

INDIVIDUALISM AND LEGITIMATION: PARADOXES AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF ÉMILE DURKHEIM

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PARADOXES AND PERSPECTIVES  
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1. *Introduction*

SOCIOLOGY competes with other social scientific disciplines not only with regard to the interpretation of social crises but also with respect to the development of particular models of legitimation. For this reason, early sociology was once aptly described as the 'science of order' (Negt 1974). In actual fact sociology is not only concerned with the analysis of social crises; it also sees itself as a science of political legitimation.

Max Weber devised the typology which led to the decisive conceptual broadening of political sociology and which is still of fundamental importance today. According to this typology, forms of domination can be defined by looking at the typical claim to legitimation made by the authority which holds sway at the time, independently of the specific motives or purposes of the social superiors or subordinates involved. It is on this basis that the three well-known forms of domination—traditional, bureaucratic-legal and charismatic—can be distinguished. Furthermore, the structure and continuity of power relations are determined by the internal organization of their associations, particularly by the distribution of executive powers between leaders and subjects as well as within the administrative ranks (Weber 1976: 122ff and 548).

Weber's contemporary and the co-founder of sociology, Émile Durkheim, takes up the problem of political legitimation and looks at it under a different theoretical perspective. He is primarily interested in the institutional preconditions of stable political order in the light of the specific conditions of integration of modern societies. The theory of the social division of labour, the anomie hypothesis, as well as the structural analysis of social change in the period of transition towards modernity presented Durkheim with new theoretical challenges in the area of political thought. Just as social cohesiveness no longer appeared to be 'automatically' guaranteed by premodern forms of integration, so according to Durkheim the political system, and above all the State in 'organic' society, were faced with fundamentally new problems of legitimation. The great ideological debates and political conflicts which shook the France of the Third Republic—from the Dreyfus affair, which cast its shadow over everything, to the scandal over the financing of the Panama Canal and the assassination attempts of the anarchists, from the strengthening of organized socialism to school and university reforms—caused Durkheim to subject the structures

of *société politique* to close and systematic scrutiny. These reflections are certainly closely related to attempts to form a general theory of sociology (1). The question of the political model of order which is both structurally possible and worth striving for under the conditions of modern industrial society, and also its legitimation, thus becomes a prominent part of Durkheim's political sociology.

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that, although the term 'legitimation' only appears in the margins of the work, the problem of political legitimation is of fundamental importance in Durkheim's political writings (2). I begin by looking at Durkheim's treatment of the issue of political legitimation in the context of his general theory of institutions. I then go on to examine it in relation to the analysis of problems of legitimation in the historical Nation-State. Durkheim's theory of the State is then examined in more detail, with particular emphasis on the conception of moral individualism as a constitutive premise of legitimation of the modern *Rechtsstaat*. I thereby intend to verify the hypothesis that the normative strategies of legitimation developed by Durkheim, the practical realisation of which he expected would solve the problems of legitimation of the post-traditional political order, are in fact based on a paradox. Although the theoretical consistency of Durkheim's political sociology is thus called into question, the final part of the paper deals with the specifically sociological significance that Durkheim's theory of democracy has today (3).

## 2. Institution and legitimation

It is well-known that Durkheim conceives of the partial social system which is described as *société politique* as a configuration of largely autonomous organizational relations. He ascribes fairly broad scope in the definition of rules and norms to social institutions. In so doing Durkheim leaves no doubt about the fundamentally repressive character of normative structures vis-à-vis the individual. The *discipline* or *mécanique morale* binds

(1) This is shown clearly in Marina Cedronio's study (Cedronio 1989), in which Durkheim's activities as a scholar, pedagogue and political journalist are viewed against the background of the political events of his time and some of the conventional views of Durkheim are revised in the process.

(2) It is occasionally disputed that Durkheim's political sociology deals with the problem of legitimation at all. See, for example, Giddens 1971a, p. 509; Birnbaum 1976, p. 247 and Marske 1987, p. 12. Marina Cedronio discusses the problem of institutional legitimacy in Durkheim in the context of the above-mentioned analysis of the political history of

the Third Republic (Cedronio 1989, esp. pp. 59-104).

(3) The view that Durkheim's political writings are marked by a normativism which is untouched by sociological currents and partly determined by a naive sociopolitical idealist reformism seems to have become a commonplace in more recent Durkheim scholarship (e.g. Giddens 1977; Müller 1983; Marske 1987). It is sometimes denied that Durkheim's work has any real contribution to make to political sociology (e.g. Hawkins 1986; Fabvre 1982; and, with reference to Durkheim's legal theory, Lukes Scull 1983).

what is, according to Durkheim's view of it, the otherwise free-floating spontaneity of individuals and 'socializes' them according to the criterion of collective values and purposes (see Poggi 1971). The normative order of the political system constitutes the *morale civique* and hence the *ensemble de règles sanctionnées* which governs the relation between the members of the community and the political institutions, the rights and obligations of the *citoyens* (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 79-110).

The question of whether political institutions need a particular form of legitimation in order to implement their authority must be answered in the negative. According to Durkheim, institutionally established standards of discipline are able to be implemented *per se*, that is, on the basis of their, so to speak, self-legitimation founded upon traditions. There is no room in this theory for anything but traditional forms of domination in Weber's sense of the term. It is well-known that Durkheim makes no distinction between bureaucratic-legal and traditional domination; and there is no room in this theory for a form of legitimation for revolutionary changes which is analogous to charismatic leadership. Institutions constantly form traditional relations in so far as in practice only organizations which incorporate a tradition are capable of organizing social needs in the best way possible. They do this primarily by means of definitions of value.

So far, for Durkheim the problem of political legitimation is only an issue when, through structural social changes, the power of their traditions is lost to political institutions. If the basic institutional norms no longer correspond to their social preconditions, or if they contradict the dominant cultural values, then there is the risk of political de-legitimation. Structural change and the crisis of value in modern society accentuate, of course, this threat (see Mueller 1983).

For Durkheim it is essential to attempt to achieve new foundations for legitimation under these conditions. The political system is then in need of reform, both with respect to its institutional structure and the political order of values which is closely bound up with it. However, Durkheim conceives of social reforms essentially as the process of establishing new definitions of value which then are institutionally transmitted. A closer examination of Durkheim's analysis of the problems of legitimation of the Nation-State may help clarify this abstract theoretical point.

### 3. *Moral individualism and political legitimation*

We have no way of knowing whether and to what extent Durkheim's lectures on *morale professionnelle* and *morale civique* (Durkheim 1969<sup>3</sup>) bewildered or even alienated his listeners. Even for today's readers, Durkheim's writings on political sociology offer some striking theoretical insights. The great political doctrines of the modern era are subject to a systematic critique. Durkheim's main concern is the analysis of the problems of political order using a sociological method primarily directed

towards the investigation of the conditions which give rise to social institutions and the way in which they function (see Poggi 1971: 229).

In this paper we will focus exclusively on the theoretical notion of the concept of State as it relates to legitimation. Durkheim denies that historical models of legitimate state order, the liberal model of minimal state organization, the socialist model of an administration which is free of domination as well as the natural law conceptions of the *Rechtsstaat*, to name but the most important examples, have any topicality. In his view, none of these models can give an adequate theoretical account of the sociological constituents of state organizations: they do not correspond to the legitimation of the political system in modern society.

Unlike some writers who have tended to engage in mystifying speculation about the historical role of the State, Durkheim establishes three essential constituents which, leaving aside their theoretical or historical origins, can be summarized as follows: firstly, the State is always to be viewed as the organizing centre of a differentiated configuration of 'secondary' institutions. As the sovereign authority (*autorité souveraine*) it monopolizes the legislative and administrative powers. Centrality and sovereignty are thus constitutive characteristics of the State. The independence of other social forms of organization (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 81 ff.) is closely linked to these features. Secondly, state structures are not conceived as abstract formations, but as administrative organs which are differentiated with regard to their function and which have their own corps of functionaries (*les agents de l'autorité souveraine*) (see Birnbaum 1976). For to Durkheim, the bureaucracy was the most important distinguishing feature of the State: 'Voilà ce que définit l'État. C'est un groupe de fonctionnaires *sui generis* au sein duquel s'élaborent des représentations et de volitions qui engagent la collectivité' (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 86). This brings us to a third element of Durkheim's concept of the State: the fact that the State provides its own legitimation for its claims to domination. In other words, the State organs have the ultimate power of definition, by which they are able to develop and implement decisionistically generally valid legal norms and ideas of order (4).

According to Durkheim the possibility of self-legitimation on the part of political institutions is however limited at the point at which its central conceptions of order come into conflict with socially important values. In fact, in his discussion of the concept of State, Durkheim is essentially concerned with issues of the loss of legitimation of the order of the Nation-State and with the preconditions of legitimation strategies which are likely to be successful in the face of fundamentally altered social value relations. He is not interested in the processes of ethnic and cultural homogenization,

(4) 'L'État est un organe spécial chargé d'élaborer certaines représentations qui valent pour la collectivité. Les représentations se distinguent des autres représentations collec-

tives par leur plus haut degré de conscience et de réflexion'. In this sense Durkheim refers to the State as 'l'organe même de la pensée sociale' (Durkheim 1969 : 87).

of rationalization of the *Rechtsstaat* administration, or of economic capability, which the rise of the Nation-State in Europe has accelerated (see Lepsius 1989). The main focus of Durkheim's investigation is instead the problem of the institutionalization of subjective rights as fundamental principles of political legitimation. His primary interests are the general social preconditions and genesis of political individualism, and the political consequences of the establishment of individualism as a social ideal in the wake of the bourgeois revolution.

It is well-known that in the social manifestations of so-called moral individualism Durkheim sees the fundamental evolutionary triumph of modernity. He attaches overwhelming theoretical importance to this idea, viewing it as a social construct and not as a principle founded in natural law (Durkheim 1969: 28 ff.; see also Lukes 1969; Giddens 1971; Prager 1981; Thompson 1982; Marske 1987). There is thus a distinction to be made between the 'sociological conception of individualism' as social 'fact' and methodological individualism, the social-philosophical theory criticized by Durkheim (Lukes 1973: 86; Lukes 1969: 15 and 19). Unlike utilitarian individualism, which Durkheim also rejects, the ideal of moral individualism can act as a powerful force for social integration (Durkheim 1969: 25; see Marske 1987: 2). Furthermore, it is well-known that Durkheim's clear commitment to Republicanism has its roots in the emancipatory ideals of moral individualism (see Giddens 1971: 489 and 499; Cedronio 1989).

For Durkheim, the most important consequence of individualistic value consensus is the gradual dissolution of the basis of legitimation of the Nation-State. This essentially grew up as a response to the organizational demands of the war and of national defence (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 89). The demands that the Nation-State made of its citizens in terms of discipline and capacity for achievement had, according to Durkheim, the main basis of their legitimation in a quasi religious self-glorification of the State which justified the subordination of the individual's own interests (*ibid.* 91). In contrast to the political morality of the Nation-State, moral individualism developed into a politically important value relation and thus into a premise of legitimation. This development would be fostered by the gradual improvement in international relations (5) and by the increasing interdependence of international markets (*ibid.* 157).

According to Durkheim, these developments are the preconditions for the formation of the modern *Rechtsstaat* (6). In natural law theories, the principles of legitimation of the political ideal, based on the postulate of equality, fundamental dignity, freedom and self-realization of the individ-

(5) Durkheim developed his theory during the forty-year period of peace in Europe, which began at the end of the Franco-German war of 1871 and came to an abrupt end at the outbreak of the First World War in September 1914.

(6) As far as this aspect is concerned, it

should not be overlooked that Durkheim merely develops abstract and highly reductionist theoretical models. He certainly does not provide a differentiated historical analysis of the Nation-State or of the development of the *Rechtsstaat*. For a detailed critique, see Lukes/Scull 1983, 1-32.

ual, have taken on the form of a philosophical system. However, as we shall see in the following section, it is precisely on the basis of a critique of the meta-historical, or, more accurately, of the meta-social construction of natural law, that Durkheim establishes a sociological theory of the function of the State in modern society.

#### 4. *A paradoxical concept of State*

Durkheim's sociological critique of the individualism of natural law is essentially based on two premises. On the one hand it rests on an analysis of the institutional mechanisms of the social construction of individualism. On the other it is founded upon the hypothesis of structurally conditioned social threats to which the individual is exposed, particularly in modern society. On the assumption that 'ce qui est à la base du droit individuel, ce n'est pas la notion de l'individu tel qu'il est, mais c'est la manière dont la société le pratique [...]' (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 102), Durkheim is particularly interested in an aspect of the function of political institutions which has been neglected by natural law theory, namely the way in which they act as intermediaries in the practical realization of individual ideals of freedom. At this point Durkheim makes an important conceptual distinction between diffuse *représentations collectives* on the one hand and institutionally transmitted principles of value on the other. Durkheim includes the value relations of moral individualism in the multiplicity of *courants sociaux* which pervade collective consciousness (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 119). However, these images of this type of social order must be distinguished from the evaluative and normative structures which are defined, codified and finally implemented in a way which has a bearing on action by identifiable political institutions on the strength of tradition and authority. According to Durkheim, the fact that State organs are largely responsible for defining their own functions gives rise to a whole complex of value orientations.

Quand l'État pense et se décide, il ne faut pas dire qu'il pense et se décide pour elle (for society: M.B). Il n'est pas un simple instrument de canalisation et concentration [...] L'État est un organe spécial chargé d'élaborer certaines représentations qui valent pour la collectivité (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 86-87).

It is the bourgeois State's specific power to define its own functions and impose its own sanctions that renders the diffuse emancipatory ideals of moral individualism politically relevant. Their translation into social reality is thus not only left to the *Eigendynamik* of social developmental processes, but is dependent upon a particular institutional order. Durkheim illustrates these thoughts by using the example of the development of political individualism in France. Even after its epoch-making breakthrough with the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen' before the French National Assembly in 1789, it was for a long time unable to make any real impact on society (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 95). The fact that even in the nineteenth century authoritarian régimes—'reposant en réalité sur des



principes très différents'—were on several occasions able to come to power without encountering any resistance worth noting (*ibid.*) is proof of this. Durkheim concludes from this that in order to institutionalize an individualistic political morality it is not enough to translate it into subtle philosophical systems. On the contrary, it is essential that 'la société soit arrangée de manière à rendre possible et durable cette constitution. Autrement elle reste à l'état diffus et doctrinaire' (*ibid.*). Durkheim clearly has a particular political order in mind.

Durkheim's sociological solution to the natural law problem of legitimation is a new and unique idea of the State. Moral individualism becomes a central element of political legitimation. But Durkheim goes further and views the State as the actual creator and most important guarantor of individual rights to freedom. As Durkheim writes:

[II] n'y avait rien d'exagéré à dire que notre individualité morale, loin d'être antagoniste de l'État, en était au contraire un produit. C'est lui qui la libère. [...] Le rôle de l'État n'a rien de négatif. Il tend à assurer l'individualisation la plus complète que permette l'état social. Bien loin qu'il soit le tyran de l'individu, c'est lui qui rachète l'individu de la société (*ibid.* 103).

The State thus plays an indispensable role in the process of social integration. In Durkheim's view, exclusively the State is capable of translating the emancipatory ideals of modern individualism into social practice. And only by guaranteeing the rights of the individual does it have a secure basis for its own legitimation. In other words, the value relations of moral individualism can only be converted into reality through State organizations.

It is apparent that we are dealing with a theoretical paradox here. Unlike contemporary views of the State, which generally postulate a fundamental antagonism between the individual's libertarian aspirations and the State's claims to domination, Durkheim sees the conditions of legitimation of the State as being inextricably linked with its general social function. The latter is viewed as essentially residing in the production and implementation of its own premises of legitimation which have their roots in moral individualism. This paradoxical construction furthermore forms the basis for Durkheim's projected legitimation strategies. He attempts to find a sociological foundation for these in order to resolve the crisis of legitimation in post-traditional society.

##### 5. *Sacralization as a strategy of legitimation*

Durkheim proceeds on the assumption that threats to the social and thus the moral integrity of the individual in modern society are structurally conditioned. In the transition towards industrial mass society, the prospects for the realization of moral individualism's ideal of freedom are considerably limited and the progress of the emancipation of the individual seems to be structurally endangered. The tendencies towards 'anomie' which are bound



up with the extension of capitalist production and exchange relations are sufficient evidence of this. Durkheim was, as is well-known, particularly interested in anomie. There is no need to go into his analysis of crisis to emphasize the point that it is the 'état d'anomie juridique et morale où se trouve actuellement la vie économique' (Durkheim 1986: 189-197) that objectively curtails individuals' scope for freedom. According to Durkheim, latent anarchist tendencies were becoming more pronounced and deteriorating into a type of chronic 'état de guerre' (Durkheim 1986 : III). This was happening for two reasons: firstly, as a consequence of social inequality in terms of the opportunities open to the individual to make a living and own property and secondly, as a response to the resulting social conflict of interests which is no longer alleviated by any general principle of solidarity. For Durkheim it is obvious that such a state of affairs necessarily imposes limits on the individual's potential for self-realization:

En vain, pour justifier cet état d'irréglementation, fait-on valoir qu'il favorise l'essor de la liberté individuelle. Rien n'est plus faux que cet antagonisme qu'on a trop souvent voulu établir entre l'autorité de la règle et la liberté de l'individu. Tout au contraire, la liberté [...] est elle-même le produit d'une réglementation. Je ne puis être libre que dans la mesure où autrui est empêché de mettre à profit la supériorité physique, économique ou autre dont il dispose pour asservir ma liberté [...] (Durkheim 1986: pp. III-IV).

In view of the structurally conditioned threats to which the individual is exposed in modern society, it is, according to Durkheim, primarily the responsibility of the political system to create the institutional conditions which can guarantee the realization of the emancipatory ideals of moral individualism. Durkheim considers that the best chance of resolving problems of legitimation in modern society lies in a quasi-religious institutionalization of moral individualism since he is convinced that norms and values are easier to implement the more their dignity and ultimate authority appear to derive from a transcendental source (Durkheim 1969: 21 ff). In his sociological analysis of crisis, Durkheim conceives of a strategy of legitimation which is aimed at the practical sacralization of the individual and the institutionalization of the 'religion of the individual'.

We know today that a religion does not necessarily imply symbols and rites in the full sense, or temples and priests [...] Essentially, it is nothing else than a system of collective beliefs and practices that have a special authority [...], a sort of moral supremacy which raises it far above private goals and thereby gives it a religious character [...] Thus, what we need to know is what the religion of today should be. Now, all the evidence points to the conclusion that the only possible candidate is precisely this religion of humanity whose rational expression is the individualist morality (Durkheim 1969a, 25). Consequently it is 'a matter of completing, extending, and organizing individualism, not of restricting it or struggling against it' (*ibid.* 29).

Again it is, according to Durkheim, incumbent upon the State 'd'organiser le culte, d'y présider, d'en assurer le fonctionnement régulier et le développement' (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 104). The power of the State thus has a new basis for legitimation which is more in keeping with the demands for

integration in modern society. The loss of legitimation of the political system which arises as a consequence of structural change within society and of the secularization of culture is compensated for in Durkheim's theory by the sacralization of individualistic values. Another paradox becomes evident: Durkheim considers the sacralization of the individual through the State organs the culminating point of the process of rationalization of modern society. In this respect he differs from, for example, Max Weber, who sees the figure of the charismatic leader as providing the only alternative pathways for individual freedom in the face of the rigid structure of the bureaucratic State. According to Durkheim's theory, the quasi religious process of self-legitimation seems to be the last way out of the crisis of legitimation which afflicts post-traditional political systems.

#### 6. *Democracy as a system of institutionalized conflicts of value*

One of the main issues also in Durkheim's theory of democracy is the question of the extent to which it is possible to realize the individual's rights to freedom in political praxis. The fact that individualistic emancipatory ideals do not have to be enforced against the power of the State, but are on the contrary all the more important the more secure and undisputed the authority of the State is, proves to be a further theoretical aspect of Durkheim's theory of legitimation (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 122).

The assumption that 'plus l'État est fort, plus l'individu est respecté' (*ibid.* 93) should not, however, be misunderstood as a justification of some form of statist authoritarianism (7). On the contrary, assuming the sovereignty and autonomy of the central system of the State, the fundamental problem for Durkheim is how effectively to counterbalance the dangers of the tendency of the State apparatus to become autonomous, a process which ultimately would have a repressive effect. On the assumption that 'une société composée d'une poussière infinie d'individus inorganisés, qu'un État hypertrophié s'efforce d'enserrer et de retenir, constitue une véritable monstruosité sociologique' (Durkheim 1986, p. xxxii), Durkheim demands socially qualified mediating institutions. The reasons why he did not consider the traditional regional authorities of modern representative democracies, electoral colleges or parliaments, or political parties for such a function are well-known. What prompted Durkheim to propose a type of modernized *ständestaatlich* model is also common knowledge (Steeman 1963; Black 1984; Hearn 1985; Müller 1983 : 146-179; Meier 1987; Cedronio 1989: 83 ff. and 152 ff.). We need not go into the complexities and paradoxes of Durkheim's outline for a reform of the corporate State. The point at issue is the fact that, when Durkheim demands the anchoring of

(7) For a critique of the view, which is still occasionally put forward, that Durkheim is to be counted among the ideological precursors

of fascist State doctrine, see Cedronio 1989, p. 160.

occupational organizations in the political system, the main question running through his analysis is which concrete institutional conditions guarantee the individual the greatest possible scope for freedom.

The answer is a reformulation of the model of the division of powers. Durkheim departs from the classical theories of democracy and devises an institutionally balanced model of a political order which, in its internal institutional equilibrium, is likely to expand individuals' scope for freedom. The central theme of Durkheim's theory of democracy is an investigation of the extent to which it is possible to institutionalize conflicts of value. According to Durkheim, on the one hand, it is primarily up to occupational corporations to act as institutional counterbalances to the claims to power of the centralized State. '[C]es groupes secondaires sont indispensables pour que l'État ne soit pas oppressif de l'individu [...]' (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 129). On the other hand, Durkheim expects that the presence of the state as a supreme instance of domination will effectively neutralize the *tyrannie collective* which a state of unmediated polycracy of self-legitimated secondary groups organizing the everyday occupational activities of people would represent for the individual (8).

Durkheim's *ständestaatlich* model of order could not gain ascendancy in political sociology (9). Recent attempts to revive the issue in the context of the debate on neo-corporatism did not change this situation (see Meier 1987). Faced with the systemic complexities of democratic societies, the ultimately circular functionalism of this model appears less convincing than ever. The historical failure of corporatist experiments in the twenties and thirties should not blind us to the fact that what Durkheim was attempting to do in his early work was to give a sociological foundation to a model of democracy based upon the legitimizing values of moral individualism.

Unlike the political sociology based on a theory of elites which was developed in Italy by Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto at about the same time, Durkheim tries to find a way of anchoring new structures of representation in people's everyday occupational experiences and interests. In an attempt to obviate the dangers of the establishment of an authoritarian *étatiste* corporatism, as exemplified in the system of corporations of the late Roman period, Durkheim argues that the State should be as independent as possible and that occupational organizations should have a high degree of autonomy in the regulation of their own affairs (Durkheim 1986: pp. ix f.). As against the mass democratic and socialist utopias of a stateless society (Durkheim 1969: 114 f.) and the liberal conception of the 'nightwatchman State', Durkheim underlines the importance of the authority of the State as

(8) 'Une société formée de clans juxtaposés, de villes ou de villages plus ou moins indépendants, ou de groupes professionnels nombreux autonomes les uns vis-à-vis des autres, sera à peu près aussi compressive de toute individualité que si elle était faite d'un seul clan, d'une seule ville, d'une seule corporation [... Si]

aucun contrepoids ne neutralise leur action, chacune d'elles tendra à absorber en elle ses membres' (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>, 97).

(9) On the earliest praxis-oriented further developments of Durkheim's model of professional groups, see the work of Christian Guelich (1989).

an integrating social force. In an attempt to counter the dangers of a despotic overturning of the State apparatus' centripetal tendencies towards autonomy, Durkheim comes up with the idea of a decentralized system of mediating social organizations which provide their own legitimation. As counterbalances to the State's monopoly of the definition of political norms and values, it is the occupational associations that compete for the articulation and imposition of value definitions which are oriented towards particular interest groups within society. According to Durkheim this would not only have the effect of increasing the political system's regulatory powers in the economic and political spheres, but, more importantly, also increase the chances of being able to implement the principle of moral individualism in society.

[La] force collective qu'est l'État, pour être libératrice de l'individu, a besoin elle-même de contrepoids ; elle doit être contenue par d'autres forces collectives, à savoir par ces groupes secondaires [...] Et c'est de ce conflit de forces sociales que naissent les libertés individuelles. On voit ainsi encore de cette manière quelle est l'importance de ces groupes. Ils ne servent pas seulement à régler et administrer les intérêts qui sont de leur compétence. Ils ont un rôle plus général ; ils sont une des conditions indispensables de l'émancipation individuelle (Durkheim 1969<sup>2</sup>: 99).

### 7. *Concluding remarks*

Durkheim's political sociology is essentially based upon a number of theoretical paradoxes. This is expressed in the conception of the State as a centripetal force for social integration and as the sole legitimate guardian of moral individualism. Both the analysis of political institutions and the model for reform based upon occupational associations are rooted in the context of this theory of legitimation. The question of the chances of political implementation of moral individualism turns out to be a dominant sociological problem and a fundamental principle of Durkheim's politically oriented engagement.

An interpretation which attributes a series of specific integrating functions to particular political institutions would merely dissipate the theoretical tension of Durkheim's theory of legitimation and reduce his political thought to the simplest form of sociological functionalism. On the other hand, his analysis could be seen as an attempt to find a theoretical way out of a possibly insoluble problem of political sociology. By this I mean the attempt to analyze the objective chances of the realization of humanistic values under the Machiavellian assumption that even the most sacred ideals which could bestow meaning upon collective fates, in a sociological perspective, represent no more than profane social constructs\*.

MAURIZIO BACH

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