind of intellectual socialism which blends socialist politics with a radical rationalism that takes science as the only form of true knowledge, tracing its history back from Durkheim through Comte to Saint-Simon.¹⁰ Nearly all the members of the Durkheimian group fit neatly into this category, and Hertz too at first glance would seem to fit neatly into this lineage. Yet, though some of the letters published herein do lend support to the notion of Hertz as a clear "scientific socialist,"¹¹ there are numerous other indications of something rather more complex. In fact, it is perhaps not going too far to argue that Hertz's socialism, like his engagement in the war, had something of a non-rationalist and even quasi-religious character to it. He was devoted to an idea of the socialist project in which being a socialist is as much a pure question of faith and courage, of total engagement in the face of grave adversity, or in his words an affinity for a certain "mysticisme de la foule,"¹² as it is a purely scientific question of evolutionary and rational progress. In these letters, he uses explicitly religious terminology in indicating that his socialism sprang from a "nostalgie de la cathédrale absente,"¹³ and there are lengthy passages in these letters in which he describes the religious practices of his Catholic comrades with a sympathetic tenderness, going so far in one case as to write that only the socialists and the Catholics among the soldiers really understand why they are fighting.¹⁴

⁹Mauss, *Ecrits politiques*, edited by Marcel Fournier (Paris: Fayard, 1997), pp. 466, 755.

¹⁰Christophe Prochasson, *Les intellectuels et le socialisme, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1997), pp. 41-44, 71-90.

¹¹See for example the letter dated 3 November 1914.

¹²Hertz describes his socialism with this phrase in a letter to his friend and ENS colleague Pierre Roussel, dated 11 February 1906. See "The Intellectual and Political Project of Robert Hertz: The Making of a Peculiar Durkheimian Intellectual, as Seen Through Selected Correspondence with Pierre Roussel," edited by Alexander Tristan Riley (*Durkheimian Studies/Études durkheimiennes*, forthcoming).

¹³Letter of 1 March 1915.

¹⁴Letter of 1 January 1915. Hertz's sympathies for orthodox Catholicism are evident in pre-war correspondence as well, as we can see in a letter to his English friend Dodd dating from 2 July 1911 (FRH):

"I think more and more that if one has to be religious, it is better

In reading Hertz as he speaks of his socialist faith, it is in fact not difficult to think of the socialist mysticism of Charles Péguy, who was considered "un fou dangereux"¹⁵ by Mauss and many other more purely scientific socialists but whose death in battle Hertz describes herein in awed, devotional language: "Sa fin justifie toute sa vie et la sacre."¹⁶ If these claims seem too radical, it is perhaps wise to recall that even Lucien Herr, for some the very archetype of the scientific socialist intellectual in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, was described in more complicated terms by his closest friend as a kind of "mystique laïque."¹⁷ It is in any event scarcely a diminution of the seriousness and even the rationality of Hertz's position to indicate its complicated and quasi-religious aspects, as the very core of the Durkheimian project can in fact be read as an effort to demonstrate the religious origins of even the most rational and scientific forms of thought.¹⁸ Indeed, Durkheim's own work was centrally concerned with the need to establish a new secular moral framework which would replace the Catholic morality which had previously been the moral foundation of French society, and he too recognized that the new morality would need to speak to its adherents in ways not unlike the way in which traditionally religious morality had spoken. Hertz simply went further along this line than Durkheim was apparently willing to go.

The particularly intriguing and complex connection between Hertz's intellectual life and his politics, along with his complex position on religious belief, makes him something of an exemplary character to study for insight into the particular dynamic of the 'intellectuel' of the period as defined by Christophe Charle and others. The 'intellectuel,' according to this understanding, is born in the late nineteenth century from

to take it all in--I mean, no rationalism, no secularization of the divine, no mean adaptation of the grand absurdity of true religion to our petty intellectualist scruples. If I was a Roman Catholic, I would certainly be with Pie X against the modernists. Those people are ashamed of having a religion--they try to beg their pardon from the intellectual people and the freethinkers--they take as humble and 'reasonable' an attitude as they can--and they lose what is the essence of religion, the emotional power, without winning intelligibility."

¹⁵Marcel Mauss, letter to Henri Hubert (undated, Fonds Hubert-Mauss, Archives du Collège de France).

¹⁶Letter of 22 September 1914.

¹⁷Andler, *La Vie de Lucien Herr* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977), p. 19. Herr was also a close friend of Charles Péguy, one of the chief mystical/religious socialists, up until the moment the latter broke permanently with Herr over the financial scandal of the Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition (ibid., p. 153-158). This aspect of Herr's presence as leader and mentor of young normaliens and socialist militants has not been sufficiently underlined in most studies of his life and influence. We know also that Herr was close to Hertz. Hertz wrote at least one moving card to Herr from the front (unpublished letter, fonds Lucien Herr, Archives d'histoire contemporaine, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques) and Herr's letter to Alice in which he offers condolences at Hertz's death shows clearly how totally shattered Herr was by this event: "Madame, J'étais avec Dupuy lorsqu'il a reçu votre mot, hier soir. Nous avons sangloté tous deux. Ce matin, j'ai le coeur brisé; je n'ai pas ressenti de douleur aussi cruelle depuis la mort de Jaurès. Je suis avec vous de tout mon coeur. Votre peine est de celles que rien ne console, que rien n'apaise; mais il faut être courageuse, pour votre fils, et pour la mémoire de celui qui a été fier et noble autant qu'on peut l'être, et qui sera vivant en moi tant que j'aurai un coeur. J'embrasse votre fils en pleurant. Lucien Herr", (undated letter, FRH).

¹⁸Durkheim himself would go perhaps the furthest along this path in his final book (see *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 3ième édition (Paris, F. Alcan, 1937)). There, in the last chapter, and later in his course at the Sorbonne on pragmatism in 1913-14, he went as far as to maintain that even scientific knowledge cannot escape the genealogical tree which has its roots in religious knowledge.

an internal crisis within the elite social classes. Contradictions between the rhetoric of the Republic which valorised meritocracy and the the influence of cultural producers (that is, members of the intellectual class) and the actual distribution of power among the ruling classes made it only too clear that intellectuals were in fact under the domination of economic and political elites. The 'intellectuel' who emerges here is distinguished from earlier intellectuals in that he attempts to challenge this domination and to intervene politically using his intellectual stature as justification for that intervention; indeed, the movement is toward a unification of purely intellectual and purely political or moral engagement into something more holistic.

This figure emerges at a moment in European history when key debates in the domains of science, religion and politics overlapped in the struggle to formulate a modern, democratic and secular society. Intellectuals were forced to grapple with three broad questions: 1) what are the limits of reason and scientific knowledge, specifically insofar as they can be put to use in the study and reform of human societies; 2) what is the future of religion as a system of ethics and morality and, if it is destined for extinction, what will replace it?; and 3) what are the limits of the idea of progress in the political order and of democracy as a specific form of political system? Responses to these three questions made clear very different intellectual projects for social reconstruction in the modern world. As Charle and others have indicated, the 'intellectuels' are marked by an internal opposition within their ranks concerning this project. This opposition was most radically clarified by the Dreyfus Affair, which pitted those intellectuals on the left (defenders of objective reason as ultimate arbiter of political and cultural affairs, advocates of radical democracy and/or socialism and a rational secular morality, enemies of the Church and defenders of Dreyfus) against those on the right (defenders of the Church and of the traditional and religious morality which the leftists attacked, critics of reason and democracy, antagonists of Dreyfus).

Accurate and useful as this division is in many cases, in Hertz's life we find an example of something of a marginal case which may go some way to better illustrating the contested ground between the two kinds of 'intellectuel.' Indeed, it would be difficult to find an individual better situated than Hertz from the standpoint of personal characteristics to demonstrate the contradictions and complexities of the debates of the 'intellectuels.' Hertz is certainly a sociologist and a rationalist of some variety, but in this correspondence he shows that he is also deeply moved by the lyrical 'irrationalism' of many of the figures considered the polar opposites of the Durkheimians, including Henri Bergson (whose course Hertz attended at the Collège de France in 1901-02), Charles Péguy et Maurice Barrès. Hertz's reactions to the wartime writing of Barrès is indeed enough to scandalize more orthodox onlookers, such as Durkheim:

Il y a [dans la correspondance avec sa femme] des développements sur la régénération de la France qui sentent le Barrès. Il parle de Barrès, avec les réserves de droit, mais par endroits avec sympathie!¹⁹

We can better appreciate Durkheim's incredulousness after reading the correspondence. For here Hertz shows himself a rationalist socialist who is yet sympathetic to Catholics and to religion more generally, even speaking at length of his own socialist conviction as his faith; he is a fierce patriot who celebrates an almost mythical French soldier from the

¹⁹Durkheim, *Lettres à Marcel Mauss*, letter of 14 December, 1915.

provinces endowed with practical intellect and sensibility which far surpass that of the "deutsche professor" on the other side of the trenches,²⁰ yet who nonetheless, during the Great War in the midst of the widespread anti-German spirit whipped up by the French state, is reading Goethe's account of his military exploits against Napoleon and sympathetically citing Nietzsche. In more clearly revealing this complexity in Hertz's identity, this correspondence thus promises to further the discussion of the nature of the project of the 'intellectuels' which was born precisely at the moment Hertz's intellectual career began.

The chronicle of a conversation between two engaged intellectuals: Alice Hertz and the question of education

Christophe Charle, in his preface to the correspondence between Charles Andler and Lucien Herr, notes an important development in the possibilities of intellectual and cultural history which is pointed to by the increasing number of publications of intellectual correspondences which have appeared in recent years:²¹

L'histoire des intellectuels en général...suit la même évolution que l'histoire des autres groupes sociaux. Après la phase héroïque des témoignages et des essais de première main, après les tentatives iconoclastes d'analyse objectiviste, voici venu le temps où l'approche interne et l'approche externe s'enrichissent mutuellement par l'utilisation de nouvelles sources (en vérité très anciennes) non filtrées par la mémoire, comme les souvenirs et autobiographies écrites après coup, ni par la passion, comme les essais, tableaux, anthologies, nécrologies, hommages dont les professionnels de l'écrit sont amplement pourvus. Parmi ces sources, les correspondances sont les plus riches.²²

With this in mind, we must be clear to note that the correspondence published herein is more than just an intimate exchange between husband and wife. It is an intellectual correspondence in every sense of the term, as Alice Hertz was herself an important collaborator, both practically as well as theoretically, in the radical reform movement in French pedagogy of the fin-de-siècle and, as such, she "suivit pas à pas la vie scientifique, morale et politique de son mari."²³ From her early interest in psychology and the biological sciences, she had been increasingly struck by the serious lacunae in French primary education. This observation led her to the discovery of the work of German pedagogical theorist, Friedrich Froebel, and of the pedagogical movement he inspired in France. Froebel had explored the limits of traditional education, and particularly that of the very youngest children, and concluded that this education

²⁰Letter of 15 January 1915.

²¹Just a few noteworthy examples: Elie Halévy, *Correspondance, 1891-1937*, (Paris:de Faillois, 1996); Lucien Febvre, *De La Revue de synthèse aux Annales, lettres à Henri Berr*, (Paris: Fayard, 1997); Emile Durkheim, *Lettres à Marcel Mauss; Correspondance entre Charles Andler et Lucien Herr, 1891-1926*, edited by Antoinette Blum (Paris: Presses de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure, 1992).

²⁹*Correspondance entre Charles Andler et Lucien Herr, 1891-1926*, p. 3.

²³ See Marcel Mauss, préface to Robert Hertz, *Mélanges de sociologie religieuse et folklore* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. xix.

separated and isolated the human faculties and senses and thus led inevitably to a state of general disequilibrium in students. He had dedicated his life to the creation of a new system of education which would consist of a much more holistic approach intended to educate the young by utilizing and engaging all their faculties and capacities at once. Froebel and his disciples developed the idea of the kindergarten as a school for children between the ages of two and six based on the principle of physical exercise and play as natural stimulants of creativity and the acquisition of knowledge. They viewed the kindergarten as an essential advance on the system of "salles d'asile" which were until then the dominant form of education for pre-primary students in much of Europe (including France), as infants were simply herded together here in unhealthy conditions and were given precious little attention or mental and physical stimulation.

Alice Hertz joined forces with the leaders of the Froebelian movement in France and became in short order one of its most important figures through her contributions to the creation of the first kindergartens in France. In her efforts to help establish this new system of education, she was, like her husband, oriented at once to the theoretical and to the practical. She served as director for several kindergartens, but her principal activity consisted of the course on pedagogical theory she gave at the Collège Sévigné from 1910 until her death in 1927. The Collège had become the de facto École Normale for kindergarten instructors and the responsibility for preparing students destined for this occupation was considerable, as the new method demanded a completely new set of skills and expert knowledge on the part of instructors. Alice played a role in this program of pedagogical instruction second only to its director, Thérèse Sance. Beyond this pedagogical work, Alice contributed throughout her adult life to numerous pedagogical reviews, notably *L'Éducation joyeuse* and *Revue Moulin Vert*.

The correspondence between Hertz and his wife is full of reflections on questions and problems of education and teaching, as Hertz too was fascinated by this central realm of debate and action for engaged intellectuals. Indeed, the Durkheimian team in particular devoted a vast amount of attention to questions of education and the role played by teaching in the construction of social morality, and these questions were often at the very heart of political debates in the Third Republic. The socialist project of Hertz and his Durkheimian colleagues required great attention to educational questions, as they envisioned a peaceful move toward socialism that required a cultural means to change capitalist institutions. The Universités populaires, created during the last decade of the nineteenth century, represented a first socialist effort to establish a link between socialist intellectuals and the working class. The failure of this effort was followed by a succession of écoles socialistes allied to socialist political parties which envisaged a mission of progressive education and socialist propaganda to create socialist solidarity.²⁴ Hertz played a very active role in this movement of socialist schools and universities, speaking often at these institutions on diverse subjects including the thought of Saint-Simon and Fabian socialism and writing often in his correspondence with socialist comrades of the necessity of expanding such efforts. Hertz so clearly considered these educational questions as central to the project of political and cultural change to which he was committed that he at least once seriously considered renouncing an academic career as a researcher in order to take a teaching position at a lycée at Douai, where he believed he would be able to contribute more concretely to the necessary pedagogical change. In

²⁴Christophe Prochasson, *Les Intellectuels, le socialisme et la guerre, 1900-1938* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1993) and *Les intellectuels et le socialisme, XIXe-XXe siècle*.

the end, he spent only a year at Douai, as Durkheim and Mauss essentially insisted he return to Paris to resume his research,²⁵ but as these letters make clear, his commitment to progressive pedagogy remained with him to the end of his life.

Intellectual and soldier: the crisis of the Great War in the eyes of a "sociologue...socialiste...juif"

Alongside the insights offered by these letters into the broad political and intellectual debates discussed above, we find also a very personal narrative of an individual facing profound questions of identity in the midst of this great conflict. Hertz often makes use of his ethnographic skills in describing in minute detail the goings-on in the trenches among his "gars,"²⁶ and these passages provide fascinating insights into the morale of the French troops and the effects of the psychology of war in the everyday life of soldiers. They also provide insights into the internal struggles of Hertz himself to make sense of his own complicated place in this combat as a sociologist, socialist and Frenchman of German Jewish origin. One sees throughout the correspondence a valiant effort to reconcile the disparate elements of his own identity, an effort which he rightly saw as the necessary aftermath to the war's formal conclusion, and this effort in Hertz's person can be fruitfully read as an embodied version of some of the most serious cultural debates then taking place in France: what does it mean to be truly French? what is the place of French Jewry in the identity of the French nation? can one be socialist and nationalist, rationalist and quasi-religious at one and the same time?

The question of the intersection of Jewish identity and Frenchness has been a central concern of scholarship for some time and the period of the Dreyfus Affair and the Great War is particularly intriguing for intellectual historians exploring the path of Jewish assimilation into French society precisely because of the difficulties it presented to assimilation.²⁷ These letters promise to further inform such scholarship insofar as they furnish the testimony of a Jewish intellectual struggling with his own identity dilemma and with the larger social ramifications of the question at one and the same time. Hertz, not unlike many other French Jews of the period, here endeavors to reject narrow ethnic identity in the quest for full assimilation into French identity and even into an exaggerated French patriotism, and yet he retains certain structures of the Jewish experience even in adapting them to the French national cause, remolding the Jewish notion of the "peuple élu" to apply to France in a powerful passage of patriotic fervor.²⁸ In fact, the complexity of Hertz's Jewishness had been apparent for most of his adult life; he wrote, at the age of seventeen, a stunning letter to his socialist friend Dodd condemning Zola's 'J'accuse' letter from a conservative standpoint, adding "bien que juif-- ou plutôt parce que je suis juif et que je m'attache avec frénésie à la patrie que le hasard m'a donnée, j'ai été indigné comme tous les vrais Français impartiaux de la lettre trop

²⁵There is a letter to his friend Pierre Roussel on this subject, dated 27 April, 1907 (FRH) and two letters published here, dated 23 February and 4 March, 1915, wherein he imagines the possibility of dedicating himself to educational work after the war.

²⁶We note here that Hertz was among the rare Durkheimians to have done actual ethnographic research; this was his study of the cult of Saint-Besse in north-western Italy.

²⁷Although arguably even the rupture of the Dreyfus Affair did not significantly move French Jews from the largely assimilationist path they had been pursuing prior to the Affair (see, for example, Michael Marrus, *Les Juifs de France à l'époque de l'Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1972), translation by Micheline Legras).

²⁸Letter of 18 December, 1914.

fameuse."²⁹ In these letters, we can see the continuing evolution of his position, which is made all the more fascinating by the volatile situation from which he writes.

We save for last a brief word on the purely literary quality of the document before us here. It is certainly stretching matters too far to compare Hertz's war account with that of Goethe, which he is in fact reading while at the front, as the latter composed his narrative after the fact and in the writerly calm of his everyday life while Hertz's account is composed 'on the spot,' so to speak. And yet, it is clear that we have here a document of significant emotional power, precisely because of its direct linkage to the lived ecstasies and tragedies of war. As a biographical testament, these letters provide insights into the manner in which a life that is lived in extreme conditions can come in some ways to resemble a literary act. Hertz presents the tragedy of war, the drama of heroism and the crushing reality of suffering and death, and the frustrating banality of the long hours between the moments of heroism and tragedy as part and parcel of this definitive test of the character of a man. It is, he writes, an "épopée" he and his fellows are living, and it is an epic in which the biographical comes in some ways to resemble the literary, as is

²⁹Hertz's language here is sufficiently stunning to merit a lengthy quotation:

"Je considère Zola, quelque généreuse que fût son intention, a été à la fois coupable et maladroit. Coupable il l'a été en ne calculant pas les suites de son acte, le mal qu'il allait faire à la France en la plongeant dans une agitation lamentable; son excuse en même temps que sa faute, c'est qu'il a agi en impulsif, sans se rendre compte de la portée néfaste de ce que j'oserais appeler son crime de lèse-nation...bien que juif--ou plutôt parce que je suis juif et que je m'attache avec frénésie à la patrie que le hasard m'a donnée, j'ai été indigné comme tous les vrais Français impartiaux de la lettre trop fameuse que vous savez, il aurait fallu que pas un seul homme ne dépassât sa pensée, au lieu que la lettre entière n'est qu'un tissu de monstrueuses hyperboles; il aurait fallu [...] proclamer bien haut l'entière, l'absolue bonne foi de nos généraux et de nos officiers supérieurs, qui--en admettant que Zola ait raison--ont tout au plus été dupes d'une stupéfiante mystification, au lieu de les déshonorer et les accuser d'un crime inouï, comme il l'a fait. Et tenez la meilleure preuve que les Français ont le droit et le devoir de l'indiquer contre l'attitude d'Emile Zola, c'est le langage de vos journaux, les journaux anglais et allemands, lesquels, nos suspects en temps ordinaire de gallophilie, n'ont cessé de porter aux nuex ce héros de Zola, s'exalter son courage et sa générosité, et par la même occasion de déplorer la sottise, le chauvinisme, l'injustice des Français, eh bien comme disaient les Grecs, on peut être sûr que ce qui cause de la joie à nos ennemis est pour nous un sujet de douleur, car jamais les ennemis ne se réjouissent que de notre faiblesse ou de nos malheurs. Quant à la maladresse, elle est manifeste à ce qu'il me semble; il s'est attaché à soulever les passions autour d'une affaire qui devait rester exclusivement judiciaire et par là il a sinon définitivement empêché du moins notablement retardé l'oeuvre de réparation, si toutefois une réparation est due. Si vraiment la [?] s'imposait, comme je le crois, elle se serait faite toute seule par la force des choses et sans qu'il fût besoin de mettre la France dans l'état où il a plu à M. Zola de la mettre. Le procès va recommencer d'ici quelque temps; je souhaite de tout mon coeur qu'il ne soit plus le signal des désordres auxquels à donné lieu le premier. Quant à Zola, il sera condamné de nouveau, cela est certain, et je crois qu'il le mérite" (unpublished letter, April 1898, FRH).

indeed the case in much war biography and literature.³⁰ Though Hertz writes to his wife (who had proposed the idea of publishing some of his letters in *le Temps*³¹) of his desire not to "faire de littérature," he is inevitably doing just that in writing of the fascinating facts of his life in these perilous moments. Indeed, if he is here now and again guilty of the same "lyrisme" of which his friend Lucien Herr had once accused him,³² one might argue that it is this characteristic, intermingled with his seemingly contradictory scientific aspirations, that makes him a uniquely valuable intellectual representative of this complex and fascinating time.

³⁰See, for example, Léon Riegel, *Guerre et littérature: le bouleversement des consciences dans la littérature* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978); Jean Dormis, *Hommes d'action et de rêve: 1914-19* (Paris: G. Crès, 1920); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

³¹Hertz's response to Alice, written in the margin of one of her letters and then returned to her. Alice and Hertz's sister Fanny Gorodiche distributed typed copies of some of Hertz's letters to other family members after his death (personal communication of Antoine Hertz, 1998).

³²Letter dated 18 December, 1914 and an unpublished letter of Hertz to Herr, 11 December, 1913 (Fonds Lucien Herr, Archives d'histoire contemporaine, Fondation nationale des sciences politiques).