TARDE, Gabriel (March 12, 1843 – May 13, 1904)

Gabriel Tarde was a French social psychologist, sociologist, and criminologist. In *The Laws of Imitation* (1880), he suggests that imitation drives the development of language and the evolution of institutions and the arts. The interrelated categories “invention,” “imitation,” and “opposition” stand at the heart of Tarde’s sociology. New ideas spread via imitation, those that resemble existing norms being more readily imitated. There are three laws of imitation: (1) the law of close contact; (2) the law of imitation of superiors by inferiors; and (3) the law of insertion (new behaviors either reinforce or replace customary ones). Opposition completes and reinitiates the cycle, bringing inventions into conflict but also spurring fresh innovation. As a criminologist, Tarde argued against biological positivism—the idea that one could be “born” a criminal—and pointed to the influence of the environment on law-breakers. His notion of “group mind” influenced Gustave Le Bon. Sociologists of the American “Chicago School” later adopted Tarde’s theories. Eclipsed by the younger Émile Durkheim, with whom he carried out public debates from 1902-1904, and largely ignored for several decades, his work has of late experienced a Renaissance. He has influenced such theoreticians as Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour.

For further reading see, Terry N. Clark (ed.), *Gabriel Tarde on Communication and Social Influence: Selected Papers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

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