Durkheim on Occupational Corporations: An Exegesis and Interpretation

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Durkheim on Occupational Corporations: An Exegesis and Interpretation

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As indicated by its subtitle, this paper has a two-fold objective. The first is to provide a detailed account of Durkheim's theory of occupational corporations. Although this aspect of his thought has attracted a good deal of commentary, there is no systematic analysis of this theory which draws upon the entire range of relevant material, scattered throughout various reviews and lecture-notes as well as in the better known publications. This is a significant omission, for I hope to show that Durkheim's thinking on the corporations underwent considerable change during his lifetime, one closely connected to a more general theoretical reorientation in his work.

My second aim concerns the relationship between the Durkheimian theory of occupational groups and other theories in which guilds and corporations are assigned important ethical and political functions. Again, a good deal has been written on this subject, although little consensus exists as to how Durkheim's views are to be interpreted. While a full discussion of this issue cannot be attempted here, the exegesis undertaken in the first part of this paper does suggest ways in which Durkheim's relationship to other discursive traditions might be reassessed.

The Early Writings 1885-93

The publications of the 1880s reveal Durkheim's intense concern with the "social problem." This is construed as a configuration of pathologies created by the rapid processes of urbanization, industrialization, and secularization. The consequences were widespread disaffection from customary values and practices, hostility, violence in industrial relations, and

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a declining birth rate coupled with rising rates of crime, suicide, and alcoholism. In this context Durkheim conceived his task as a sociologist to be one of accounting for the transformation of French and, more generally, European society and indicating the new forms of morality and institutional arrangements which were consonant with modernity.[1]

Durkheim found existing responses to the social problem deficient. Conservative proposals for reconstituting traditional religious and political values he dismissed as unworkable, since the emancipation of the individual from the constraints imposed by custom and religious dogma was both an irreversible and a beneficial process.[2] On the other hand individualistic recommendations interpreted all forms of social control as infringements of personal liberty, whereas Durkheim was convinced that some degree of moral discipline was essential for both individual well-being and social harmony. Nor did he endorse the liberal suspicion of the state, since for him the historical record showed the growth of personal freedom and the progressive expansion of the state to be interconnected processes.[3] As for socialism, while he occasionally defended this doctrine from hostile criticisms,[4] the general tone of these writings distanced him from orthodox socialism. Durkheim perceived the social problem not in class or economic terms but as a moral issue, requiring forms of moral authority capable of commanding the allegiance of all citizens irrespective of their class position.

Though critical of both collectivist and individualist responses to the social problem, Durkheim showed considerable interest in theories that attempted to synthesize these two perspectives. His concern with the Austrian thinker, Albert Schaeffle, is of particular importance in this respect, since the latter argued that the suppression of corporations had created a social vacuum in modern societies, engendering egoism and class conflict. In reacting to anarchic economic relations and injustices occasioned by these conditions, the proletariat supported a "despotic socialism." Schaeffle believed that the corporations furnished a means of avoiding the opposite evils of atomizing individualism and tyrannical collectivism, and he advocated reorganizing industry into "conscious" and "authoritative" centers—i.e., corporations—which would be linked to the state. Durkheim evinced some sympathy with this program, denying it to be collectivist on the

[1] For a detailed discussion of these themes in Durkheim's early publications, see M. J. Hawkins, "Traditionalism and Organicism in Durkheim's Early Writings. 1885-93," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 16 (1980), 32-37.

[2] Emile Durkheim, Review of L. Gumplowicz, *Grundriss der Soziologie* (1885), in Durkheim, *Textes*, ed. V. Karady (3 vols; Paris, 1975), I, 352, 354; *idem*, "La Science positive de la morale en Allemagne" (1887), *Textes*, I, 316.

[3] "La Science positive," 292.

[4] Durkheim, Review of A. Fouillée, *La Propriété sociale et la démocratie* (1885), in Durkheim, *La Science sociale et l'action*, ed. J.-C. Filloux (Paris, 1970), 179, hereafter cited as *SSA*.

grounds that its proposals would not be imposed upon society but would emanate from the "free initiative of individuals."[5] But these remarks do not reflect any commitment to a corporatist political agenda. Durkheim was critical of Schaeffle throughout this early period and described his program as excessively rationalist, reposing upon an overly robust faith in the power of reason to re-shape society.[6] Furthermore, his own analyses do not disclose any explicit endorsement of a Schaeffle-type policy. In a study of the relationship between low birth rates and high levels of suicide in France, Durkheim contended that both trends were linked to a decline in familial bonds and domestic sentiments, since family life shields the individual from the anomic processes endemic in modern society. The constitution of man was such that he needed to associate with his fellows "in a community that is narrower than one made up of worldly relations or those of simple friendship." The family normally fulfills this integrative function, and if it is weakened, then individuals become exposed to "the cold wind of egoism, which freezes their hearts and saps their courage."[7] But there is no mention of occupational corporations as means of complementing or substituting for the family in the performance of this role.

It is not until the early 1890s that the occupational groups are explicitly recommended for this kind of remedial task. In a lecture on the conjugal family delivered in 1892 Durkheim recognized an evolutionary tendency for the family to contract in both size and social significance. He argued that an individual needs to identify with a group smaller than the political community but seemed to agree that the reduced importance of the modern family rendered it incapable of fulfilling this integrative role. In present conditions only the occupational groups were capable of assuming the moral functions once performed by family life. Such groups should be reconstituted and individuals encouraged to become morally attached to their professional activities: "It will be necessary that professional duty plays the same role in their hearts that domestic duty has played until now."[8]

In Durkheim's treatise on the social division of labor, published in 1893, these ideas on the corporations were woven into a theory of social evolution. Building upon themes sketched in lectures delivered in the late 1880s, he distinguished two modes of social solidarity, mechanical and organic.[9] In the

[5] Durkheim, "La Programme économique de Schaeffle" (1888), *Textes*, I, 379, and "Les études de science sociale" (1886), *SSA*, 209.

[6] Durkheim, review of A. Schaeffle, *Bau und Leben des Sozialen Körpers* (1885), *Textes*, I, 377.

[7] Durkheim, "Suicide et natalité. Étude de statistique morale" (1888), *Textes*, II, 235-36.

[8] Durkheim, "La Famille conjugale" (1892), *Textes*, III, 43, 47; also review of A. Dumont, *Natalité et démocratie* (1898), in Durkheim, *Journal Sociologique*, ed. J. Duvignaud (Paris, 1969), 237-40, hereafter cited as *JS*.

[9] See the resumé of these themes in Durkheim, "Introduction à la sociologie de la famille" (1888), *Textes*, III, 9-10.

first, typical of primitive social organization, people were bound together through conformity to a shared value system—the *conscience collective* —which derived its authority from custom and religion and was sanctioned by a repressive legal code. In the complex and highly differentiated societies of today, in contrast, organic solidarity prevailed. The individual was linked to others through the performance of specialized but interdependent and complementary roles. In these conditions the *conscience collective* contracted, tradition and religion lost their authority, repression was reduced, and individual autonomy was expanded. The respect and dignity accorded the individual provided a focus for shared commitments and identification in such societies, but the abstract and general nature of this "cult of the individual" prevented it from assuming the deterministic and oppressive intensity of a *conscience collective*.[10]

Theoretically, the solidarity of modern societies should be a spontaneous outcome of their evolutionary dynamics. The pathologies they actually exhibited stemmed from their transitional status. Rapid change had eroded mechanical solidarity, but organic solidarity was only partially developed. It was pointless to respond to this situation by attempting to resuscitate outmoded practices and beliefs: what was required was a new moral code that enshrined justice and equality and condemned hereditary wealth and privilege.[11] In the short term, however, professionally based corporations could help offset some of the adverse effects of this transitional phase by providing a moral and organizational milieu for the individual. Durkheim acknowledged the possibility that this new moral environment could assume the restrictive dimensions of a *conscience collective* but thought this unlikely for a number of reasons. The *esprit corporatif* related only to an individual's occupational role, beyond which he or she was free to enjoy the liberties sanctioned by the "cult of the individual." The specialized nature of occupational norms meant that they were of limited application and hence had "less authority because of their lesser generality." Moreover, the very factors responsible for undermining the *conscience collective* also worked against the prestige of corporate values. "The practices common to the professional group thus become more general and more abstract, like those common to society as a whole and, consequently, they leave more room for individual differences." Thus the corporation posed no threat to freedom, for "not only does professional regulation, by its very nature, restrict the scope of individual diversity less than any other, but moreover, it does so less and less."[12]

Durkheim adduced yet another argument against the over-determinacy of corporate norms in his discussion of the modern state. In keeping with his

[10] Durkheim, *De la Division du travail social* (Paris, 1973[9]), 141-42, 391-92.
[11] *Ibid.*, 368-74, 403, 405; "La Famille conjugale," 44.
[12] *De la Division du travail social*, 289-90.

earlier thesis, he depicted the state as responsible for liberating the individual from the restrictions imposed by tradition and locality and hence as a potential counterweight to the corporations. At the same time the existence of viable occupational groups established a field of countervailing forces that helped prevent the authoritative action of the state from degenerating into despotism.[13]

In the same year in which he published his thesis on the division of labor, Durkheim also discussed occupational corporations in a note on socialism. His argument here was that within each industrial sector, individual enterprises lacked any communication with one another. "Each establishment has its individuality, the totality has none." Firms also lacked vertical linkages to the state, which were essential because "it is only through the mediation of the latter that it is possible for them [the enterprises] to participate in the general life of the community."[14] To the extent that socialism sought to redress this situation, Durkheim believed it to be consistent with the goal of all who desired to cure the social malaise: "To socialize economic life is, in effect, to subordinate individual and egoistical ends, which are still preponderant there, to ends which are truly social, yet moral. It is, consequently, to introduce it to a superior morality." This "socialization" had already commenced in the armed forces, in education, transport, and communications and seemed to be implicit in the logic of social evolution.[15]

In summary, it is evident that by the end of 1893 Durkheim considered occupational corporations capable of filling an important *lacuna* in contemporary societies through the performance of three interconnected functions. These were, first, moral, by integrating individuals with a group and thereby insulating them from the more destructive consequences of social change; second, political, through the creation of a network of forces capable of counteracting the abuse of state power; third, organizational, by coordinating social (in fact, mainly industrial) activities along functional lines, thereby enhancing communications (especially with the state) and reducing social conflict.

Yet two points about Durkheim's perception of the corporations at this juncture require emphasis. The first is that they do not represent a major concern of these early writings. They receive little attention in the texts written during the 1880s and are by no means prominent in those of the early 1890s. What explicit attention the corporations do receive—and this is my second point—hardly amounts to a systematic theory. In *The Division of Labor* occupational groups, at least as far as their integrative function is concerned, are presented as an interim solution whose importance will recede as modernity advances and organic solidarity is consolidated. Yet the

[13] *Ibid.*, 199-205.
[14] Durkheim, "Note sur la définition du socialisme" (1893), *SSA*, 231-32.
[15] *Ibid.*, 233, 235.

political functions of these groups, in addition to their organizational tasks outlined in the note on socialism, seem more permanent—indeed, are inscribed in the very course of social evolution. Thus while it is an exaggeration to claim that Durkheim had no inkling of the importance of professional associations prior to the publication of his book on suicide in 1897,[16] it is certainly true that his ideas on this subject were incompletely worked out in the period from 1883 to 1893.

The Development of the Doctrine, 1895-1902

An important source for an understanding of the development of Durkheim's thinking on occupational groups are the lectures he delivered on socialism during 1895-96. Here he criticized Saint-Simon and his disciples for their diagnosis of the problems confronting modern societies. They believed that crisis and instability were due to the survival of pre-industrial institutions which had simply to be eradicated in order to ensure social harmony. For Durkheim this perspective was oblivious to the problem of "egoism," brought about through the erosion of traditional systems of moral and religious discipline. Individual wants were inherently insatiable unless constrained by a moral code that clearly and authoritatively apportioned rewards to different social activities.[17] In the modern world the task of the social scientist was one of "discovering through science the moral restraints which can regulate economic life and, by this regulation, contain egoism and thus allow for the satisfaction of needs."[18] The agencies Durkheim considered to be most suitable for this task were a set of institutions ignored by the Saint-Simonians, namely, the occupational groups. Throughout their long history these groups had performed the dual functions of integrating the individual with the wider social system and moderating his or her desires. Yet their proximity to their members rendered them responsive to the interests of the latter and hence unlikely to become repressive. Thus the corporation

> ... is capable of being a moral force for the members who compose it. Let it be made a definite organ of society, whereas it is now merely a private association. Transfer certain rights and duties to it which the State is less and less capable of exercising and assuring. Let it be the administrator of businesses, industries, arts, that the state is unable to manage due to its remoteness from material things. Grant it the power necessary to resolve certain conflicts, to apply the general laws of society according to the diversity of labor, and gradually, through the influence it will exercise, through the *rapprochement*

[16] This is the assertion of R. A. Nisbet in *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* (London, 1975), 138-39.

[17] Durkheim, *Le Socialisme* (Paris, 1978), 211-18, 243, 246.

[18] *Ibid.*, 253.

> that it will produce in the work of all, it will acquire the moral authority which will permit it to play the role of restraint without which there will be no possibility of economic stability.[19]

These arguments, while echoing those of the earlier texts, contain some novel themes. First, there is a development of the organizational focus, underlining the gains in efficiency to be derived from substituting corporative for state administration of many activities. Second, and more importantly, *Socialism* introduces a distinctive stress on the *disciplinary* role of corpo-rations. The moral environment they comprise regulates wants and allocates rewards. In the treatise on the division of labor and other early writings the stress is more on the need to integrate people into some form of collective life capable of protecting them from pathological social currents. Though these concerns can also be found in the lectures on socialism, they are accompanied by a focus on occupation groups as agents of discipline and control. Third, the *Division of Labor* explained social instability and personal stress in sociological terms, i.e., as the consequences of rapid and dislocative social change. Now we find that a major threat to social harmony has a psychological foundation—egoism—which, if undisciplined, unleashes insatiable desires. It is this inherent insatiability that allows Durkheim to criticize socialist proposals for the abolition of private property and the redistribution of wealth as irrelevant to the question of how to instigate moral controls on personal desires. In short, human nature is invoked both as an explanation for social problems and as a rationale for a negative evaluation of the socialist agenda of radical reform.[20]

The lectures on socialism were published posthumously. In his major work of the late 1890s, *Suicide*, Durkheim's treatment of occupational corporations was rather muted in comparison. His investigation of the social factors responsible for variations in suicide rates once again highlighted the lack of normative regulation and integration in modern industrial societies. When he turned to positive remedies for this situation, Durkheim successively rejected a reformed civic education, the state, religion, and the family as viable institutional cures, nominating the corporations as the only suitable candidates.[21] Their candidacy, therefore, was argued for by the process of elimination: the corporations were proffered *faute de mieux* given the unavailability of alternatives. Thus, while the study of suicide is often portrayed as an important source for understanding Durkheim's theory of the

[19] *Ibid.*, 217.

[20] *Ibid.*, 213-14. For a detailed account of changes in Durkheim's conception of human nature during this period, see M. J. Hawkins, "A Re-examination of Durkheim's Theory of Human Nature," *Sociological Review*, 25 (1977), 229-52.

[21] Durkheim, *Suicide* (1897), tr. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (London, 1970), 372-82.

corporations, it actually contains very little in terms of a substantive and positive analysis of their nature and significance.

It is not until the lecture course *Leçons de sociologie* that we find a systematic account of occupational groups. Rehearsing his usual arguments about the social problem and its especially severe manifestation in the sphere of industrial relations, Durkheim again condemned socialist proposals for abolishing private property as irrelevant. Whatever the form of society in question, there will inevitably be economic activity requiring the execution of diverse economic tasks. "It will be necessary, therefore, to determine the rights and duties of these various agents in the different forms of industry. A body of rules must be constituted which fixes the quantity of work, the renumeration of different functionaries, their duties *vis-à-vis* one another and *vis-à-vis* the community." [22]

According to Durkheim, the anomic state of economic relations could be overcome by reorganizing industry along corporatist lines. Enterprises should be linked together according to their "natural affinities," and an "administrative council"—described as "a kind of miniature parliament" —would be elected at the head of each of these groupings, with regional parliaments subordinated to it. This council would be charged with the administrative tasks of regulating employer-employee relations, overseeing working conditions, fixing wages and salaries and controlling competitive practices. It would also maintain close links with the state. Workers and employers would be separately represented within each corporation, although Durkheim left open the issue of how and in what proportion this representation should be effected. He did, however, dismiss the question of whether or not membership of a corporation should be made compulsory as a trivial one, claiming that once a corporatist regime was instituted it would be impossible for anybody to survive outside of an occupational group. Besides, argued Durkheim, there was nothing objectionable in making such membership mandatory, since under the existing system each citizen was obliged to belong to a parish.[23]

Durkheim also elucidated the expressly political functions of corporations. Secondary associations—whether based upon kinship, territory or occupation—were one of the necessary conditions for the existence of a political society, the other being the presence of a central sovereign body, the state.[24] The interactions between the secondary bodies and the state created favorable conditions for the maintenance of individual freedom by estab-

[22] Durkheim, *Leçons de sociologie: physique des moeurs et du droit* (Paris, 1950). This posthumously published course was drafted between 1898 and 1900, and delivered in 1903-5, 1909-11, and 1914-16. See Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 263.

[23] *Leçons*, 46-50.

[24] *Ibid.*, 55.

lishing a system of institutional interdependence and mutual constraint.[25] In contemporary societies kinship and regional bonds had become severely weakened, rendering them incapable of forging lasting associational ties. Only the occupational corporations played a sufficiently important part in social life to be an appropriate basis for political community: "The permanent groups, those to which the individual devotes his whole life, those to which he is the most strongly attached, are the professional groups. It seems, therefore, that they are called upon to become in the future the basis of our political representation as well as of our social organization."[26]

Unfortunately, in France the corporations existed in but a rudimentary form, having been outlawed during the Revolution and subsequently viewed with suspicion by a public opinion saturated with individualistic prejudices. This situation had brought about many of France's political difficulties. The absence of durable groups intercalated between the individual and the state meant that the latter was unable to act on its own volition. Instead of shaping popular opinion to produce a refined public consciousness, which was the proper function of the state, the latter merely reflected the blind and obscure sentiments of the masses. Incapable of creative action, the state was, accordingly, unable to achieve genuine change: the turbulent surface of French political life concealed governmental impotence and social stagnation. The state was sufficiently powerful, however, to oppress any individuals who were unprotected by membership in secondary associations.[27]

At this juncture Durkheim embarked upon a resounding critique of the electoral practices of the Third Republic, which he held responsible for many of the latter's deficiencies. He asserted that the oft-decried incompetence of deputies only reflected the more serious incompetence of the electorate.[28] The reason for this was to be found in the nature of direct elections to the national legislature:

> From the moment the citizens directly elect their representatives, that is to say, the most influential members of the governmental organ, it is impossible for these representatives not to apply themselves more or less exclusively to a faithful translation of the sentiments of their constituents; and it is equally impossible for the latter not to claim this docility as a duty.[29]

Although Durkheim's conception of democracy as a network of state/citizen exchanges has attracted considerable commentary, rather less atten-

[25] *Ibid.*, 77-78. Elsewhere Durkheim maintained that competition among the groups themselves also contributed to personal liberty. See Durkheim, review of G. Palante, "L'Esprit de corps" (1899), *JS*, 273-74.

[26] *Leçons*, 116-17.

[27] *Ibid.*, 111, 119.

[28] *Ibid.*, 125.

[29] *Ibid.*, 115.

tion has been given to his negative evaluation of the electoral procedures typical of representative government.[30] He found especially objectionable the individualistic rationale for voting:

> If each individual brings his own perspective to bear on the constitution of the state ... if each man makes his choice in isolation, it is virtually impossible for such votes to be inspired by anything other than personal and egotistical preoccupations; at least these will predominate, and an individualistic particularism will be the basis of our entire organization.[31]

Here again the corporations could perform a vital function by acting as intermediaries between the individual and the state in the electoral process. Durkheim advocated the adoption of at least a two-tier electoral system, with the corporations constituting the first level, responsible for electing delegates to an electoral chamber. This procedure circumvented the problem of the incompetence of the average citizen by only requiring him to vote upon matters within his occupational experience: "In what concerns the interests of each profession, every worker is competent; he is not therefore inept at choosing those best able to conduct the common business of the corporation." Representatives chosen in this manner would in turn elect delegates to a national body which would then be truly representative of the living forces within the social organism.[32]

Durkheim conceded that in current circumstances voting was a duty incumbent on all citizens. What he disputed was the attempt to assign this duty a permanent normative status, when for him its necessity had been brought about by abnormal political conditions and it would become redundant when a corporatist regime was fully implemented. The duty of voting

> derives from an anomic state to which one should not submit but work to prevent. Instead of presenting as an ideal this disorganization which is incorrectly described as democracy, it is necessary to bring it to an end. Instead of attaching ourselves to a jealous conservation of these rights and privileges, it is essential to remedy the evil which renders them provisionally necessary. In other words, our first duty is to prepare ourselves to dispense gradually with a role for which the

[30] Two recent exceptions are T. V. Kaufman-Osborn, "Emile Durkheim and the Science of Corporatism," *Political Theory*, 14 (1986), 652-53; R. Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1992), 100-101. Neither account, however, provides a detailed analysis of this aspect of Durkheim's theory of democracy.

[31] *Leçons*, 126.

[32] *Ibid.*, 121, 125-26. Durkheim continued to stress the importance of elections within the corporations; see his remarks made during debates on syndicalism held in 1908, in *Textes*, III, 208-9.

> individual is not fitted. To do this, our political action should consist in creating these secondary organs which, to the extent to which they are formed, will both liberate the individual, and gradually free the latter from a task for which he is not made.[33]

Given Durkheim's dependence on the patronage of the Radical-Socialist politicians of the Third Republic, sentiments such as these may help explain why these lectures were not published during his lifetime. Some elements of this thesis did appear in his preface to the second edition of the *Division of Labor* in 1902. For example, he argued that the corporations could curb egoism and should become the foundation of political organization, with electoral colleges based upon occupational groups rather than upon territorial units. Durkheim also repeated his earlier anti-socialist claim that egalitarian reforms failed to address the problem of how to discipline individual desires.[34] Yet the preface contained no critique of parliamentary democracy; and while for many years after his death it undoubtedly represented Durkheim's most complete published account of the corporations, their treatment in this text lacks the detail, the breadth of vision, and the polemical thrust of the *Leçons*.

By about 1900, then, Durkheim had elaborated a view of the social and political significance of occupational corporations that went beyond his earlier discussions in a number of important respects, the full significance of which is only partially apparent in his published writings on this subject. Furthermore, this revised perspective on the corporations has to be seen in the context of other theoretical developments that took place at about the same time. Of these the most important is a re-evaluation of the importance of a moral consensus in modern societies. Thus in his lectures on moral education he insisted that in addition to the norms specific to each occupational group there must exist a body of *common* values which bound together the diverse functional associations in a harmonious whole. This argument suggests a revision of the thesis in the *Division of Labor*, where this sort of value system was confined to premodern societies. In *Moral Education* Durkheim maintained that a society in which there is merely peaceable commerce among its members would be rather lifeless: "Society must, in addition, have before it an ideal toward which it reaches." In the absence of both an effective coordination of its parts and "the unity based upon the commitment of men's wills to a common objective," society is doomed to chronic in-

[33] *Ibid.*, 130.

[34] Durkheim, "Quelques remarques sur les groupements professionnels" (1902), *De la Division du travail social*, iii-xii, xvii, xxxi, xxxiv-xxxv. The countervailing functions of corporations with respect to the state also received mention during this period: Durkheim, Review of S. Merlino, *Formes et essence du socialisme* (1899), *Textes*, III, 171.

stability.[35] In a later essay Durkheim asserted: "To see society only as an organized body of vital functions is to diminish it, for this body has a soul which is the composition of collective ideals."[36]

These statements amount to an acceptance of the need for some degree of moral uniformity (i.e., a *conscience collective*) as a prerequisite for social cohesion, a uniformity which cannot be achieved unless all the members of the social organism are "sufficiently alike," that is, unless "they all reflect, in differing degree, the characteristics essential for a given ideal, which is the collective ideal."[37] In this formulation the corporations furnish only part of an individual's moral environment, for transcending the occupational diversification typical of modern societies, there should exist a shared identification with a body of values that prevented specialization from assuming pathological proportions.[38]

As for the content of this *conscience collective*, Durkheim continued to endorse the values enshrined in the "cult of the individual."[39] What changed was his assessment of this cult. Instead of the abstract and indeterminate normative system outlined in the *Division of Labor*, it was now presented as a modern *conscience collective*: "This cult, moreover, has everything necessary to play the same role as the cults of former times. It is no less capable of ensuring that communion of minds which is the first condition of all social life."[40]

The existence of an authoritative shared value system was integral to Durkheim's theory of the corporations. In the lectures on moral education he lamented the feebleness of the "spirit of association" and the prevalence of a "fierce individualism" in French society, and he underlined the need for the creation of groups that were "in harmony with the new social order and with the principles on which it reposes." These groups "can only be reborn if the

[35] Durkheim, *Moral Education*, tr. E. K. Wilson and F. Schnurer (London, 1973), 13, 102. These lectures were first delivered in 1902-3 and then repeated in 1906-7 (unchanged) and in 1911-12. See P. Fauconnet, "Introduction" to *Moral Education*, v, and Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 110.

[36] Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy* (1911), tr. D. F. Pocock (New York, 1974), 93.

[37] *Moral Education*, 87-88.

[38] *Ibid.*, 119; Durkheim, *Education and Sociology* (1903), tr. S. D. Fox (Glencoe, 1956), 117-23.

[39] This is suggested by his repeated identification with these values throughout his lifetime. See, for example: "Individualism and the Intellectuals" (1898), tr. M. Traugott, in R. N. Bellah (ed.), *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society* (Chicago, 1973); review article on pedagogy (1904), *Textes*, I, 261; *Sociology and Philosophy* (1906), 60; letter to Celestin Bouglé (22 March 1898) *Textes*, II, 422-24; *L'Allemagne au dessus de tout* (Paris, 1915), 22-24; *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), tr. J. W. Swain (London, 1915), 427.

[40] *Leçons*, 84; also review article on pedagogy, 261. For a detailed exploration of Durkheim's re-evaluation of the importance of a *conscience collective* in modern societies, see M. J. Hawkins, "Continuity and Change in Durkheim's Theory of Social Solidarity," *Sociological Quarterly*, 20 (1979), 155-64.

spirit of association and the sense of the group are aroused";[41] but what happens if a society should lack these groups *and* a shared moral focus? How then would it be possible to rekindle a taste for communal life? Durkheim's answer was to propose a program of civic education, because "the school is the only moral agent through which the child is able systematically to learn and love his country." In this way the schoolteacher becomes "the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and country."[42]

In order to appreciate the extent to which Durkheim's thinking underwent a reorientation during this period, it is necessary to recall his skepticism about the reforming potential of educational programs in his early writings.[43] Even as late as *Suicide* his support for occupational groups was based on the belief that education was inadequate in the struggle against anomie and excessive individualism because, being "only the image and reflection of society," if the latter is morally corrupt then education will be unable to avoid contamination. "Besides," he continued, "even though through some incomprehensible miracle a pedagogical system were constructed in opposition to the social system, this very antagonism would rob it of all effect.... Education, therefore, can be reformed only if society itself is reformed."[44] Yet only a year or so after this was written Durkheim thought it possible to mobilize support for the corporations by an educational agenda which, by recreating the "spirit of association" among children, would provide the requisite moral infrastructure for a novel form of social and political organization.

In summary, the theory of occupational groups worked out between 1895 and 1902 formed part of a restructuring of Durkheim's thought. While these institutions had always been present in his efforts to theorize the social conditions of modernity,[45] their significance and the roles assigned to them varied. They were not credited with positive functions until the early 1890s, when they were presented as a temporary antidote to contemporary social problems. By 1902, however, the corporations were a prominent feature in a complex conceptualization of community in which education, public moral-

[41] *Moral Education*, 234, 235.

[42] *Ibid.*, 79, 155. Elsewhere Durkheim concluded that "in a society in which education has become an important factor in moral life" the curriculum cannot be a matter of parental choice, but must be "first and foremost subordinated to more general and higher interests which, consequently, the families will not be fully competent to appreciate." *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1904-5), tr. P. Collins (London, 1977), 300-301.

[43] Review of Fouillée, 182. Durkheim's reassessment of the effectiveness of education appears to have occurred at about the same time as the drafting of the *Leçons*. Compare the estimation of Fouillée's educational proposals in the review cited above (1885) with that in Durkheim's review of Fouillée's *La France au point du vue morale* (1900), *JS*, 303.

[44] *Suicide*, 372, 373.

[45] W. Watts Miller, "Les Deux préfaces: science morale et réforme morale," in P. Besnard, M. Borlandi, and P. Vogt (eds.), *Division du travail et lien social: Durkheim un siècle après* (Paris, 1993), 147.

ity, occupational activities, and the state were closely integrated. Thereafter, when he was heavily preoccupied with issues of moral authority and education, Durkheim continued to lecture on the corporations.[46] Hence, though his arguments for moral education, corporations, and a revitalized *conscience collective* have sometimes been interpreted as separate solutions to the social problem,[47] my thesis is that these were all elements of the same distinctive, if incompletely formulated, vision of the "good society."[48] But how should this vision be characterized?

The Nature of Durkheim's Theory

In attempting to determine the nature of Durkheim's theory of occupational groups, it is important to bear in mind the transformations that took place in this theory over time. The following comments refer to what I would regard as the fully-fledged version formulated between 1898 and 1902.

Durkheim's theory has sometimes been discussed in the context of guild socialism.[49] There are undoubted similarities between Durkheim and (for example) G. D. H. Cole that go beyond a shared commitment to the functional reorganization of society and a large measure of autonomy for industrial corporations. Like Durkheim, Cole was, at least during his guild socialist phase, highly critical of parliamentarianism and envisaged a system of indirect elections to a national guild assembly. But the differences between the two theorists are also striking. Cole was a committed democrat for whom the guilds were a medium for popular participation in public affairs, a mechanism through which working people could exert some control over their immediate environment, the one most obviously affecting their lives and well-being. The guilds were advocated as a forum for active citizenship in which participation and decision-making were realities, as opposed to the passivity implicit in a form of democracy which confined the expression of citizenship to voting in national and local elections every few years.[50] For Cole the guilds were *voluntary* bodies existing within a spontaneous and pluralistic social structure which would allow each person the maximum opportunities for political involvement and self-expression.

[46] See note 35 above, in addition to Durkheim's lectures on "L'État" (1900-5), *Textes*, III, 172-78, and "Morale professionnelle et corporation" (1909), *ibid.*, 217-20.

[47] For example, S. R. Mark, "Durkheim's Theory of Anomie," *American Journal of Sociology*, 80 (1974), 358.

[48] That Durkheim envisaged the corporations to be part of a *system* of sociopolitical relationships and institutions is suggested by his frequent references to a corporatist "regime" or "system," e.g., *Leçons*, 27, 36, 37, 40, 46, 48, 49, 51; "Quelques remarques," xii, xxi, xxvi, xxvii, xxix.

[49] See, e.g., Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 268.

[50] G. D. H. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry* (1917), (London, 1972), especially chapters II, IV, and VI. See A. W. Wright, *G. D. H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford, 1979).

Social order and stability were not his primary concerns, and the guilds were not envisaged as agents in the promotion of these goals. "The crying need of our days is the need for freedom," argued Cole, which involved "giving into the hands of the workers the control of their life and work."[51] He certainly saw the guilds contributing to this freedom by integrating the individual with other social groups and counteracting the power of the state.[52] But he believed individuals possessed "natural capacities for self-government and self assertion." The guild allowed these qualities to be expressed and developed: "Men become democrats by conviction, but they become good democrats only by practice."[53] For this reason the guilds formed only a part of the institutional milieu of each person, since the individual "cannot truly be sustained by any single form of organization."[54] Finally, Cole regarded the guilds as instruments of class conflict in the struggle against capitalism and for socialism. He saw them as "a progressive invasion of capitalist control of industry, a progressive wresting of the right to make decisions from capitalism and a vesting of it in the workers themselves...."[55]

All this is a far cry from Durkheim's approach to the corporations. He did insist that employees became meaningfully involved in their occupational groups by electing representatives to the next representational level, but in general he did not regard these groups as training people for *political* involvement, as agencies for popular participation in government and democratic control of industry. On the contrary Durkheim underlined their integrative and disciplinary functions rather than their potential for raising the political awareness and experience of their members. Indeed, the notion of popular involvement in political and economic policy-making was alien to his way of thinking and inconsistent with his belief in the limited competence of the masses. Nor were the corporations merely one aspect, however important, of an individual's collective existence (as they were for Cole); they were mandatory institutions combining the totality of an individual's economic and political life. Finally, Durkheim was opposed to class conflict and saw the corporations not as vehicles of class interests but as agents of class conciliation, representing both employers and employees. These differences surely constitute a critical gulf between Durkheim's theory and guild socialism.

Even R. H. Tawney, who occasionally came close to Durkheim in the moral and organizational significance he attached to a functional reorganization of industry, remained adamant in believing that this reorganization was a matter not just of economic efficiency and social harmony but

[51] *Ibid.*, 44, 52.
[52] *Ibid.*, 21-24.
[53] *Ibid.*, 164, 169.
[54] *Ibid.*, 9.
[55] *Ibid.*, 81.

also of democracy, since "men should not be ruled by an authority which they cannot control."[56] For Durkheim the primary tasks of the corporations were to integrate, to discipline, and to regulate their members rather than initiate them into new modes of citizenship and political activity. His citizens were not, therefore, the politically knowledgeable actors envisaged by Cole and Tawney. When Durkheim did approve of mass action, it was in the form of "creative effervescence," an unstructured, non-institutionalized, and amorphous expression of popular enthusiasm that received little systematic analysis in his writings,[57] and on the face of it, appears inconsistent with the mistrust of mass opinion exhibited in the *Leçons*.

Caution is also needed when comparing Durkheim's theory with Tocqueville's views on the importance of intermediary associations in modern social and political life.[58] Once again there is considerable overlap. Tocqueville, like Durkheim, was sensitive to the importance of com-munications between government and civil society in democracy, attempted to separate egoism from the ethical components of individualism, and was perturbed by the potentially harmful consequences of political involvement by the masses.[59] But Tocqueville's theory of intermediary bodies laid considerable stress on their participatory and educational aspects, and above all he conceived them as voluntary associations occurring in all spheres of social life. This pluralism is absent in the treatment of the corporations by Durkheim, whose writings showed little interest in friendly societies, clubs, cooperatives, and political parties and movements, and were less than enthusiastic about trade unions as independent expressions of class and sectional interests.[60] Nor did he regard the proliferation of secondary associations as an intrinsically healthy process. On the contrary, "The spontaneous formation of secondary groups and their excessive development are certain indices of the absence or weakness of central authority." This situation arose when the state became

[56] R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*, [1921], (London, 1961), 14. For an early assessment of Durkheim's relationship to guild socialism see H. E. Barnes, "Durkheim's Contribution to the Reconstruction of Political Theory," *Political Science Quarterly*, 35 (1920), 236-54. Barnes (252) describes Durkheim's proposals as "an interesting capitalistic flirtation with the least dangerous and revolutionary phases of syndicalism and guild socialism."

[57] On creative effervescence as a source of new moral and political creeds, see Durkheim's comments in *Elementary Forms*, 427-28, and his references to "dieux des carrefours," in Durkheim, "Le Problème religieux et la dualité de la nature humaine" (1913), *Textes*, II, 58.

[58] This comparison has been made in Nisbet, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim*, 136-50; M. Richter, "Durkheim's Politics and Political Theory," in K. Wolff (ed.), *Emile Durkheim et al: Essays in Sociology and Philosophy* (New York, 1964), 196.

[59] For a useful discussion of these themes in Tocqueville's work, see J.-C. Lamberti, *La Notion d'individualisme chez Tocqueville* (Paris, 1970). Of particular interest (24) is Tocqueville's private evaluation of democracy.

[60] H.-P. Müller, "Durkheim's Political Sociology," in S. Turner (ed.), *Emile Durkheim: Sociologist and Moralist* (New York, 1993), 106.

powerless to protect people, and secondary groups emerged to fill the vacuum, a condition he considered to be evident in China.[61] Durkheim certainly approved of intergroup relations among corporations, even to the extent of extolling the positive effects of group competition for creating feelings of corporate identity and solidarity, while yet preventing these feelings from stultifying into a closed and rigid mentality.[62] But such interactions were confined to *corporations*, i.e., functionally organized groups; and, as Durkheim made clear, their multi-plication was beneficial to individual liberty only if they were coordinated and hierarchically organized.[63] There is, then, a considerable difference between Durkheim's conception of professional corporations and the liberal pluralism of Tocqueville and, I would suggest, with any perspective that placed a high value on membership in a wide range of voluntary associations, including pluralistic versions of socialism.[64]

The connection sometimes made between Durkheim and solidarism is harder to assess.[65] Léon Bourgeois, for example, desired an end to social conflict in the name of a progressive tendency to interdependence and cooperation he derived from a biological "law" complementing that of the struggle for existence.[66] Though he eschewed such reductionism, Durkheim undoubtedly shared certain goals of Bourgeois and other solidarists, e.g., the reform and secularization of education.[67] Nevertheless, he was critical of solidarist legislative programs and the biological analogies upon which they reposed. For Durkheim the social problem was, at base, a moral one and could not be ameliorated through welfare legislation alone.[68] Thus while he may have sympathized with the broad goals of solidarism, his theory of occupational groups suggests an alternative approach to the social problem,

[61] Durkheim, Review of M. Courant, "Les Associations en Chine" (1899), *JS*, 223.

[62] *Evolution of Educational Thought*, 81, 83, 158-59, 163-64.

[63] Review of Merlino, 171; *Textes*, III, 210.

[64] For this interpretation of Durkheim, see J.-C. Filloux, *Durkheim et le socialisme* (Geneva, 1977); F. Pearce, *The Radical Durkheim* (London, 1989), 153, 179; M. Gane, "Institutional Socialism and the Sociological Critique of Communism," in Gane (ed.), *The Radical Sociology of Durkheim and Mauss* (London, 1992).

[65] See J. E. S. Hayward, "Solidarist Syndicalism: Durkheim and Duguit," *Sociological Review*, 8 (1960), 17-36, 185-202, and "Solidarity: The Social History of an Idea in Nineteenth Century France," *International Review of Social History*, 4 (1959), 278; J. A. Scott, *Republican Ideas and the Liberal Tradition in France* (New York, 1966), 172.

[66] Léon Bourgeois, *Solidarité* (Paris, 1897), 45, 52. See Hayward, "The Official Philosophy of the French Third Republic: Léon Bourgeois and Solidarism," *International Review of Social History*, 6 (1961), 19-48.

[67] See Hayward, "Educational Pressure Groups and the Indoctrination of the Radical Ideology of Solidarism, 1895-1914," *International Review of Social History*, 8 (1963), 8.

[68] See Durkheim's comments on Fouillée, a leading solidarist theoretician, in the texts cited in note 43 above, and in "L'État actuel des études sociologiques en France" (1895), *Textes*, I, 90-91. He was also highly critical of another solidarist, Coste, in "Les Etudes de science sociale," *SSA*, 203-8.

one that for him went to the roots of the moral and institutional crisis rather than being confined to its surface manifestations.

This brings me to corporatism, with which Durkheim's theory has sometimes been compared.[69] Here the historian of ideas encounters a difficulty; for corporatist theories, despite their long pedigree, have yet to be subjected to a detailed and systematic investigation, particularly for the twentieth century.[70] This raises the question of which of the different versions of corporatist theory should be used in a comparison with Durkheim's ideas. It is an important question, since some commentators, identifying corporatism with the theory and practice of Italian fascism, have denied the relevance of such a comparison.[71] This is to take an overly narrow view of corporatism, which is not exclusively or even predominantly the property of Italian fascism and which was particularly widespread in France during the first few decades of the twentieth century.[72] For the purposes of this paper I shall compare Durkheim with the Rumanian, Mihail Manoïlesco, since this author attempted a synthesis of the various currents of corporatist thought, of which he possessed a wide ranging knowledge, including a familiarity with Durkheim's ideas.[73]

According to Manoïlesco, after World War I the weakened industrialized liberal democracies were no longer able to achieve growth through the colonization and exploitation of agricultural countries, a situation later exacerbated by economic depression. In these new conditions, in which survival could be attained only by economic autarky and national unity, majority rule, individualism, and the night-watchman state were entirely inappropriate. Successful adaptation necessitated both economic efficiency and social harmony, and these could best be attained by functionally based corporations, coordinated by a strong state and supported by a moral consensus inculcated and maintained by a program of civic education.

In the context of this paper it is impossible to do justice to the details of Manoïlesco's arguments, but of particular relevance is his conception of the ideal structure of a corporatist regime. The Rumanian theorist distinguished

[69] M. H. Elbow, *French Corporative Theory, 1789-1948* (New York, 1953), 109-14; F. Hearn, "Durkheim's Political Sociology: Corporatism, State Autonomy, and Democracy," *Social Research*, 52 (1985), 151-77.

[70] Though see A. Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London, 1984), which contains an excellent discussion of Durkheim, although the author treats the theory in the *Leçons* as of a piece with the theory expressed in *Division of Labour* and *Suicide* (223).

[71] Filloux, *Durkheim et le socialisme*, chapter 9, especially 347-52.

[72] See P. C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?," *Review of Politics*, 34 (1974), 90.

[73] Mihail Manoïlesco, *Le Siècle du corporatisme: doctrine du corporatisme intégral et pur* (Paris, 1934). Durkheim is cited on 27, 40, 73, 74, 83, 82, 198. In identifying Durkheim as a fellow corporatist, Manoïlesco only had access to *Division of Labour* (including the preface to its second edition) and *Suicide*.

three types of corporatist system. In the first, *corporatisme subordonné*, the corporations were created and controlled by an all powerful state, as in the case of Fascist Italy. In *corporatisme mixte* there existed functionally based corporations alongside institutions founded on other principles, e.g., an assembly based upon regional representation. Neither of these systems was regarded by Manoïlesco as optimal. His preference was for *corporatisme pur*, in which the corporations were autonomous within their own functional domain, selecting officials to represent their interests in a national corporatist Parliament, which arbitrated the relationships among them. The state was a corporation like any other, performing the activities of defense and internal law and order. However, in addition to these roles, it was also responsible for coordinating the different interests within the community while yet remaining independent of and above them, for directing economic activities, and for organizing the spiritual life of the nation.[74]

Despite his rejection of a state-controlled corporatism in his ideal system, Manoïlesco obviously envisaged the state as a powerful and authoritative organ. His analysis was couched in terms of a denunciation of the liberal state for being merely a framework for the expression of egoism and for its stress on rights as opposed to duties. For him duties preceded rights because the nation was prior to the individual. Legal rights adhered to corporations rather than to individuals, being derivative from and legitimated by the performance of public functions, and Manoïlesco emphasized the disciplinary role of corporations vis-à-vis their members.[75] Furthermore, he described majority rule as a principle integral to liberal democracy but inconsistent with corporatism. Majority rule should be confined to the internal affairs within each corporation, and then only if nothing better could be found to replace it.[76] In the ideal regime respect for the masses will be replaced by "respect for the nation and its ideals. The respect for individual liberty is replaced by respect for the liberty of organized collectivities, i.e., for corporate autonomy. The cult of the majority is replaced by the cult of the nation and its moral imperatives."[77]

There is much in common between Manoïlesco's concept of integral corporatism and Durkheim's own analysis of occupational associations, not the least of which being the way in which empirical and normative concerns are fused in a vision that is at once moral and organizational. Both theorists imagined a community in which the corporations, the state and moral discipline were integrated to form a new type of political order, one made

[74] *Ibid.,* 101, 125, 128-32, 164 (esp. 154-64 on the classification of corporatist regimes). Manoïlesco later endorsed fascism and approved of single-party dictatorships as interim measures en route to the attainment of pure corporatism. Cf. Manoïlesco, *Le Parti unique* (Paris, 1937, 2nd ed.), esp. 130-34.

[75] *Le Siècle*, 164-66, 197.

[76] *Ibid*., 148-49.

[77] *Ibid*., 197.

possible as well as necessary by contemporary social conditions. It is a vision, moreover, in which the state occupied a crucial position. Whatever the shortcomings of Durkheim's sociology of the state,[78] there is little doubt that this institution was fundamental to his notion of a corporatist regime, in which it was assigned crucial coordinating functions as the authoritative nucleus of the social organism. The state was the locus of policy-making expertise, and one of the functions of the corporation was to facilitate exchanges between the state and society, while at the same time insulating the former from the dysfunctionality of popular political participation.

There *are* differences between Durkheim and Manoïlesco, but while these are of fundamental importance, they do not, in my view, suffice to vitiate the comparison. These concern the rights of the individual, rights which Manoïlesco quite clearly repudiated as irrelevant to the needs of a corporatist regime. By contrast Durkheim always saw the claims of individual justice as paramount and as overriding the demands of *raison-d'état*. For him the cult of the individual was capable of furnishing a moral consensus for modern societies, the normative milieu in which functional corporations, the state, families, and individuals interacted.[79] He certainly exaggerated the consensual possibilities of this cult, remaining oblivious to the ways in which such values could engender incommensurable but equally legitimate moral positions;[80] but he always upheld the importance of the individual as a moral entity. The moral ideals, then, which Durkheim perceived as crucial underpinnings for a corporatist system, were manifestly different from those subscribed to by the Rumanian theorist.

In this Durkheim differed sharply not only from Manoïlesco but from the most salient corporatist theoreticians of his own day. Durkheim's language —particularly when exposing the negative implications of majority rule and egoism—sometimes came close that of reactionaries like la Tour de Pin and Charles Maurras.[81] But Durkheim was a republican, committed to a secular state and morality, and a Dreyfusard and Jew. For these reasons he would not have wished to be associated with social Catholicism and was utterly opposed to the anti-semitic Action Française, which may explain why his most comprehensive reflections on corporatism remained unpublished

[78] See M. J. Hawkins, "Emile Durkheim on Democracy and Absolutism," *History of Political Thought*, 2 (1981), 369-90.

[79] For forceful demonstrations of the centrality of individual rights in Durkheim's thought, see the contributions in W. S. F. Pickering and W. Watts Miller (eds.), *Individualism and Human Rights in the Durkheimian Tradition*, British Centre for Durkheimian Studies, Occasional Papers No. 1 (Oxford, 1993); M. Cladis, *A Communitarian Defense of Liberalism: Emile Durkheim and Contemporary Social Theory* (Stanford, 1992).

[80] Bellamy, *Liberalism and Modern Society*, 101.

[81] See M. de la Tour de Pin, *Vers un ordre social chrétien* (Paris, 1929); Charles Maurras, *De la Politique naturelle au nationalisme intégral*, ed. F. Natter and C. Rousseau (Paris, 1972), 79-93, 168-71.

during his lifetime. The difference between Durkheim and these other thinkers, including Manoïlesco, is to be found, therefore, in the *content* of the moral values to be inculcated and sustained in a corporatist regime, the meaning of the ideals which the nation represented. The structure of the regime and the moral, political, and social functions its various components are seen as performing are similar in the cases of Durkheim and Manoïlesco; but the ideals which impart moral meaning and legitimacy to the regime and act as the foundations of social consensus, are vastly different.

On the basis of the analysis conducted above, therefore, my conclusion is that Durkheim attempted to construct a corporatist theory by wedding the notion of a society organized along functional lines to secular and republican values in which individual liberties retained moral paramountcy. Unlike the syndicalists and guild socialists of his day, he did not see occupational associations as instruments of either class action or popular political participation. Yet, however concerned with social harmony and peace, he did not conceptualize the functional reorganization of society in terms of the reassertion of traditional religious beliefs and practices or the complete subordination of the individual to the needs of the collectivity. The result is an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, the imperatives of social discipline and, on the other, the legitimacy of personal autonomy and freedom. It would be interesting to examine the extent to which this tension was manifested in subsequent examples of corporatist theorizing during the early decades of the twentieth century.

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