Durkheim's Political Sociology: Corporatism, State Autonomy, and Democracy

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PRESENT circumstances may prove conducive to the revitalization of interest in Emile Durkheim's political sociology. Durkheim's account of how the liberal state, political pluralism, and the often irrational dynamics of the capitalist economy converge to weaken the structure of authority in complex capitalist society brings his political sociology to the forefront of contemporary concerns. More significantly, his proposals for reestablishing the bases of social order and political authority anticipated well and clearly the recent development of two major issues in the study of the political arrangements of the present Western capitalist democracies—corporatism and state autonomy. In addition to providing a relatively sophisticated account of each, Durkheim examined in detail the relationship which obtains between the two in modern complex society.

Durkheim's interest in corporatism and state autonomy had as its object the defense of democracy. Before examining Durkheim's analysis, its bearing on the present situation, and the implications this situation has for Durkheim's democratic theory, I will consider briefly the recent attention given corporatism and state autonomy in the study of the politics of Western industrial society.

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Beyond Pluralism

Theorizations of corporatism, Leo Panitch observes, have attained the status of a "growth industry."[1] The same can be said of the effort to understand the state's interest in and capacity for autonomous action.[2] In large measure, these "growth industries" are fueled by the increasingly widely held conviction that the pluralist paradigm has become obsolete. As a model of policy formulation, pluralism is said to be capable of producing

> only fragmentation and wrong or nonpolicies. . . . The very immersion of [congressional or parliamentary] bodies and other public institutions in the interplay of interest group struggles erodes the desired autonomy and insulation of public authority from contradictory cross-pressures, obscuring policy-choices and enfeebling any form of governmental purpose.[3]

As a theoretical perspective, one which denies the existence of independent state interests and preferences and which defines state action as reactive to the pressures of private, competitive, well-organized interest groups, pluralism is regarded as entirely at odds with the reality of interest intermediation and political decision making in the Western capitalist democracies. In this view, the immediate task facing those seeking a proper understanding of politics in these societies is to move beyond pluralism.

Corporatism. As the complex of problems besetting the Western capitalist democracies takes on a seemingly intractable character, corporatist-inclined proposals for social reorganization

[1] Leo Panitch, "Recent Theorizations of Corporatism: Reflections on a Growth Industry," *British Journal of Sociology* 31 (1980): 159–187.

[2] Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," *Social Science Research Council Items* 36, no. 112 (1982): 1–8; Stephen Krasner, "Approaches to the State," *Comparative Politics* 16 (1984): 223–246.

[3] Raymond Seidelman, "Pluralist Heaven's Dissenting Angels: Corporatism in the American Political Economy," in A. Stone and E. Harpham, eds., *The Political Economy of Public Policy* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982), p. 54.

are expressed with greater frequency and acquire ever increasing support and influence. Even in the United States, certainly in spirit and in structure the most antistatist of the advanced industrial democracies, business publications join with liberal Democrats and left-wing union leaders to champion public-private partnerships, a National Development Bank, a revamped Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and tripartite decision-making groups—the very stuff of the state-directed approach to economic recovery which lies at the center of corporatist modes of interest intermediation.[4] The strong movement in support of corporatist political structures as a solution to the related problems of stagflation and ungovernability (the former seen as representing the obsolescence of Keynesian demand techniques, the latter as the breakdown of political pluralism) causes alarm in many and encourages some to draw a "Weimar analogy."[5] In the 1920s, the corporatist strategy was introduced in Germany to reverse the rapid decline of economic growth and social stability. It failed to accomplish these goals but doubtlessly facilitated the rise of fascism.[6] It is significant to note, however, that the authoritarian corporatism implemented in Germany and, to some lesser extent, in pre-Fascist Italy differs in important respects from the liberal corporatism currently endorsed as a solution to the difficulties of mature capitalism. In Philippe Schmitter's terms, where liberal or societal corporatism is a more or less voluntaristic response to gradual but continuous developments which warrant a greater rationalization of the political economy, authoritarian or state corporatism is imposed and maintained with the systematic employment of state coercion, and appears to be "a defining element of, if not

[4] Frank Hearn, "The Corporatist Mood in the United States," *Telos* 56 (Summer 1983): 41–57.

[5] Kevin Phillips, *Post-Conservative America* (New York: Random House, 1982).

[6] Charles Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Alan Wolfe, *The Limits of Legitimacy* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

structural necessity for, the antiliberal, delayed capitalist, authoritarian, neomercantilist state."[7]

Despite its failure to distinguish liberal from authoritarian corporatism, the Weimar analogy is useful in alerting us to the preconditions of the expression of the corporatist solution. Abrupt or deep structural change, moral crisis, intense class hostility, the collapse of political authority, the need for greater planning and more centralized coordination brought on by industrial concentration, technological development, and heightened international competition—these are the conditions which promote the promulgation of the corporatist spirit in industrial capitalist societies.

The liberal corporatist arrangements developed in the twentieth century rest on a mode of interest-group representation where the state coordinates the activities of the private sector in institutionalized consultation with the representatives of a limited number of hierarchically organized, functionally differentiated, noncompetitive, singular and compulsory interest associations unified around a common commitment to social stability and economic prosperity. Within these arrangements,

> "citizens" participate through the exercise of voting rights in relation to a corporation which represents their interests in the formulation of state policy; the unit of representation is the corporation rather than the constituency organized on a territorial basis and citizens participate in their capacity as economic agents.[8]

In return for active and continuous involvement in the area of policy formation, the national representatives of participant groups are expected to provide the state with expert advice, to encourage their groups to undertake the reorganization nec-

[7] Philippe Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?", in P. Schmitter and G. Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends Toward Corporatist Intermediation* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979), p. 13.

[8] Bob Jessop, "Capitalism and Democracy: The Best Possible Shell?", in G. Littlejohn et al., eds., *Power and the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 48.

essary to enhance national coordination, and, most importantly, to agree to abide by and contribute to the legitimacy of effected policies.

Participation in corporatist structures does not depend on success in the political arena. Relative importance in the social division of labor rather than capacity to mobilize the electorate determines whether or not functional peak associations will be allowed to collaborate in the formulation of public policy. With the incorporation of their leaders into these structures, functional associations and interest groups begin to lose their private, protective character and become quasi-public bodies engaged in regular cooperative relations with government and responsible for enforcing and legitimating effected policy. In effect, these associations serve the "public good" or the "national cause" by controlling their members. Associational power combines with state power to more effectively mute popular opposition to the public policy generated in accordance with technocratic criteria by collaborative, consensus-seeking, functionally representative decision-making bodies.

As a mode of interest intermediation and a process of policy formation, corporatism requires an active state capable of sustaining a consensus-forming framework and guaranteeing the structure of political partnerships and consultation which underlies it. In addition, corporatism requires the presence of well-established national peak associations whose leaders and representatives, in exchange for the privilege of representation, agree to abide by the spirit of consensus in the course of policy deliberation and implementation. Facilitating consensus is the scrupulously nonpartisan and nonideological—that is, technocratic—character of the corporatist decision-making process. Issues are depoliticized as popular opinion gives way to technical and professional expertise and as short-term political expediency is replaced by a steady resolve to concentrate on long-run objective requirements. The consensus invoked by corporatist arrangements, in Claus Offe's words, requires agreement not on "some normative conception of a

good and just political order but [on pragmatic issues of] functional requirements, limits of tolerance, and economic mechanisms."[9] It is a consensus to defer to expertise, to place the objectively necessary before the politically popular.

Liberal corporatism is partial in character in that it coexists with rather than replaces conventional pluralist politics. Corporatist decision making tends to be concerned exclusively with issues bearing upon the strategic role of the state. With respect both to other issues and to nonincorporated interests and groups, lobbying, pressure-group tactics, and other pluralist means for influencing legislative bodies prevail. Within this coexistence, as Stein Rokkan notes, "votes count but resources decide"[10]—and these resources decide by bypassing or limiting the impact of pluralist competition.

In corporatism, as noted previously, interest groups become quasi-public agencies. As such, they continue to represent the interests of their members but no longer seek to activate or mobilize their memberships in support of or in opposition to particular policies. Instead, they serve to legitimate those policies which they helped shape. In pluralism, Colin Crouch writes, interest groups

> are prepared to accept compromises and call at least a temporary halt to conflict. This may involve them in asking their members for restraint at the conclusion of a bargain in order to maintain the group's credibility as a bargaining partner. Liberal or bargained corporatism marks a distinct shift from this position. . . . Here, in exchange for securing certain ends, the participating groups accept joint responsibility for the order and progress of the system as a whole and undertake to help guarantee the on-going commitment of their members of cooperation.[11]

[9] Claus Offe, "The Attribution of Public Status to Interest Groups: Observations on the West German Case," in Suzanne Berger, ed., *Organizing Interests in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 132.

[10] Stein Rokkan, "Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism," in R. Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 105.

[11] Colin Crouch, "Pluralism and the New Corporatism," *Political Studies* 31 (1983): 457.

Engaged in mutually supportive relations with the state, interest groups as corporatist partners operate largely outside the pluralist orbit.

While pluralists and corporatists alike recognize and seek to ameliorate the problems associated with the growing diversity of the modern polity, the political solutions they offer embody substantially incompatible images of the mode of interest intermediation most appropriate for the complex challenges faced by modern governments.

> The former suggest spontaneous formation, numerical proliferation, horizontal extension and competitive interaction; the latter advocate controlled emergence, quantitative limitation, vertical stratification and complementary interdependence. Pluralists place their faith in the shifting balance of mechanically intersecting forces; corporatists appeal to the functional adjustment of an organically interdependent whole.[12]

If not antithetical, the two positions clearly are contrasting. The expanding influence of the corporatist position has corresponded closely to the declining power of the pluralistic position.

The ascendancy of the corporatist position is attributable to two increasingly accepted claims. The first is that corporatist political arrangements are indispensable if modern democratic society is to overcome the related problems of ungovernability and recurrent economic crisis, a point strongly supported by Schmitter's finding that in "advanced capitalist, highly industrialized societies, there is a strong positive relationship between a societal corporatist mode of interest intermediation and relative governability (or at least citizen ruliness and fiscal effectiveness),"[13] while for these same societies the pluralist mode of interest articulation is a virtual formula for political

[12] Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?", p. 16.

[13] Philippe Schmitter, "Interest Intermediation and Regime Governability in Contemporary Western Europe and North America," in Berger, *Organizing Interests in Western Europe,* p. 313.

instability.[14] The second claim, often stated independently of the first, is that corporatist structures—very firmly in Austria, Norway, the Netherlands, and Sweden, more moderately in West Germany, France, and Britain, only implicitly but still significantly (in the form of interest group liberalism, to use Lowi's term[15]) in the United States—already have become or are becoming central to the polity of the advanced capitalist democracies.[16] Durkheim, as we shall see, made both claims and developed their implications in terms of state autonomy.

State Autonomy. Pluralism views politics largely as the state-supervised interplay of competing interest groups. As the occasion demands, the state enters into this political competition as a neutral mediator, arbitrator, or conciliator. Lacking both the capacity and the inclination to act autonomously, the state does what it does to be consistent with the "societal parallelogram of demands and resources" which prevails in civil society. More vigorously than other society-centered approaches to politics, pluralism makes the argument that public officials lack the capacities and the inclination to distance themselves from the pressures and constraints applied by the private actors who constitute the demand-group universe.

[14] This should not be taken to mean that corporatism signals the end of history. "Corporatism's very success at keeping political life ruly and effective," Schmitter notes, "has been purchased at the price of organizational sclerosis, rigidification of differentials, perpetuation of inequalities, and, most of all, disregard for the individualistic norms of citizen participation and accountability characteristic of a liberal democratic order" (Schmitter, "Interest Intermediation," p. 323). These constitute a major source of vulnerability which can be exploited by rank-and-file revolts, class mobilization, entitled organizations, and single-issue movements which either violate the partial character of liberal corporatism or force a spillover of issues into more politicized realms (Philippe Schmitter, "Reflections on Where the Theory of Neo-Corporatism Has Gone and Where the Praxis of Neo-Corporatism May Be Going," in G. Lembruch and P. Schmitter, eds., *Patterns of Corporatist Policy-Making* [Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982], pp. 266–272). Like all modes of interest-intermediation, corporatism encounters contradictions and instabilities which threaten is persistence. Today, these instabilities may be more manageable or at least less risky than are pluralist instabilities given the circumstances of advanced democratic capitalist society.

[15] Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1979).

[16] Berger, *Organizing Interests in Western Europe.*

This universe is seen to encompass virtually the whole of civil society. Given the ready availability of effective political resources and relatively easy access to the state, groups form quickly to aggregate interests, to defend them against rival associations, and to pressure the state in their name. Civil society is a sort of political marketplace which constrains and ultimately shapes state action.

In opposition to this pluralist reductionism, Alfred Stepan defines the state in realist terms as "the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive systems that attempt not only to structure relationships *between* civil society and public authority in a polity but also to structure many crucial relationships *within* civil society as well."[17] While Stepan's concern is with nondemocratic states, a number of recent studies have posited a similar realist conception of the state, one which regards the contemporary liberal democratic capitalist state as a powerful, authoritative, resource-ladened organization with distinctive interests and the capacity to act on them even when such action runs counter to the interests of the most dominant groups in society. In these studies, states "have been identified . . . as taking weighty, autonomous initiatives—going beyond the demands or interests of social groups—to promote social change, manage economic crisis, or develop innovative public policies."[18] Here, states are seen as in possession of compulsions and preferences distinct from those of particular societal groups. Indeed, states frequently act in ways that contradict the preferences of dominant groups.

[17] Alfred Stepan, *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. xii.

[18] Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," p. 1. The state autonomy thesis should not be confused with the relative autonomy thesis found in Marxist theories of the state. The latter regards the state as possessing a functional autonomy from the capitalist class, functional in that it enables the state to order and reproduce the capitalist system. The former much more carefully separates state power from class power and sees the state frequently pursuing its own interests even when such action opposes the long-run interests of the dominant class. The differences between the two positions are enunciated in Eric Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) and Theda Skocpol, "Political Response to Capitalist

In the statist view, then, the state is not simply a supervisor of interest-group competition or an arena where group conflicts are worked out. It is rather a more or less autonomous organization with a logic, interests, and power of its own. Expanding on these state-centered assumptions, Eric Nordlinger argues that the state regularly translates its preferences into authoritative actions opposed by powerful societal groups. The modern democratic state, he finds, inculcates in public officials a preference for the maximization of their autonomy, and possesses autonomy-enhancing capacities which enable these officials to detach the state from societal constraints and to implement policies divergent from key societal support. By "neutralizing or markedly diminishing the constraining effects of private resources, mitigating the extent or effectiveness with which societal actors are able to deploy them," public officials enable the state to become an independent, self-interested, and powerful actor in its own right.[19] In contrast to the pluralist view which explains state action in terms of private sanctions and incentives, Nordlinger observes that the state acts autonomously, often in an effort to secure its own interests, and frequently is strong enough to satisfy its preferences even in the face of substantial social resistance.

Obviously, statists envision the political universe differently than do pluralists. In contrast to pluralists, Krasner notes, statists take the problems of rule and control to be more central than those of allocation.[20] For them, politics is not so

Crisis: Neo-Marxist Theories of the State and the Case of the New Deal," *Politics and Society* 10 (1980): 155–201. Relative-autonomy theorists tend to see corporatist arrangements as beneficial for the long-run interests of capitalism. These structures are said to place far greater restraints on the working class than on the capitalist class (whose future interests, in any event, are protected by the corporatist state). From a state-autonomy perspective, while it makes sense to argue that corporatist structures are less restrictive to the capitalist class than the working class, the fact remains that they place additional constraints on both while reducing those on the state. Thus they permit the state greater autonomy to act on its own distinctive preferences, some of which are inconsistent with the long-term interests of the capitalist class (Frank Hearn, "State Autonomy and Corporatism," *Contemporary Crises* 8 [1984]: 134).

[19] Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*, p. 130.

[20] Krasner, "Approaches to the State," pp. 26–29.

much about which effective demand groups influence public policy ("who gets what, when, and how") as it is about the relative power of state and societal actors. Further, if pluralism tends to reduce the state to a collection of individuals occupying formal roles, statism tends to regard the state as an administrative and legal order which regularly shapes the preferences of private actors, limits their use of resources, and gives symbolic representation to the underlying unity of the political community. Finally, while pluralists fail to clearly and sharply distinguish public officials and state managers from their society, statists picture state actors as using primarily state-derived resources to pursue distinctive state goals. Consequently, state autonomy theorists concentrate on how the state formulates and implements its preferences and on how, in its interaction with domestic and international environments and actors, it seeks to enhance and enlarge its capacities for formulation and implementation.[21]

Durkheim anticipated the state-autonomy thesis in his assessment of the state in complex society as the "organizing center," the "organ of social intelligence," the "central nervous system" of society, the "prime mover," and the "organ of moral discipline."[22] For Durkheim, however, the autonomous state does not yet exist. It is a desirable goal, one attainable only in conjunction with the establishment of corporatist political structures. In modern society, Durkheim thought, the state realizes its interest in autonomy by becoming a corporatist state.

[21] Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal," *Political Science Quarterly* 97 (1982): 255–278; Krasner, "Approaches to the State," p. 224. For a more elaborate and specific discussion of the capacities, attributes, and interests in state autonomy, see Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*. Obviously, the statist approach suggests an agenda for political research that is considerably different from that proposed by pluralism. The outlines of such an agenda are provided generally in Krasner, "Approaches to the State," p. 243, and, much more specifically, by Peter Evans et al., "Proposal to the Social Science Research Council for a Research Planning Committee on States and Social Structures," unpublished manuscript, April 1983.

[22] Emile Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958), pp. 49–72.

Significantly, the recent interest shown both corporatism and state autonomy arises amid enduring social, political, and economic crisis and a widespread search for a strategy for rebuilding consensus, authority, and economic growth. A very similar situation confronted Durkheim and, to a far greater extent, his two sociological predecessors, Henri Saint-Simon and August Comte.

As developed by Saint-Simon and Comte in the first half of the nineteenth century, sociology was essentially a basis for devising a strategy of societal reconstruction, a program for reestablishing the social order and consensus shattered by a series of political revolutions and continuously rapid, seemingly directionless industrial and economic change. Very much akin to the corporatist proposals put forth in the twentieth century, the sociological strategy elaborated by Saint-Simon and Comte was developed in direct opposition to the various programs of social reorganization advocated by laissez-faire liberalism, antirational conservatism, and socialism. Regarded as indispensable to a stable and prosperous social order were greater planning of and control over the economy and, through expanded state guidance, more rational coordination of the increasingly differentiated parts of society.

Saint-Simon and Comte were concerned more with promulgating a corporatist spirit than with precisely and unambiguously defining the structural preconditions and features of corporatism. Outside of their extended arguments in favor of replacing politics with rational administration under the guidance of a scientific-industrial elite, and unlike Durkheim, whose contributions on this score were clear and developed, Saint-Simon and Comte addressed the question of corporatist structure in partial terms at best. Nevertheless, in their conviction that the minimal requirement for the restoration of economic growth and social order is subordination to objective

facticity—government which does what is necessary, not what is politically expedient—they anticipated exactly the basic premise underlying the twentieth-century corporatist calls for sacrifice for and consensus around this or that conception of national cause or public good, calls assertive of an administrative conception of politics which requires the insulation of the policy-making process from popular pressures.

Clearly, the corporatism proposed here is nondemocratic, if not antidemocratic, in form and substance. For this reason especially, it runs directly counter to the corporatist solution offered by Durkheim. Durkheim, Tiryakian observes, shared Saint-Simon's and Comte's "repugnance of political upheavals, of group struggles for power, of chicanery and civil strife" and he continued their effort "to make sociology a healing and stabilizing science, one that would find a viable basis for restoring social consensus and for enhancing social integration."[23] Yet, while borrowing liberally from the strategy of societal reconstruction developed by Saint-Simon and Comte, Durkheim maintained a strong commitment to democracy, one he justified sociologically, and this commitment infused his model of corporatism.

Durkheim argued that scientific sociological knowledge, particularly as it made possible the distinction between the pathological and the normal, enables beneficial intervention in the course of development and thus is essential to the progress of social order. While he never went as far as Saint-Simon and Comte to promote a scientific-industrial elite, Durkheim did maintain that "the duty of the statesman is no longer to push society toward an ideal that seems attractive to him, but his role is that of the physician. He prevents the outbreak of illnesses by good hygiene, and he seeks to cure them when they have appeared."[24] In diagnosing these illnesses, in for-

[23] Edward Tiryakian, "Emile Durkheim," in T. Bottomore and R. Nisbet, eds., *A History of Sociological Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 190.

[24] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 75.

mulating the hygienic principles and cure, the statesman would do well to rely on sociological knowledge. More important to the accomplishment of these tasks, however, is an autonomous democratic-corporatist state capable of normatively regulating communal groups, bringing the economy under conscious and rational social control, and implementing national and regional policies of economic exchange and growth—while all the time vigilantly safeguarding individual liberties. Durkheim regarded corporatism as an integrative element indispensable to all postagrarian societies, and he sought to demonstrate that democratic corporatism is commensurate with the criteria of social normality consistent with modern complex society.

The primary aim of Durkheim's corporatist strategy, writes LaCapra, "was to establish a normative triangle of community, individual rights, and state regulation under the general guidance of universal, humanistic values."[25] Underlying this goal was another—a solution to the problem of anomie. The old traditions and practices have receded and nothing has arisen to take their place. A "breakdown has occurred which can be repaired only when a new moral discipline comes into being and takes root. In short, our first obligation today is to forge a new morality for ourselves."[26] The crisis of our time is a moral crisis, Durkheim maintained, and the state of normlessness or anomie from which this crisis originates is a pathological social fact which impedes both the harmonious operation of society and individual freedom.

Initially, Durkheim regarded anomie as a by-product of the as yet uncompleted shift from traditional to modern society. The collective conscience of simple society was distinguished by its strong emphasis on the tyranny of the group over the individual and its rigid, fixed moral boundaries. Repressive

[25] Dominick LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 232.

[26] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 409.

and obstructive of the development of the individual, it was viewed by Durkheim as totally inappropriate to the complex division of labor which undergirds modern society. Appropriate to complex society is a collective conscience of moral individualism.

Grounded in sentiments of cooperation and a concern for the welfare of others, moral individualism is a societal injunction to tolerate, respect, and encourage the individuality of others (such individuality, particularly in the area of skill, being essential to the complex division of labor). Far from endorsing an ethos of egoism and selfishness, moral individualism imposes limits and constraints on the individual. The individual is restrained in his choice of goals and means by his respect for other individuals. Insofar as the collective conscience of moral individualism remains underdeveloped, anomie prevails.

Durkheim's effort to discover a way of resolving the problem of anomie began with his observation that the "first origins of all social processes of any importance should be sought in the internal constitution of the social group,"[27] particularly its dynamic density. Out of the regular interaction between and among those who share a common life emerges a collective nomos. Given the influences the complex division of labor has on group dynamics in modern society, the emergent collective nomos would be moral individualism. The basic remedy for anomie, then, entails the creation of microsocial opportunities or centers for interaction for those who are or should be living a common life.[28] "Within any political society," Durkheim wrote,

> we get a number of individuals who share the same ideas and interests, sentiments and occupations, in which the rest of the population have no part. . . . They feel a mutual attraction, they

[27] Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method,* p. 113.

[28] Stephen Marks, "Durkheim's Theory of Anomie," *American Journal of Sociology* 80 (1974): 336.

> seek out one another. . . . Once the group is formed, nothing can hinder an appropriate moral life from evolving.[29]

The main basis of the collective nomos in complex society, Durkheim argued, is the occupational corporation.

Superficially similar to medieval guilds, the occupational corporations envisioned by Durkheim were clearly defined, well-organized, internally democratic groups existing as national public institutions. For each major occupation in the division of labor there would be a corporation whose members would be drawn from all those in that occupational category throughout the country. While legally sanctioned by and responsible to the state, these occupational corporations "would have authority to resolve conflicts both within their own membership and in relation to other occupational groups; and they would be the focus for a variety of educational and recreational activities."[30] In this sense, the occupational corporation would closely resemble the occupational community whose members regularly interact with one another outside as well as inside the workplace. With each occupational center generating its own emergent morality, the problem of anomie would begin to be brought under control.

Durkheim recognized that to be effective the remedy for anomie found in the establishment of occupational corporations required an explicitly developed political dimension. The problem of anomie was not simply an occupational one, it was society-wide in character and scope. In addition, there would be a good probability that the morality produced by one occupational group would be different from if not antagonistic to that arising from a second. For social solidarity to predominate over a disputatious particularism, "related groups would have to share a *conscience collective* containing norms which defined the justified modes of interactions, mutual ex-

[29] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics,* pp. 23–24.

[30] Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 103.

pectation, and exchange with one another."[31] Anomie requires for its resolution a genuinely collective nomos, one representative of society as a whole. Such a collective nomos would emerge from the interaction of everyone with everyone else. The direct interaction of everyone with everyone else is obviously impossible in a large, complex society. However, the indirect interaction of each with all others is another matter.[32]

Being the most inclusive of all societal associations, the state became for Durkheim the most appropriate arena for the indirect interaction of everyone with everyone else in society. Democratically elected political representatives are few enough in number so that they can directly interact with each other. As long as public officials are truly representative of all the various differentiated segments of society, the morality that emerges from their direct interaction will constitute a collective nomos. To assure that this be the case, Durkheim argued that the occupational corporations should replace territorially defined constituencies as the basic electoral units. The occupational association, Durkheim wrote, "is the true electoral unit, and because the links attaching us to one another derive from our calling rather than from any regional bonds of loyalty, it is natural that the political structure should reflect the way in which we ourselves form into groups of our own accord."[33] Moreover, Durkheim claimed,

> if votes are to be an expression of something more than individuals and if they are to be animated by a collective mind, the ordinary voting electorate should not be made up of individuals brought together solely for this exceptional occasion; they do not know one another, they have not contributed to forming each other's opinions and they merely go along in single file to the ballot box. No, on the contrary, it must be an established group that has cohesion and permanence, that does not just take shape for the moment on polling day. The guild or corporative body corresponds clearly to the desired end.[34]

[31] LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim,* pp. 91–92.
[32] Marks, "Durkheim's Theory of Anomie," p. 338.
[33] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics,* pp. 102–103.
[34] *Ibid.,* p. 105.

In this context, public officials would become representatives of distinct occupational groups and all corporations would be represented in the state apparatus. Through their representative, members of one occupational corporation would be indirectly interacting with the members of all others. From this cooperative political arrangement would arise a cure for the excesses of anomie—a civic morality which would endorse the principle of moral individualism and further the progressive emancipation of the individual. "Our moral individuality," Durkheim concluded, "far from being antagonistic to the state, has on the contrary been the product of it."[35]

For Durkheim, the steady expansion of the directive role of the state is normal in modern complex society so long as nothing is done to threaten the cultivation of intermediary corporative groups. Only the state is capable of formulating laws expressive of collective representations valid for society as a whole. Only the corporate group, on the other hand, is capable of providing both resistance to any absolutist tendencies the state may possess and the social interaction and experiences in which socially valid representations can be rooted. The state is a moral actor responsible for translating narrow particularistic concerns into coherent and meaningful collective representations. At the same time, as intermediaries between the state and the individual, occupational corporations "are essential if the state is not to oppress the individual; they are also necessary if the state is to be sufficiently free of the individual. . . . They liberate the two confronting forces, whilst linking them at the same time,"[36] and they do this in such a way as to assure that "the State will be more dependent on itself, the distinction between it and the rest of society will be clearer, and by that very fact it will be more capable of autonomy."[37]

[35] In Anthony Giddens, *Emile Durkheim* (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 64.
[36] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics,* pp. 96, 106.
[37] *Ibid.,* p. 96.

For Durkheim, then, the state is primarily responsible for the related tasks of advancing the interests of society as a whole and "redeeming the individual from society," that is, fostering the development of the individual. To meet these responsibilities, the state must be autonomous from civil society. "If the state was reabsorbed into society," Giddens writes of Durkheim's argument, "the result would either be that the state would be too weak to carry out its role as the overseer of social progress, or that it would dominate all aspects of the life of the citizen."[38] Corporatist groups afford a counterbalance between these two alternatives and permit the state the autonomy it requires for the promotion of the rights of the individual and for the conscious, deliberate, reasoned and reflective formulation of collective representations. While these corporatist groups are indispensable to the preservation of state autonomy, the state by no means is constrained by their preferences. If anything, just the reverse holds true. "When the State takes thought and makes a decision," Durkheim insisted, "we must not say that it is society that thinks and decides for the State, but that the State thinks and decides for it. It is not simply an instrument for canalizing and concentrating. It is, in a certain sense, the organizing centre of the secondary groups themselves."[39]

Without sufficient autonomy, the state is reduced to an offprint or translator of individual preferences. As such it no longer is able to meet its primary task, the reasoned formulation of ideas appropriate to the requirements of society at large. Here,

> the State does not move of its own power, it has to follow in the wake of the obscure sentiments of the multitude. . . . As long as the political order brings the deputies in immediate contact with the unorganized mass of individuals, it is inevitable that the

[38] Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 206.

[39] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics*, p. 49.

> latter should make the laws. This direct contact does not allow the State to be itself.[40]

So long as the state is prevented from being itself, disorganization prevails as amid a multitude of uncoordinated and discrete demands and pressures each pretends to be his own statesman.

To be itself, the state must be "an organ distinct from the rest of society."[41] To assume its normal and desirable role in industrial society, the state must

> deploy forces equal to those for which it has to provide a counter-balance. It must even permeate all those secondary groups of family, trade and professional association, Church, regional areas and so on. . . . The state must . . . enter into their lives, it must supervise and keep a check on the way they operate and to do this it must spread its roots in all directions . . ., it must be present in all spheres of social life and make itself felt. Wherever these particular collective forces exist, there the power of the State must be, to neutralize them.[42]

Durkheim found in the active, directive, expansionist, interventionist state the essential precondition of democracy.

Democracy presupposes the autonomous corporatist state. It is not the role of the democratic state to add up and express the unreflective opinions of the citizenry. Rather, its task is

> to superimpose on this unreflective thought a more considered thought. . . . It . . . must be a centre of new and original representations which ought to put the society in a position to conduct itself with greater intelligence than when it is swayed merely by vague sentiments working on it . . . [While] it has to be informed as to what the citizens are thinking, . . . this is only one of the elements in its means of deliberation and reflection. . . . [Ultimately,] it has to take thought in its own way.[43]

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 82.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Only in the most primitive democracies is the state reduced to a receptor of majority opinion, an echo of the will of citizens—and the price for this is the inability to act with care and deliberation. The stability and prosperity of modern society and, as well, the enlargement of individual rights requires a much more sophisticated democratic politics.

Durkheim located the foundation of modern democracy in the regular and institutionalized interaction between the directive autonomous state and corporatist groups.[44] As he defined it, democracy possesses two central features: frequent institutionalized communication and consultation between the state and its citizens and an influential, interventionist state with strong attachments to the key sectors of society. To the extent that the first condition obtains, the collective conscience of moral individualism will be firmly established and forcefully expressed. Guided by the morality of individualism, growing intervention by an autonomous state will serve to enhance individuality as it brings to society the rational coordination demanded by the complex division of labor. In these circumstances, state autonomy embedded in corporatist political structures, democracy, and individuality continuously feed and enlarge one another.

Despite the clear influence of Saint-Simon and Comte on Durkheim's thinking, the democratic corporatism he proposed substantially differs from the elitist corporatism advocated by his predecessors. Nevertheless, Durkheim's model—especially its emphasis on the creation of occupational corporations or national peak associations licensed and recognized by a directive and autonomous state and substituted for territoriality as the basis of electoral units—also anticipated well the corporatist arrangements developed in the twentieth century. In one crucial respect, however, Durkheim's vision has been repudiated. Corporatism appears antagonistic to—and not, as Durkheim had it, necessary for—democratic politics in modern industrial capitalist societies.

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90.

Corporatism, State Autonomy, and Democracy

The autonomous corporatist state Durkheim regarded as normal for modern industrial society now exists to one degree or another in a number of Western European societies. There are good reasons for believing that it will become more common. For one, there is some evidence that industrial capitalist societies overcome severe crisis only on the back of a more powerful and more autonomous state apparatus.[45] For another, the internalization of capital, now apparently indispensable to capital accumulation in the advanced capitalist world, has proven disastrous to the state's capacity to influence market enterprises, to formulate effective national economic policy, and to affect the international monetary system. "As internationalization pulls capital's interests away from a direct identification with its nation of origin . . .," Hawley and Noble find, "state managers are encouraged to define the interests of the state as distinct from the interests of capital."[46] This process of interest definition leads toward corporatism for, as Seidelman rightly observes, in corporatism the "state emerges as an autonomous actor capable of forming and implementing an industrial policy and an incomes policy, of targeting certain industries for help or destruction, and of tying workers' wage demands to a firm's productivity and profits."[47]

Increased state planning and intervention do not in themselves, of course, signify the emergence of the autonomous corporatist state. Required as well is regular and institutionalized collaboration of functional groups in the formulation of public policy. Yet, while corporatist structures of decision making give national peak associations greater say in

[45] Hearn, "State Autonomy and Corporatism"; Fred Block, "Beyond Relative Autonomy: State Managers as Historical Subjects," in Ralph Miliband, ed., *The Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 1980).

[46] James Hawley and Charles Noble, "The Internationalization of Capital and the Limits of the Interventionist State," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 10 (1982): 117, 103.

[47] Seidelman, "Pluralist Heaven's Dissenting Angels," pp. 51–52.

the making of policy, they simultaneously enlarge the state's control over these groups. National associations are recognized and licensed, they are accorded a representational monopoly by the state. "In return for the granting of representational privileges," Nordlinger finds, "the state is able to maintain some control over the associations. . . . Public officials are able to define demands that diverge overly far from their own preferences as unacceptable and attempts to bring overbearing pressures upon them as unallowable."[48] Corporatist structures place limitations on the full application of private resources and thus accord the state further autonomy from the associations which are its corporatist partners. Moreover, these arrangements transform the participant associations into a buffer which insulates the state from the full shock of any rank-and-file discontent that might emerge in response to the bargaining process or outcomes. In these circumstances, the state as the national coordinator and ultimate guarantor of the corporatist partnership becomes less constrained by popular expectations and demands.

In this context, the decision-making process becomes less democratic as it appears to become more democratic, policy formulation is depoliticized as it is seemingly politicized. The appearance of democratization is a function of the inclusion of representatives of key associations in the policy-making process. The formulation of policy is no longer the exclusive responsibility of a state biased in favor of one or another set of dominant social actors. There are, however, several aspects of corporatist structures which serve to weaken democratic forms and practices. For instance, conventional legislative bodies are regularly bypassed in the formulation of major policy statements, particularly those concerning economic questions. In addition, those in society not members of participating national peak associations are in effect disenfranchised. Furthermore, decision making is limited to the leaders and repre-

[48] Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State,* p. 170.

sentatives of these associations, who become quasi-public agents committed to both a nonpartisan, technocratic outlook and predetermined national goals which take precedence over the particularistic concerns of their individual organizations. This dual commitment is necessary if groups are to retain their privileged access, representational monopoly, and state funding.[49] In these circumstances, participant groups are compelled to enforce effected policy rather than encourage the democratic participation of their members in the creation of such policy.

Corporatist democracy converges well with the recent neoconservative effort to meet the crisis of governability in advance capitalist society by restoring a "democratic balance." It has the capacity to mitigate the problem of democratic excess caused by the breakdown of established political arrangements (by subordinating pluralist to corporatist modes of interest intermediation) and to solve the related problem of governmental overload (by delegating some authority and responsibility to participant groups) in a way that partly insulates the states from popular pressures. Thus Kvavik's study of Norwegian corporatism finds that the government is virtually assured "little adverse reaction to legislation once effected; that reaction, should it come, would be directed not toward the government, but at the participants—the interest groups and their representatives—who accept legislation in behalf of the organization membership."[50] Shielded from democratic pressures, the state in corporatism, according to Schmitter, "would be relieved of decisional and implementional responsibility over 'non-essential' matters (welfare, health, etc.) and could then devote more attention and effort to such 'essential' tasks as internal security, external defense, foreign affairs"

[49] John Keeler, "Corporatism and Official Union Hegemony: The Case of French Agricultural Syndicalism," in Berger, *Organizing Interests in Western Europe.*

[50] Robert Kvavik, "Interest Groups in a 'Cooptive' Political System: The Case of Norway," in M. Heisler, ed., *Politics in Europe* (New York: McKay, 1974), p. 111.

and economic growth.[51] In effect, the state would be accorded greater autonomy to do what is necessary but politically unpopular. Saint-Simon and Comte surely would applaud this development. Equally surely, Durkheim would find in it reason enough to seriously question the connections he drew between corporatism, state autonomy, and democracy.

Conclusion

Durkheim maintained that a society's mark of honor has little to do with its wealth and military greatness and everything to do with the justice of its organization and moral constitution. The basis of modern societal honor, for him, is the corporatist-democratic state characterized by the ever active participation of publicly interested citizens. "The planning of the social milieu so that the individual may realize himself more fully, and the management of the collective apparatus in a way that will bear less hard on the individual; an assured and amicable exchange of goods and services and the cooperation of all men of good will towards an ideal they shape without any conflict"—in these Durkheim discovered the ground of a decent and prosperous society.[52] In this context, Prager writes, Durkheim regarded a properly functioning democracy as one which "successfully promotes an active and reflective citizenry; it serves to transform citizens into increasingly more autonomous individuals responsibly participating as individuals in their political and social life."[53]

As it has developed and probably will continue to develop in response to the political and economic crises of maturing capitalist societies, corporatist democracy displays little respect

[51] Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?", p. 35.

[52] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics*, p. 71.

[53] Jeffrey Prager, "Moral Integration and Political Inclusion: A Comparison of Durkheim's and Weber's Theories of Democracy," *Social Forces* 59 (1981): 920.

for Durkheim's active and responsible citizenry. This, despite the fact that corporatist democratic arrangements are structurally quite similar to Durkheim's model. Schmitter suggests what may underlie this discrepancy. Liberal corporatist arrangements, Schmitter notes, promote

> policies which have extended citizen rights to protection against unemployment, to more extensive welfare services and to representation within institutions previously governed by other authority principles, especially business firms and state agencies. Citizens of pluralistically structured policies have suffered significantly greater inequalities in all these domains.[54]

Yet the ways by which the formulation and implementation of these policies take place have the effect of shifting democratic practice "away from a concern with *participation* and *accessibility* toward a greater emphasis on *accountability* and *responsiveness*. Individual citizens become less intensely and directly involved in political life; at the same time, organizations active in their interests become increasingly integral components of the policy process."[55] In Durkheim's view, the autonomous corporatist state would advance the democratic participation of both individual citizens and their representative associations. His conception of democracy incorporates participation and accessibility as well as accountability and responsiveness, and it places the highest premium on an active citizenry. In their actual development, however, corporatist democratic structures discourage the active participation of individual citizens as they encourage the involvement of the organizations which represent their interests. Implied here is a fundamental flaw in Durkheim's position.

Durkheim valued democracy not so much as a way of determining collective goals or political objectives—for these have to do with scientifically knowable, societal-based re-

[54] Philippe Schmitter, "Democratic Theory and Neo-Corporatist Practice," *Social Research* 50 (1983): 919.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 920.

quirements and imperatives—as for its capacity to enable the interaction and communication through which these goals or collective representations are able to receive general, lawful, and meaningful articulation. The view, derived in part from Saint-Simon and Comte, that the goals around which corporatist consensus is to be built and maintained are given in the form of the collective representations associated with the autonomous state in modern complex society is inconsistent in the last analysis with any vibrant conception of democracy, for it deprives democracy of its very object—the active creation of collective ends and purposes. The rationalization of the political economy entailed by the establishment of an autonomous corporatist state transforms secondary groups from intermediaries to quasi-public agencies. As partners of a rational and rationalizing state, these groups become committed more to the logic of administration than to that of democracy. Furthermore, to the extent that these arrangements arise, as they so often do, in response to capital-labor stalemates and remain primarily tripartite in character—involving the state almost exclusively with business and labor associations—they narrowly delimit the opportunities other groups have to influence or even have their interests represented in the policy-making process. Durkheim's solution, in short, rested on two irreconcilable commitments: one to the autonomous corporatist state, the other to a democracy respectful of active and informed individual citizens.