

punishment of free-riding behavior. If the group is sufficiently small and stable, and interactions among its members are repeated over a long horizon, actions that benefit the group can be sustained by the fear that an individual deviation will trigger deviations by others, resulting in the complete collapse of prosocial behavior. Alternatively, even if interactions are not repeated, collective action can be sustained if individuals have the ability and the inclination to impose direct punishments on each other for free riding. Experimental evidence suggests that many individuals do indeed have such preferences for “altruistic punishment,” and that such propensities have played a key role historically in the sustainable management of common property resources.

The most common solution to collective action problems is through the intervention of a centralized authority that can set rules for behavior and impose sanctions on those who fail to comply. Sometimes these sanctions take the form of monetary fines, as in the case of tax evasion or the failure to meet pollution standards. In many instances, however, punishments can take the form of ostracism or expulsion, as in the case of clubs, trade unions, or political parties.

**SEE ALSO** *Common Knowledge Rationality Games; Evolutionary Games; Game Theory; Noncooperative Games; Screening and Signaling Theory Games; Strategic Games*

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*Rajiv Sethi*

## COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Contemporary usage of the term *collective memory* is largely traceable to Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who wrote extensively in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) about commemorative rituals, and to his student, Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945), who published a landmark study on *The Social Frameworks of Memory* in 1925. For Halbwachs, who accepted Durkheim’s sociological critique of philosophy, studying memory is not a matter of reflecting on the properties of the subjective mind; rather, memory is a matter of how minds work together in society, how their operations are structured by social arrangements: “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 1992, p. 38). Halbwachs thus argued that it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts. Group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never experienced in any direct sense. Halbwachs thus resisted the more extreme intuitionist subjectivism of philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) (whose work had nevertheless led Halbwachs to his interest in memory), as well as the commonsense view of remembering as a purely—perhaps even quintessentially—individual affair.

In contrast to Halbwachs’s discussion in *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, however—in which he argues that what individuals remember is determined by their group memberships but still takes place in their own minds—in *The Legendary Topography of the Holy Land* (1941) and elsewhere Halbwachs focused on publicly available commemorative symbols, rituals, and representations. This more Durkheimian discussion in turn undergirded Halbwachs’s contrast between “history” and “collective memory” not as one between public and private but as one based on the relevance of the past to the present: Both history and collective memory are publicly available social facts—the former “dead,” the latter “living.” Halbwachs alternately referred to *autobiographical memory*, *historical memory*, *history*, and *collective memory*. Autobiographical memory is memory of those events that we ourselves experience (though those experiences are shaped by group memberships), while historical memory is memory that reaches us only through historical records. History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an “organic” relation—the past that is no longer an important part of our lives—while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities.

While rightly credited with establishing “collective memory” both as a concept and as a subject for sociolog-

ical research, Halbwachs is far from the only scholar to have thought systematically about the (changing) relationship between the past and the present. Before Halbwachs, the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) had distinguished among original history (eyewitnessing and chronicling), reflective history (scientific), and philosophical history (teleological). Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) in turn distinguished among antiquarian, monumental, and critical uses of the past.

In contemporary scholarship, the so-called history of mentalities has pursued a “collective psychology” approach to cultural history, seeing images of the past as part of “the whole complex of ideas, aspirations, and feelings which links together the members of a social group” (Goldmann 1964, p. 17), and thus forms an important topic for historical investigation. In Germany, many historians and social scientists have revived an older, philosophical concept of “historical consciousness” (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*) to guide analysis, linking it to concerns about “the politics of history” (*Geschichtspolitik*), which indicates both the role of history in politics and the role of politics in history. Yet another camp has employed the awkward yet insightful term *mnemohistory*, which “unlike history proper ... is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered” (Assmann 1997, p. 9). Mnemohistory thus calls for a theory of cultural transmission that helps us understand history not simply as one thing after another nor as a series of objective stages, but as an active process of meaning-making through time, “the ongoing work of reconstructive imagination” (Assmann 1997, p. 9). Yet another similar argument comes out of the hermeneutic tradition, particularly as articulated by German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), in which the meaning of life can be found in our ongoing making and remaking of self-consciousness through interpretation without end.

No matter what the specific conceptualization, what may be called *social memory studies* (Olick and Robbins 1998) has become a prominent feature of scholarly discourse in recent decades, when Western societies in particular have been experiencing a sort of “memory boom” (Winter 2006). Indeed, explaining this boom has been an important topic for social memory studies. Scholars have variously sought to explain the rise of interest in the past, memory, commemoration, nostalgia, and history in contexts ranging from consumer promotions, popular culture, interior and exterior design, and public space, as well as the rise of reparations, apologies, and other forms of redress in domestic and international politics. Answers have included the decline of the nation-state as a carrier of identity, the end of faith in progress, the rise of multiculturalism, and postmodernity more generally. Most famously, and most generally, the French historian and

editor Pierre Nora has claimed that we spend so much time thinking about the past because there is so little of it left: Where we earlier lived lives suffused with pastness—the continuities of habit and custom—we now live disconnected from our pasts, seeing ourselves as radically different than our forebears. In Nora’s terms, where once we were immersed in *milieux de mémoire* (worlds of memory), we moderns now consciously cultivate *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) because memory is now a special topic. In a related manner, the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm has distinguished between worlds of custom and worlds of “invented tradition.” Since the late nineteenth century, not only have nation-states sought to shore up declining legitimacy by propagating fictional pasts and a sense of their institutions’ ancientness, people have invented the very category of tradition (as opposed to custom): the idea of self-conscious adherence to past ways of acting (whether genuine or spurious) is itself a product of our distance from the past, which has come to be seen as “a foreign country” (Lowenthal 1985).

SEE ALSO *History, Social; Identity; Memory*

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Jeffrey K. Olick