
In Search for Another Master: Gabriel Tarde and French Classical Sociology Tradition

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Abstract

Classical sociology is a theoretical domain that is often labelled outdated. Nevertheless, in the Sociology curriculum, almost all departments teach classical theory to their students. In Indonesia, several classical scholars like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tonnies, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim have been consistently taught by sociology departments all over the universities. However, despite the unwavering effort to preserve classical tradition, there have been no scientific articles that reveal one of the founding fathers of French Sociology, Gabriel Tarde. This article attempts to respond to these shortcomings by bringing the fruits of Gabriel Tarde's thoughts to the surface. This study uses critical hermeneutics to explain key concepts initiated by Gabriel Tarde in a series of scientific works and biographies. In general, the study found two things. First, there are two dominant concepts in Gabriel Tarde's thought: imitation and monad. The idea of imitation is used by Tarde to explain how society exists, while the understanding of monads empowers Tarde to elaborate on the phenomenon of social change. Second, with the example of migrant workers and the processes of agricultural innovation, this paper endorses the application of Tarde's theory of imitation and monads to explain myriad social phenomena in Indonesia. However, the article provides three criticisms toward Tarde: his blindness to economic or financial capital, the heavy reliance on natural science analogy, and the tendency of elitism and colonialism.

Keywords: Classical Sociology Theory; Gabriel Tarde; Imitation; Monad

Introduction

Gabriel Tarde is an unfamiliar figure in the field of sociology. In France, where his idea flourished for the first time, Tarde's thought had been marginalized before being taken up by Jean Pinatel, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Millet, and Raymond Boudon. Among them, Jean Pinatel was the first academician who tried to unearth Tarde's ideas. In 1959, Pinatel wrote an article explaining the controversy between Durkheim and Tarde. Pinatel was interested in Tarde's style of analysis which always starts from the inter-psychological realm (Mucchielli 2000). At the same time, Raymond Boudon saw the potentiality of Tarde's concept in terms of the empirical and theoretical aspects. Specifically, Boudon was keen on Tarde's understanding of statistics which motivated him to devote some of his energy to writing a paper describing the use of statistics in Tarde's works (Mucchielli 2000). Besides his statistical orientation, Boudon cited Tarde because of the similarity between Tarde's focus on the individual and the methodological individualism that he had espoused since his time in the USA (Boudon 1980).

Now in the 21st century, Tarde's reputation has been reinvigorated by a philosopher cum sociologist, Bruno Latour. Latour, in an article titled *Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social*, paid homage to Tarde and claimed that Tarde was one of the few theoreticians who laboured to challenge the long-standing dualism between society and nature and the universal and the particular (Latour 2019). Furthermore, Latour also defended Tarde from Durkheim's psychological indictment and baptized Tarde as the father of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) since his neo-monadology has contributed a lot to the creation of ANT (Latour 2019). The revival project was then carried on by Matei Candea in which he edited an anthology book titled *The Social After Gabriel Tarde*. The book contains several essays from various writers whose articles explain and criticize in detail Tarde's debate with Durkheim, his main concepts, and his method. Eight years later, Anthem Publishing published what seems to be an introduction book which the publisher gave the name *The Anthem Companion to Gabriel Tarde*. These three works stand as ample evidence that there has been intense interest in analyzing and scrutinising Gabriel Tarde. What about Indonesia?

Unfortunately, in Indonesia, sociologists haven't discussed extensively the theory that had been invented by Tarde. Tarde's concepts are more attuned to the study of economics, communication, and criminology; in these fields, we could find several practices of Tarde's concepts where most of them, if not all, use imitation as a tool to describe how a behaviour or an action proliferates (Kartikasari and Yenny 2017; Sella 2013). As of now, there is no viable information to answer the question about the negligible interest of Indonesia's sociologists in developing or even utilizing Tarde's ideas or concepts. Until quite recently, sociologists in Indonesia haven't written papers or books describing or evaluating Tarde's theories. Hence, it is arduous for anyone to present a satisfactory exposition on why there was and is meagre attention on Tarde's thoughts in Indonesia. However, part of the answers could be found in the phenomenon that Fajri Siregar and Inaya Rakhmani have called academic insularity. For the context of this article, it is urgent to take a long excerpt from Siregar and Rakhmani's paper:

the bureaucratic model and narrow technocratic role shaped during the previous authoritarian regime still impinge on social research productivity and critical thinking among Indonesia researchers. The gap between more open policies and the closed institutional model of state universities in Indonesia has resulted on and academic insularity, a condition in which most of Indonesian researchers lack academic mobility and international peer interaction ... As a consequence, this insularity has stunted basic research ...

As Fajri Siregar and Inaya Rakhmani rightly suggest, the bureaucratic model and narrow technocratic role have blocked any meaningful attempts to build basic research in Indonesia. In this case, basic research includes but is not limited to, reintroducing and contextualizing classical theories to comprehend contemporary social realities. Based on that judgement, it can be argued that social scientists in Indonesia are not paying enough attention to inspecting Gabriel Tarde because of the unconducive research environment. Not only that they have to stick to the practical demands of the government to support the development agenda, but they also don't have international interactions to update their theoretical knowledge. Simply said, there are no available incentives for Indonesia's social

scientists to discuss theoretical matters. These reasons put social scientists in Indonesia into a dilemmatic situation where they have to choose between an idealistic vision of intellectuals whose ultimate goal is to promote innovative ideas through basic research or a pragmatic person who only focuses on profitable research projects. The latter perhaps still triumphs over the former.

Drawing from the above exposition, it is clear that in Indonesia the publications discussing Gabriel Tarde were unavailable. As a response to that, this article is going to explain the cornerstone of Gabriel Tarde's theory. Accordingly, the main aim of this paper is to reintroduce Garbiel Tarde's concepts to Indonesia's sociologists so that they can be used to explicate current social phenomena in Indonesia. There are at least two questions to which this research would like to answer. First, what are the key concepts instigated by Tarde as a sociologist? Second, is Tarde's notions are useful as a theoretical framework to analyse Indonesia's recent social phenomena and are there any critics that can be deduced from Tarde's system of thoughts? To reach its aim, this study will describe a brief biography of Gabriel Tarde first. Afterwards, I move to the main part of the paper, which is the detailed interpretation of two central concepts in Tarde's theory: imitation and monad. In the last part of the article, the relevance issue will be outlined by citing two empirical examples from the writer's semi-formal interview in Pangandaran dan a town in East Java. Afterwards, three main objections will be deployed against Tarde's theory.

Methods

This article uses critical hermeneutics in interrogating the structure of thought of Gabriel Tarde. Critical Hermeneutics is deployed against the need to interpret and criticise Gabriel Tarde's ideas and concepts. As a tool of analysis, critical hermeneutics not only provides the instrument to describe and confer with the theories propounded by Tarde but also goes beyond mere interpretations agenda to seek weak points that can be attacked. The opportunity to do two things at the same time drives the article to use critical hermeneutics as the main methodology.

The primary method of data collection utilized here is desk study, most of the materials are secondary data. Consequently, the article makes use of Tarde's first-hand written books and documents in the form of books or journals. Among Tarde's many manuscripts are *The Laws of Imitation*, *Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology, Monadology and Sociology*, and *On Communication and Social Influence: Selected Papers*. Moreover, other second-hand sources which are paramount and deserve to be mentioned here are *The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*, *Gabriel Tarde and Contemporary Social Theory*, *Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social*, *The Science of Passionate Interests: An Introduction to Gabriel Tarde's Economic Anthropology*, *Imitation, Repetition, Iterability: Postructuralism and the 'Social Laws' of Gabriel Tarde*, *Social Monads*, *Not Social Facts: Gabriel Tarde's Tool for Sociological Analysis*. Although these are not manuscripts written by Tarde himself, the significance of these articles is impossible to ignore since they provide accessible data on his core ideas and his limitations. Together, these manuscripts help the writer's comprehension of Tarde's manifold thinking.

The researcher took several steps to analyze data. First, the collection of relevant articles, books, and journals suitable with research questions; second, reading all relevant materials; third, coding some parts of the documents vital for the understanding of Tarde's thought; fourth, data reduction which functions to select the gist of Tarde's thought so that the data representation in the article is in line with the purpose of the writing; fifth, the presentation and interpretation of data where the researcher put valuable excerpts and analyze the sentences according to the context and interest of each section.

Results

Who is Gabriel Tarde?

Jean-Gabriel Tarde, or Gabriel Tarde, was born on the 12th of March 1843 in Sarlat-la-Caneda-Dordogne, France. Tarde was the son of a military soldier and a judge. In his childhood, Tarde went to a Jesuit school in Sarlat to get a classical education. When he was a teen, Tarde suffered a mysterious eye disease which made him stay on his bed for a long time. Nevertheless, his terrible condition didn't block him from learning philosophy and

social science. Seeing her beloved son experiencing a horrible defect, Tarde's mother suggested him to pursue a law degree at the University of Toulouse and the University of France, an admission which Tarde cheerfully accepted.

After getting a degree from the faculty of law, Tarde worked as an examining magistrate at the Sarlat tribunal from 1869 to 1894 (Wärneryd 2008). The specific task of an examining magistrate is to analyse the criminal behaviour of the suspect in a specific region. This strategic position gave Tarde numerous chances to encounter various cases that ameliorated his conservative mind. The insights coming from the job he had done at Sarlat court became the foundation of some of Tarde's early writings. Tarde sent his papers to the journal outlet owned by Antoin Augustin Cournout, *Philosophical Review*. In this period, Tarde was attracted to the philosophy of Cournout, especially Cournout view on emulation and its application in the study of linguistics. Tarde wanted to make emulation the sole explanation of social phenomena. Therefore, Tarde came out with the theory of imitation, a paradigm which has the same analogy with emulation. Cournout, then, is one of the first scholars who gave influence on Tarde.

In 1894, Tarde decided to move to Paris to fill the Director of Statistics at the Ministry of Justice post in France. The post obliged him to take care of annual reports that needed to be sent to the France government and represented the institution in the statistical congress in Saint Petersburg and Copenhagen. Tarde's excellent scientific contributions made a number of marginal universities invited him to lecture in some class. Furthermore, his impressive performance in the bureaucracy satisfied the government which subsequently handed over a chair position in the modern philosophy department in 1900 at the Collège de France, a post he held before his untimely death in 1905.

Imitation (or Repetition), Opposition, and Adaptation: How Society Exists

Imitation starts with Tarde's contemplation over two natural sciences branches: astronomy and biology. Tarde claims that there is no hierarchy among the vital, the physique, and the social domain, each of them is parallel, correlated, and can be categorized in the same place (Tarde 2011). Since no hierarchy existed, there is, according to Tarde, no epistemological justification to form a new field of study with its specific object and method

(Candea 2016). The consequences of that are twofold: (a) sociology doesn't need to define its object of study and a new method and (b) sociology can replicate the logic or the law that has been used in other sciences. Hence, in his effort to explain social reality, Tarde doesn't have the pretension to differentiate his approach from the previous endeavour; he was more comfortable to utilize astronomy and biological law to interpret social phenomena.

Based on that view, Tarde set forth to apply astronomical and biological law to sociology. One law that comes to his mind is Universal Repetition, a law which emphasizes the importance of the incessant movement of an entity as the foundation of reality. In biology, repetition is part of hereditary processes in which the organism or cell does a repetitive move to bequeath genetic behaviour from older vegetation to new ones and creates a new species (Tarde 2011). The new species, then, is the result of continuous repetitive actions executed by the organism or the cell. Meanwhile, in astronomy, repetition is manifested in the regular motion of aerospace entities like stars, the moon, and the sun. According to Tarde, the movement of stars, the moon, and the sun can be apprehended as a repetitive phenomenon due to the existence of patterns when these things revolve around the atmosphere. In daily life, for example, we can discern the standard position of the sun or the moon in outer space—in the morning, the sun will rise from the east, in the afternoon, it will morph well above our head, and at night the sun will be sunk in the west (Tarde 2000).

While in astronomy and biology, repetition is reflected in the motion of aerospace entities and heredity processes, the manifestation of repetition in sociology can be observed in the form of imitation where a person, being cognizant of the actions done by others, is copying the activity of his/her cohorts. The creation of the theory of imitation harks back to the time when Tarde was proactively engaged in the problem of criminality that plagued France at the end of the 19th century (Tonkonoff 2018). At that particular moment, criminality was the hottest topic in France. The intense occupation with the staggering increase of lawlessness and the publications of criminality statistics depicting huge numbers of lawbreakers in France forces many thinkers to study the reason behind these two trends. One paradigm that dominated the discussion of criminality was the biological positivism of the Lombroso school and the statistical view of Adolphe Quetelet. For Lombroso, the rise of illegal actions can be attributed to the hereditary dimension of the suspect (Beirne 1987).

Hence, according to that crude argument, the answer to various misconducts is biological, meaning that it is the shape of some specific parts of the body that lends support to the criminal action. On the other hand, Quetelet offers a different cause. For him, it is not the biological, but the social that has to be blamed for the extreme surge of criminality statistics. This stream of thinking is the logical consequence of the law of large numbers that Quetelet advocated where he sees only a collective side of the statistical regularity, and not a specific case, in a social phenomenon (Porter 2011). Because statistical regularity always overlooks special cases, Quetelet has no room for another answer except society (Beirne 1987).

Following the footsteps of Lombroso and Quetelet, Tarde plunged himself into the debate on the problem of criminality. He had two goals on his mind: finding an answer to the demographical and social problem and developing a social theory based on the law of repetition (Beirne 1987). For the first aim, Tarde launched a critique towards Lombroso's biological positivism. His attacks on Lombroso centred on the biological fatalism that made Lombroso rely too heavily on the physical aspect without paying enough attention to the social dimension of criminal action. Tarde collected the papers and published two books from these constructive critiques, the two documents were *La Criminalité Comparée* and *Penal Philosophy*, which officially aired in 1886 and 1890, respectively. In these two manuscripts, Tarde tried to explain why Lombroso's reading on the cause of criminality was inaccurate and offered alternative causes of the event. In Tarde's view, there were two errors contained in the criminality theory created by Lombroso. First, Lombroso's physical evidence was not universal since, at that period, many scholars still debated the anatomical characteristics used by Lombroso. Therefore, it was dubious to claim that criminality was caused solely by hereditary aspects (Beirne 1987). Second, the true source of a chain of misconduct was not the parents or geography, but the society (Beirne 1987).

Based on his critiques against Lombroso and Quetelet, Tarde developed his version of causal analysis on the rise of criminality in France. Deploying his law of universal repetition, Tarde proposed imitation as the proper source of illegal actions. For Tarde, criminal behaviour are so widespread because one person is imitating others' success

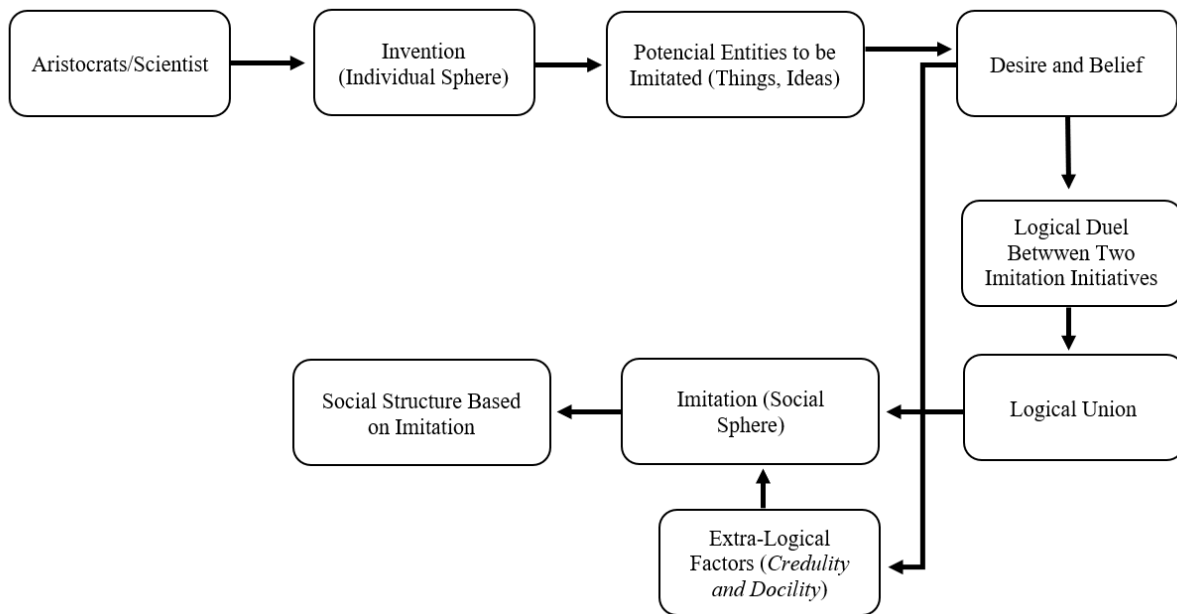
stories, and therefore inspired by the deeds of his/her predecessors. This conclusion was closely related to Tarde's empirical experience when he worked as the magistrate at Sarlat. The tasks as a magistrate render an obligation for Tarde to investigate some of the criminal cases in Sarlat Province. Tarde had had the opportunity to interview directly the alleged criminals after which he found out that many of them were doing such actions because he/she was motivated by another figure. Put simply, the suspects acknowledged that previous attempts made by others were responsible for the growing intention to steal or to kill; they were doing just that because someone else had proved that by stealing or robbing, they could become opulent.

Now that Tarde had succeeded in his objective to answer the rise of criminality, Tarde wanted to use imitation in another sphere. To realize the goal, Tarde surely needed a new platform. Therefore, in 1895, he wrote a book called *The Laws of Imitation*. Bearing its name, imitation was a theory about the social process of imitation involving several individuals. In Tarde's terminology, imitation was defined as "every impression of an inter-psychical photography, so to speak, willed or not willed, passive or active" (Tarde 2011). It means that imitation could be understood as an imitative action, conscious or unconscious, made by one person to another person or one group to another group. In contrast with the repetitive phenomena in astronomy or biology, repetition in the social landscape has an affinity with psychological concepts. The internalisation of psychology has a concrete reason for Tarde saw in human populations the dynamic characteristics incomparable to the celestial objects or organisms. With the help of psychological concepts like desire and belief, Tarde believed that there was a chance to absorb the law of repetition in social science and explain how an imitation occurred amongst individuals or groups (King 2016). Tarde's reliance on psychological notions often made him prone to critiques, as several scholars reproach Tarde for his "individual analysis" as a consequence of utilizing desire and belief (Borch 2014; Candea 2016).

Overall, Tarde views society as a collection of imitations. In this case, imitative actions done by one person to another and one group to another are said to be the backbone of our social reality (Kinnunen 1996; Toews 2013, 2017). However, the processes of imitation are not always clear-cut and follow a linear path. In the chain of imitation, a person or a group

will encounter a logical duel, an event when two or more opponents fight each other for the position of the leader. Based on that understanding, before imitation can occur, an entity has to pass the logical duel, and it is a testament to conflict-ridden socialization. In an excerpt Tarde said: “It is well noted here that even the spread of an imitation involves it in an encounter and struggle with another imitation” (Tarde 2011). To ensure that the reader fully understands imitation theory, we need to draw a processual approach. The picture below is an effort to represent the processes of imitation as explained by Tarde, or in this paper, we can call it the laws of imitation.

Picture 1: Gabriel Tarde’s Law of Imitation



Source: Writer’s Analysis, 2023

All kinds of imitations, in Tarde’s view, follow a descending order from the superior to the inferior. In *The Laws of Imitation*, Tarde cited aristocrats, scientists, and genius people as the superior whose influences are responsible for imitation processes. This exclusive class has the intellectual capacity and capital to make an invention in the form of things or ideas

that can inspire others to do the same. In the span of their life, these ingenious people initiate a number of practical inventions which can be used widely in society and creatively render it as something to be imitated. But before new actions or ideas circulate freely, it has to pass the elimination phase first. This phase is what Tarde called logical duels or oppositions, a process whereby two inventors face each other to decide which one deserves to be imitated. Those who are involved must have a desire and belief, for these two basic virtues will help when competition gets tight (Tarde and Clark 2010). In a nutshell, desire will breed belief after which it forces the subject to do everything, and eventually overcome its limits to reach the targets that it has set before, including denying the existence of another seed of imitation. The comprehension of logical duels or the vying between imitative actors and inventions is vital in Tarde's system of thoughts since for him every social reality that we enjoy is the product of social dialectic: "What is social life but a continual turmoil of vague hopes and fears intermittently excited by fresh ideas stir up fresh desires? ... There is no peaceful institution which has not been mothered by discord" (Tarde 2011).

Logical duels are the medium through which unification happens. In simple terms, logical union is a culmination of a conflict where the winner is set to become the dominant figure whereas the loser has to unite with the triumphant. There are at least three ways in which an entity can upset his/her contenders (Tarde 2011). First, a form of imitation has a longer duration of existence compared to the others; this durability causes the competitors to vanish naturally. Second, the deployment of armed forces to dominate other initiators; in this case, violence is the strategic tactic to defeat the rivals. Third, the involved parties acknowledged the hegemony of the strongest and surrendered voluntarily. After the damage is done, imitation proliferates comprehensively without any serious obstacles. At this stage, imitation is not only absorbed by one or two people but the whole inhabitants. Imitation that occurs in the size of populations can be equated with somnambulism, he said: "Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism" (Tarde 2011). It means that when imitation reaches the stage of logical union, it progresses like a somnambulism or hypnotism where a person copies another because he/she is stunned by the superiority of the ingenious and his/her invention (Blackman 2007).

Other than antagonistic operation, there is always a probability that imitation also goes without wars. Tarde specifically dubbed this procedure as extra-logical, the reason being the absence of logical duels. In extra-logical situations, one doesn't have to consider strategies to break down the opponents for in this condition imitation is monological, obedience takes precedence over resistance (Tarde 2011). This silence and peaceful imitation normally occur in authoritarian, traditional, or monarchical societies. In these types of social and political organizations, a compact group that is ready to shake the crown of a powerhouse is rare. Thus, lay people, whose life depends entirely on the good intentions of the king, don't have choices except to abide by the rules of the ultimate leader. As a result, imitation progresses without any differing opinions, everything happens as it is naturally.

To sum up, with the theory of imitation, Tarde wants to showcase that society are not something that we should take for granted and just exist naturally. For Tarde, social reality and social facts are the accumulation of small-scale actions executed by concrete individuals or real agents. In an essay titled *Sociology, Social Psychology, and Sociologism*, Tarde exclaimed that "now, in this case, we establish that without the individual element, the social is nothing" (Tarde and Clark 2010). In sharp contrast with Durkheim who views social facts as a direct product of collective consciousness minus the intervention of subjects, Tarde thinks that social reality comes from the imitation at the level of the individual; if Durkheim claims that structure overrides agents, Tarde proposes a distinct road: it is the agent or the people who presence before the social exists and it is they whose active involvement are capable of building the structure (Tarde and Clark 2010). Therefore, in Tarde's version of social science, the objective of sociology is to trace and understand how imitation determines and forms social reality.

Monads, Neo-Monadology, and Social Change

Besides imitation, neo-monadology is another intriguing concept initiated by Gabriel Tarde. The prefix "neo" indicates that the term "monadology" or "monads" had been used by thinkers in Pythagorean groups (Philolaus, Archytas, Pythagoras) and Gottfried Leibniz.

Amongst the Pythagoreans, the monad was viewed as the first entity or the origin of all which preceded the dyad, number, sign, line, pure figure, and body that has four

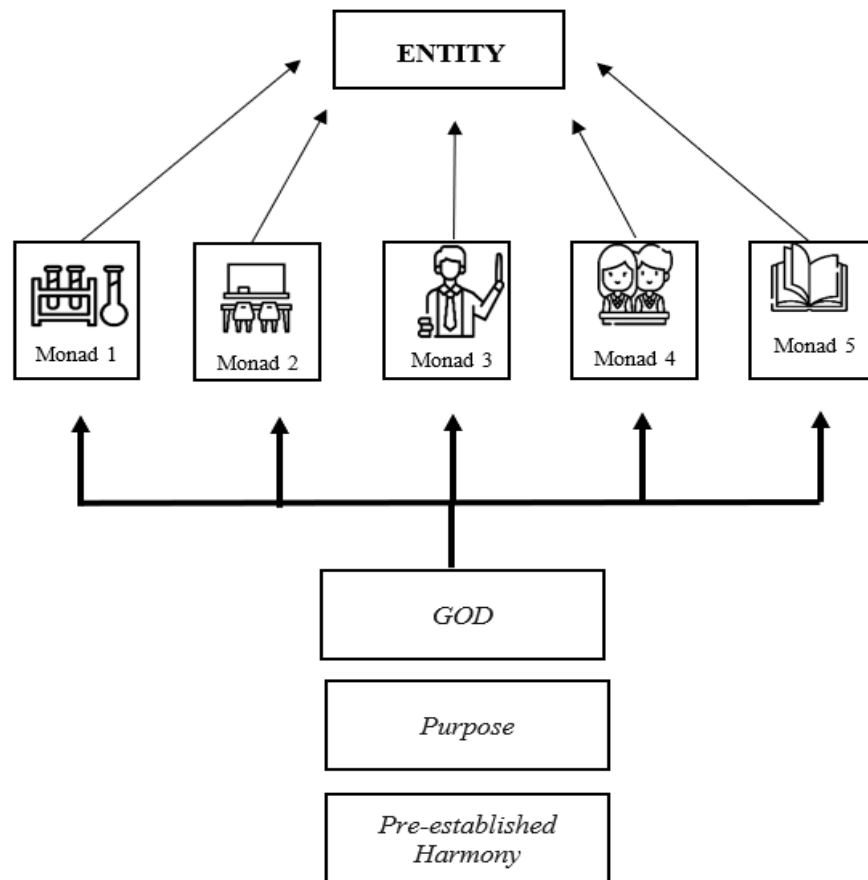
sensibilities (Santana-Acuna 2015). The idea of monad as the first foundation of reality was then taken up by Platonic and Neoplatonicism. After a few centuries, the monad entered the Christian theologic phase, was viewed as a reference to God and started to become an integral part of the spiritual dimension. In the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution period, the monad was moulded by Giordano Bruno, Henry More, and Gottfried Leibniz. Like Christian theologic doctrine, Giordano Bruno affirms the connection between the divine and the monad and depicts God as the ultimate monad. Along the line painted by Bruno, Henry More also equates monad with God, he calls it a *Nature Monadically and unmoved Monad*. However, at the end of his scientific career, Henry More shifted his comprehension of the monad to more material and secular bearing. In this case, More's conception of a monad was closer to the idea of atoms. Henry More argues that a monad is a small article that can't be divided into other parts (Santana-Acuña 2015).

A German philosopher and scientist named Gottfried Leibniz took the atomistic understanding of the monad and developed the concept in his book *Le Monadologi*. Leibniz defined a monad as a simple entity that can't be split without existence, part, and form (Rutherford 2018). In Leibniz's perspective, a monad has autonomy ontology where its presence is not dependent on another entity. Leibniz said that a monad is *windowless*, and therefore it can't affect or be influenced by others: "the monads have no windows through which something can enter or leave" (Antognazza 2016). A monad is a thing which is *self-sufficient and* simultaneously isolated from other entities. On the other hand, Leibniz contends that the universe is founded upon monads; monad is the first element which piles up everything that has material characteristics (*matter*). Crudely, here monad functioned as the *grounding element* or a building block that constructs *matter*.

Monad's presence is the prerequisite for the existence of material things. Every material element is surely composed of groups of monads. The logical consequence is that Leibniz sees reality as immaterial because the matter which builds reality needs the monads. Since the monads are indivisible unlike the material, monads can be categorized as immaterial. This kind of thinking is controversial, for saying that reality only consists of immaterial stuff Leibniz breaks down the doctrine of the dualism between material and immaterial. The destruction of the conservative belief in the dualism became the watershed

for the development of Tarde's project on neo-monadology. But, before moving our attention to Tarde's neo-monadology concept, we must inquire a question: if the monad has the ontology of independence, how can it construct the substance of the material?

Unfortunately, Leibniz doesn't provide a satisfying answer. Leibniz argues that the monad can be divided into four different variants: basic, soul, spirit, and supreme. The logic underlying the separation is the attribute of apperception and appetition. Here, "basic" refers to an entity which doesn't have a consciousness like plants; the soul invokes the animals that have a consciousness; the spirit is addressed to humans whose awareness is excellent (Strickland 2014). These three are controlled by the supreme, the all-rounded entity that is God. Amongst the four varieties of monads, the role of God is paramount. In Tarde's scheme, God has always supplied the energy to the monad or *Fulguration*; in short, monads can live and move thanks to the gratitude given by God (Strickland 2014). Moreover, in Leibniz's view, the movement of monads is prescribed by something called *pre-established harmony*, a mechanism created by God to facilitate the sweet manoeuvre of monads. Thus, long before God initiates monads, he has already made a neat order that needs to be attained by monads. To reach the determined system, God consigns a task to the monad to make a motion that is required to construct a *pre-established harmony*. The detail of the processes as understood by Leibniz can be seen in the picture below.

Picture 2: Leibniz's Model of Monadology

Source: Writer's Analysis, 2023

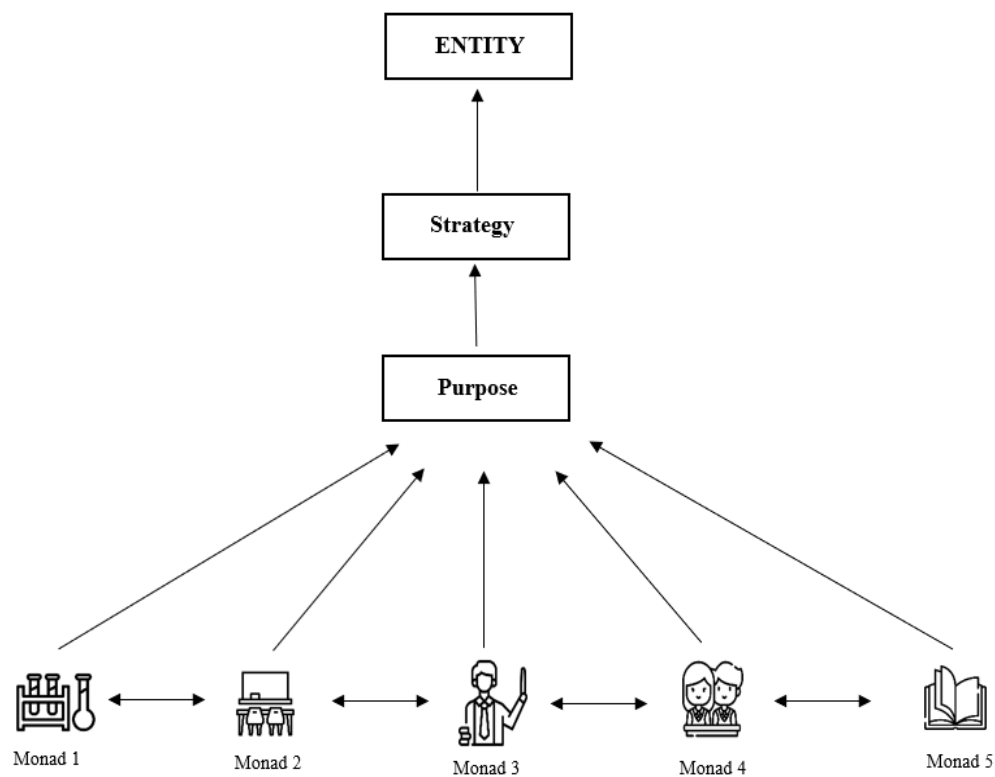
Based on the picture, Leibniz states that *pre-established harmony* and *God* are two objects that preceded the existence of the monad. In this exquisite scheme, God is supplying the energy for the activities executed by the monads. The support coming from God is determined by the *pre-established harmony* set before all the organization of monads. Hence, ahead of the monad motion assisted by God, there exists the pre-established harmony that stirs what the monad needs to do and what is to be achieved. Therefore, in Leibniz's oeuvre, monads are the substance that can't decide with ease the purpose of their movements. Using sociological parlance, monads don't have agency; it doesn't have the prerogative rights and so dependent on *God* and *pre-established harmony*.

Leibniz's idea about monads inspires Gabriel Tarde to develop his version of monadology. In 1893, Tarde wrote a book titled *Monadology and Sociology*. At the early part of the manuscript, Tarde praised Leibniz's innovative concept of monads, commenting that it allowed us to see something from its tiniest part and thus gave birth to a more productive analysis concerning social or natural phenomena around our lives (Tarde and Lorenc 2012). Hence, for Tarde, a change, in the form of evolution or revolution, is happening because of the existence of the monads; their unseen and relentless movements are the building blocks by which reality is founded. Here, Tarde dubbed monad as real agents, someone/something which fosters real actions. Monads, for their position as real agents doing concrete acts, have immense contributions to the processes of transformation done by an entity (Latour and Lépinay 2009). Attention to the details of reality lends support to the endeavour of scientists to trace how an order is assembled and how the order fades away. Specifically, monad as a concept sits easily with the project of social scientists to investigate the competition amongst monads, or how one monad revolted against another monad and ameliorated the order. For this particular instance, Tarde agrees that the principle of reality is plural; just like Leibniz views an entity from the smallest bit, Tarde also concurs that society, as a concept, is composed of the micro-scale elements (monads) that correlate to each other (Tarde and Lorenc 2012).

Tarde, although inspired by Leibniz, doesn't have the intention to glorify his master; in fact, he takes great care to lambast Leibniz's version of the monad. Leibniz explains monad as an autonomous and isolated entity. Ontologically, it doesn't need the presence of another being for its existence for the monad could stand alone. Tarde disagrees with that kind of thinking, he questions how, with the comprehension of the independence of monads, Leibniz unravels (a) why the smallest elements like oxygens or hydrogens can imitate one after the other; (b) why myriad components relinquish its autonomy and bow down to the dominant monad; (c) why an order can be attained from the juxtaposition of each monad (Tarde and Lorenc 2012). The alternative commenced by Leibniz in the form of *pre-established harmony* wasn't enough to answer these three basic allegations. In a nutshell, Tarde can't simply accept the idea of *pre-established harmony* since this notion presupposes a mystical command that stimulates the motion of all monads to abide one figure, without

cogent and clear reasons. With the spectre of pre-established harmony, it is impossible to explain the movements of monads because the appearance of universal law has already answered the question of “how”. When we inquire “how”, we only need to refer to the pre-established harmony; in short, the reason for the organization of the monad is only a mystical concept of pre-established harmony.

Against the backdrop of Leibniz’s bottleneck, Tarde tries to find a solution. If the ontological independence of Leibniz’s monad can’t explicate how monads interact with each other, then the alternative is to fabricate a more social concept of monad. In a piece of statement, Tarde said like this: “Thus, left to its own devices, a monad can achieve nothing. This is the crucial fact ... the tendency of monads to assemble” (Tarde and Lorenc 2012). Monad, according to Tarde, is not going to reach the target if it doesn’t move collectively and that also explains the fact that monads have the proclivity to form a group or team; it implies that, in every opportunity, monad has always wanted to knit a relationship with its peers. Here, we could call Tarde’s innovative idea a social monad. The embellishment of the term “social” has a solid reason: the engagement of the concept of relation between monads is the manifestation of the collaboration of two individuals who support each other to attain their goals. The picture below evinces the statement thoroughly:

Picture 3: The Model of Tarde's Social Monad

Source: Writer's Analysis, 2023

The scheme above displays figuratively how the concept of social monad works. From the picture, it is convenient to conclude that “Big Others” like society, systems, or structures are formed by strategies and aims held up by monads. In that particular context, a monad is the most basic elementary position through which social reality is founded. While it is true that the monad is positioned on the bottom of the structure, the role it holds on the overall scheme is undeniably important for without its existence and performativity the factors above the monads (goals, strategy, and entity) are not possible to function. On the deeper side of the system, monads did a lot of crucial works that are invisible. For instance, without our cognizant, monads cooperate with other monads to implement the aims and the strategy that have been made before. The sign “ ” that appears in between the monad numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, dan 5 depicts the reciprocity among the monads. Hence, monads tend to collaborate. This argument attests to the concept of social

monads that have been discussed before. In Tarde's imagination, in contrast to Leibniz, a monad is not an isolated entity, detached from another monad. Conversely, the social nature of monads forces them to form a relationship with their peers to implement and obtain targets that have been set previously.

We could take one concrete example to shed light on the abstract exposition above. For the sake of clarity, this article will use an example from a political issue. Suppose we have a party coalition, we could substitute the word "entity" with the concept of "political party coalition". Thus, monads 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 can be represented as "political party I", "political party II", "political party III", "political party IV", "political party V". These political parties unite because they have the same interest, they share particular desire and belief. When it comes to forming a coalition, the leaders of the political party will surely have a deal in place in terms of goals and strategies. The sole purpose of these goals is to knit the relationship among political parties in the coalition so that each one of them does not derail from the agreed track. Besides being glued by the same goals and strategies, political parties stick together in the same group in the hope that at the end of the election, one of the members will grab a position in the government. However, if the goals, strategies, and the political deal didn't meet the expectations of one or two political parties and eventually collapsed, the coalition became a fragile group where its members were more comfortable moving away to another cooperation. The open-ended movement of political parties in the political landscape is a perfect example of Tarde's notion of monad's reciprocity and flexibility. In this field, political party displays exactly the subtle and unpredictable motion of the monad envisioned by Tarde.

Besides the flexibility and reciprocity of monads, Tarde also envisages the dominant role of monads in the organization of its movement. If in Leibniz's world, God is the supreme court of all the decisions, in Tarde's worldview it is the monads who settle the purposes and game plans of its motions. Tarde, in other words, doesn't subscribe to the doctrine of *pre-established harmony*; it is not God's responsibility to control and fix the movements of monads for monads can regulate themselves without having to subdue to a particular order. Since a controlling regime is absent and does not determine its existence, monads morph freely and flexibly. If monads feel their interests are not met by the "structure"

or certain coalition, monads will form a resistance and invite the “perpetrators” to form a new group. This new cooperation creates a new assemblage separated from the previous “structure”, “system”, and “coalition”, and, as a logical consequence of the seeming failure of the dominant group, fabricates new themes of alternatives as an anti-thesis. Here, the monad is a plastic figure, he seeks an order that can allow and support its interests. If the monad couldn’t find an agreement in the coalition “A”, he would resist and demand a change, if his desires and beliefs are acknowledged the rage will fade away imminently. If the demands of the monad can’t be fulfilled by the coalition, monads will shake the foundation of the structure and shift away to another group.

If we follow the neo-monadology of Tarde, there is no static condition whereby the status quo exists without real challenge. At a specific moment, an order (be it political structure or social relation) may be so strong and seem impossible to proceed with its downfall, but it doesn’t mean that a particular order will last longer or there is an exemption of change. Actors who live under a robust order still have forces, desires, and beliefs that open up the chance to make resistances, even on the smallest scale. Using a more sociological phrase, an entity or a monad has an agency which lends them the capacity to think, imagine, and act by its inclination if the opportunity of being “other” is open. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to claim that monads do have ample dexterity to fight, overcome, and sweep away from the normality or status quo to form a new group. In the wider context, Tarde argues that a regime is a fragile reality (Tonkonoff 2018). Several establishments around us hinge on the activity of the monads, if the monads feel that the regime is no longer amicable, they will leave it swiftly.

An Evaluation to Gabriel Tarde: The Relevance and A Critique

After closely investigating Tarde’s core theories, we are in a good position to contextualize these concepts with the actual social phenomena in Indonesia. For a start, the concept of imitation can be utilized to analyze two crucial, but somehow massively overlooked, realities in Indonesia: the increasing number of migrant workers in Indonesia and the processes of innovation in the agricultural sector. In several provinces in Indonesia, especially in the most deprived regency like Indramayu and Pangandaran, there is a growing

trend of women who decide to work abroad as domestic workers. Research has shown that the main reasons behind the phenomenon are manifold, including helping the family, harnessing money to start a business in the village, and labour market congestions (Auliya 2022; Dewandaru, Rahmadi, and Syaidah 2019; Fikriansyah and Julia 2023). However, based on the writer's brief stint in Pangandaran, it is also vital for social scientists to explore why these women have the desire to go to a new place they never visited before. The answer hinges on the successful experience of their neighbour's village which has become migrant workers. With the money they have, the neighbours can afford to purchase land for agriculture production and investment and create a house on their own (Dewandaru et al. 2019). It is the capacity to buy land and build a house that eventually entices them to work abroad. In this case, by seeing the success of the neighbours, women develop a tendency to imitate what has been done by others.

Another example is the agricultural innovation processes. Based on semi-informal interviews with six peasants in East Java conducted by the writer, it is assumed that in agriculture production, the tendency of imitation among farmers is so great that it is not possible to discuss innovation processes in rural Java without the invocation of Tarde's concept. In the cycle of agricultural production, two irreplaceable needs that stand out are pesticides and fertilizer. Anyone who learns the structure of costs in the agricultural field will concur that both pesticides and fertilizer are the most paramount inputs for farmers. Unfortunately, for the farmers in the countryside, the price tag of these two essential things is expensive. The growing importance of pesticides and fertilizer and the rise of their fees shape farmers' buying behaviour. With the risks in mind, farmers are reluctant to purchase fertilizer products from brands that haven't been proven by other farmers, particularly affluent capitalist farmer-producers. When a brand has been wielded and the users are yielding more results than their counterparts, the peasants without a doubt will buy and utilize the same product which has been used by the capitalist farmers.

In this case, Tarde was spot on when he claimed that imitation embarks from the upper down to the lower class. The capitalist farmers, with all the capital they have acquired, initiate the innovation before being absorbed by the peasants. However, we have to be attentive here as Tarde never touches upon the problem of class based on exploitative

relations. Although Tarde emphasizes conflicts among monads as one of his basic theories, his ambiguous position regarding the source of quarrel makes Tarde insensitive to the marginalized people. By implying that those who won the squabble as the right ones without looking closely at the context of the struggle, Tarde's concepts could be easily justified to subjugate people in the name of "good intentions". Thus, following Muhtar Habibi's critical inspections on class dynamics in agricultural production in Indonesia, it is fruitful to view the innovation operation in rural Java as one part of the bigger processes of class reproduction (Habibi 2022). Here, innovations are tied up with class locations and class positions of capitalist farmers against farmer-workers and Petty Commodity Producers (PCP) (Habibi 2022). Capitalist farmers, with the capital they owe, are expected to lead in terms of innovation and technological adaptation. Meanwhile, it is certainly impossible for PCP and farmer-workers to stand on the same feet as the landlords since their crop yields only enough for little expansive agricultural production (PCP) and subsistence (farmer-workers).

The above criticism of Tarde's blindness to the class reproduction nature of the innovation processes has a connected relation with his tendency of elitism and colonialism inscribed within his conception of imitation. The very basic question is this: are all imitation processes descended from the superior to the inferior group? If we abide Tarde's Law of Imitation, the answer is absolutely yes. However, this is not always the case since not all imitations are proceeded from the upper class. The mainstream use of TikTok in Indonesia, for instance, was not embarked by the elite. TikTok users became so widespread because of the presence of one layman, Bowo Alpenlibe who brought dance content into the public sight in Indonesia a few years ago; once denigrated as the face of a dishonest figure, now he has been touted as one of the first precursors of Tiktok. The subsequent attacks on Tarde have to do with his colonial inclination. In *The Law of Imitation*, he had no problem saying this: "Hence, it follows that war is much more of a civiliser for the conquered than for the conqueror, for the latter does not deign to learn from the former, whereas the former submits himself to the ascendancy of victory and borrows from his enemy a number of fruitful ideas to add to his natural store" (Tarde 2011). With that words, Tarde wish to justify colonialism for the sake of "goodness" that the colonized may be received from the settlers.

Implicitly, Tarde argues that illegal occupation could contribute to the local inhabitants by spreading ideas or infrastructures. This kind of proposition is inimical because Tarde ignores violences and oppressions as a direct consequence of colonialism. Moreover, if it was not for its economic interests, settlers were not going to set up companies, government facilities, roads and transportation. Hence, the intention was not to upgrade the condition and welfare of the colonized, the real purpose was to extract natural resources; every “decent” thing that the colonizers brought was the unintended outcome of exploitation.

The last objection towards Tarde centres on the natural analogy bias in his theoretical structure. Gabriel Tarde was the child of his generation. Born and raised at the beginning of the development of social science, Tarde wanted to copy the methodology and analysis of natural science. While his epistemological approach was different from Comte and Durkheim, Tarde can’t pull himself out of the dominance of natural science. His ideas on *The Laws of Imitation* reflects perfectly Tarde’s reliance on natural science analogy. The concept of “Law”, to begin with, is a common attribute in natural science and is usually used to explain in a deterministic manner the natural phenomena. The creation of “the law” was and is viewed as an important step in explicating natural realities faced by humans. Based on that reasoning, in the Enlightenment era, numerous natural science scholars created several laws like the Gravitation Law, Law of Motion, and Law of Thermodynamics that were subsequently coded by the next generations. While they came under a distinct name, these laws have universal characteristics: mechanistic, linear, stable, and universal. These traits can be consistently applied to natural phenomena because the object of natural science is relatively unchanged and not flexible.

Unfortunately, while acknowledging the distinction between the object of natural science and social science, Tarde still implementing scientific law even though it has been derided by other scientists. The Law of Imitation that was spearheaded by Tarde has the same trajectory as another version of laws: fixing social phenomena to stabilise the explanation. To treat social reality like natural phenomena is not a popular innovation considering the object of social science is uncontrollable; humans, unlike atoms, cells, plants, or animals, are more dynamic and subject to change. Consequently, dramatic and drastic

changes are normal in the constitution of human life. Therefore, utilizing the scientific law paradigm to understand social phenomena is incorrect. Scientific law presupposes linearity and stability whilst an individual always changes his/her position towards something. From there, it is possible to conjecture that an imitation may not follow the Law of Imitation established by Tarde because populations are difficult to predict. In that case, the rigidity of scientific law is a visible weakness when someone is trying to explain the plasticity of social phenomena.

Conclusion

This article has explained Gabriel Tarde's core theories, namely imitation and monads, and their relevance to Indonesia's current social context. At large, the paper argues that imitation and monads are suitable as a theoretical arsenal to explicate some of the concerned issues in Indonesia and therefore could be necessarily marshalled in an innovative way to critically engage with the social plights which have become central to Indonesia and its citizens. Yet, drawing from two empirical examples in Indonesia, the case of migrant workers in Pangandaran and an innovation dynamic in a town in East Java, the paper has also delineated three limitations that need to be taken into account by sociologists who are eager to use imitation or monads: Tarde's blindness on class conflict problems, his insistence on natural science analogy, and the proclivity of elitism and colonialism. Taken together, these three stand as an important caveat for those hoping to apply Tarde's concepts in Indonesia.

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