

**The Method and its Disappearance:
Analysis between philosophies of social contract and classical sociologies. A Study in
Epistemology**

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Résumé:

In a doubly disloyal continuity with regard to the French epistemological tradition, largely preoccupied with the formation of scientific concepts, the present work addresses the phenomenon of *disappearance* of ‘analytical’ *method*. Nevertheless, the present work does not constitute an historical investigation: its very goal is to show (within the works of T. Hobbes, J.-J. Rousseau, H. Spencer and E. Durkheim) the variation of the epistemological status of the analysis, and thus to set up the concept of an ‘epistemological event’.

Examining the *disappearance* of the analysis requires its identification in the theoretical work whereby its leverage remains unacknowledged. Thus, having the status of a *method* in the philosophies of the social contract of Hobbes and Rousseau, the analysis ‘continues’ to structure, in a tacit way, the work of Spencer and Durkheim, both of them founders of scientific sociology.

Is it possible to claim that, in the 19th century, the analysis manifests itself in the sociology’s common recourse to ‘historic dualisms’ (Part II)? Conceptual pairings such as mechanical/organic solidarity (Durkheim) or military/industrial society (Spencer) contain an assumed notion of transparency that, in fact, should be denied.

The present study addresses both philosophers and historians of sociology. What does *history* in the history of sociology consist of? I tackle this question by using the work of G. Canguilhem (Part I): the history’s task is not to repeat the path pursued by science it examines, but rather an historian is entitled to assign his or her own research object.

After the discussion of the methodological nature of the social contract theories and, more generally, of the ‘analytical’ epistemology of the Enlightenment (Part III), Hobbes and Rousseau are considered in a moderate ‘monographic’ fashion. As he makes his own epistemological principles explicit, and because he openly claims to adhere to the analytical method, Hobbes occupies in the present work a position of choice (Part IV). An epistemological reading of *Leviathan* leads to the elucidation of the methodological status of the ‘history’ in the construction of the State that the natural man cannot but wish for. It is in this *necessity* that the Hobbesian analysis finds its rule.

Rousseau (Part V) speaks little of his method. Admittedly the method of analysis is widely discussed in his *Chemical Institutions*, but Rousseau does not seem to intend to offer any general conclusions borne therefrom. The examination of the second *Discourse, Essay on the Origin of Languages* and *Social Contract*, leads however to the conclusion that Rousseau is actually indebted to the analytical method. The principle of equivalence being its rule, Rousseau’s analysis is distinct from its previously identified Hobbesian version. It is therefore concluded that although assimilated, in both cases, to the operation of ‘subtraction’ and ‘addition’, the analysis does not receive, from Hobbes and Rousseau, a common interpretation (Part VI).

The Industrial Age assumes a new epistemological rigor. Yet, however firm Spencer’s and Durkheim’s critiques of the philosophies of social contract might be, they are not

inflexible (Part VII). In fact, the work of analysis can be identified even in their writings. Strictly speaking, neither the sociology of Spencer (Part VIII) nor that of Durkheim (IX) contradict the governing rules of the ancient science. Nevertheless, the epistemological status of the analysis is altered in their work. What was, for Hobbes and Rousseau, a *method* (associated with a concept of knowledge), 'became' for Spencer and Durkheim a *matrix*, a *promise*, and a *demonstrative strategy*. Such shifts, which are always irregular as they distort the primitive rule, constitute 'epistemological events' whose impact is potentially as invigorating as devastating.

Keywords: Analysis, Method, Epistemological Status, Epistemological Event, Disappearance, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Social Sciences, Sociology, Historical Sociology, Social Contract, Historical Dualism, Historicity, Enlightenment, 19th century.