Durkheim, the Action Française and the Question of Nationalism

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Abstract: This article concerns Émile Durkheim’s critique of the Action Française as expressed in his seminal articles of 1898, which was an important moment in the Dreyfus Affair, where Durkheim’s active engagement serves to challenge a still widespread view of him as a latter day traditionalist and positivist, He developed epistemological and political arguments against this proto-fascist movement, which have implications for his accounts of nationalism and internationalism.

Keywords: Action Française, Dreyfus Affair, fascism, internationalism, representation, right, logical pluralism, nationalism

The Dreyfus Affair, which began in 1894, had a defining moment in January 1898 with Émile Zola’s article ‘J’accuse’. The demand for a revision of the original guilty verdict of 1894 led to the formation of the pro-Dreyfusard Ligue des Droits de l’Homme in February 1898. Durkheim was a member from the beginning and worked to get a list of signatories. The Ligue de la Patrie Française was founded in 1899 to oppose this. While the former recruited from the universities and the intellectual left, the latter recruited from the intellectual right: the Institut de France, the Académie Française, Catholics, conservatives and nationalists (Weber 1962: 17). For Zola, the trial was a denial of truth and justice: ‘La vérité est en marche est rien ne l’arrêtera’ (1898: 138). There was, however, significant opposition to this march of truth and not only by members of the the General Staff of the French Army and the judiciary. Léon Blum (1935) remembers the astonishment at how the evidence gathered by Lucien Herr, Georges Picquart and Jean Jaurès, among other Dreyfusards, was resisted if not immediately repudiated. For members of the right who coalesced around this moment, there were more important questions than right and truth,
and these concerned the foundation of social order. The Dreyfus Affair opened up moral political and philosophical fault lines concerning right, justice and the liberal values of a democratic state, on the one hand, and the authority of the army and the state, on the other. There was significant opposition to Republicanism, which was weakened by corruption, financial scandals (including the Panama Scandals) and the Boulanger Episode. The anti-Dreyfusards consisted not just of Boulangists, Catholics and militarists; there were also Bonapartists and royalist partisans of autocracy: anti-democratic and anti-individualist, for them the safety of the State was supreme, overriding all considerations of ethics, morality and justice. For the Dreyfusards, the evident injustice of the process and the issues of truth, morality and human rights were central, and these issues were married, in turn, to the defence of the Republic and of democracy itself.

The Dreyfus Affair was central to the formation of the Action Française (hereafter called ‘AF’), which was formed out of the response to it. The Ligue de la Patrie Française had a relatively short life and morphed into its more radical progeny. Central to the Affair also was the question of nationalism: ‘La question nationale est au centre du centre de l’affaire Dreyfus’ (Ory 1981: 22). AF took this as its own. The Affair revealed a form of nationalism which challenged Republicanism, together with the rationalism and universalism of the inheritance of 1789. It led to the writing of Durkheim’s most famous article, ‘L’individualisme et les intellectuels’ (1898b).

There is, however, another article written mid-crisis in 1898 which demonstrates Durkheim’s engagement with the thinking of the far right, which had significant political consequences that extended into the 1930s and that saw collaboration under Vichy. Durkheim’s intervention can be seen as a critique of a thinking which went on to create a distinct form of French fascism. And this is also an important philosophical prelude to his treatment of nationalism. AF and its account of nationalism was a challenge to his sociology: Can he account for nationalism without conceding ground to the forces of the right, for whom rationalist intellectuals like Durkheim were traitors? To understand how Durkheim responded to this historical moment, we must first analyse the ideas of AF. There were two significant thinkers here: Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras.

**Barrès and Ethnic Nationalism**

In 1898, in mid-Dreyfus agitation, Maurice Barrès presented his candidature in Nancy on a platform of National Socialism, his aim being ‘to bar Jews, aliens, Marxists, rootless Kantian intellectuals, moneymen in international high finance, grands bourgeois and liberals of all kinds to ‘save the body
of the nation’ (qtd in Sternhell 1973: 47). At this moment, he was the theoretician of the new populist and socialist right: he blended authoritarianism and socialism, which for Zeev Sternhell prefigured twentieth-century fascism in his nationalism.

For Ruth Harris, Barrès was a dandy turned nationalist ideologue (2010: 209). Together with Maurras, he was one of the main ethnic nationalist thinkers in turn-of-the-century France. His ideas were important for the anti-Dreyfusards, who held intellectuals and socialists to be traitors. Opposed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of the social contract, Barrès held that an established nation does not need the general will as its foundation. The people were not founded by an act of autonomy, but have their origins in the soil (sol), in history and its institutions, in material conditions and in inheritance. Attachment to the soil, to blood and to ancestors is central to the nation as distinct from the Jews and the Protestants, who were regarded as rootless parasites.

Barrès was most well-known for Les Deracinés. His opposition to intellectuals is shown in his portrait of the Neo-Kantian teacher Bouteiller, who suffocated his pupils with the concept of duty, through which he opposed personal inclination and the national interest. (This was a sneer at the official doctrine of Republicanism). Barrès rejected Cartesianism together with the distinction between mind and body. He opposed the rationalism and universalism that was central to the overturning of the social order in the Revolution of 1789. The foundation of society was not based on individual reason (Barrès 1925: 47), in place of which he supported the instinctive.

He was influenced by Jules Soury (1842–1915), whose major work was Le Système Nerveux Central (1899). Barrès attended his lectures in 1883 (Harris 2010: 205). Soury had a materialist view of the mind: all mental phenomena have a material foundation and are mechanistic. Human beings are nothing more than automata; they are different in degree but not in kind from lower evolutionary forms (2010: 205). It follows from this belief that memory has only a physical existence as merely an ‘accumulated sensation imprinted in the neurological system’ (2010: 206). Both materialism and evolutionism formed the basis of his ethnic nationalism, which was organicist and deterministic: His was a physiological racism.

In his view, integration into society must be based on ethnic identity; the ethnic unity of France was compromised by foreigners. To instil solidarity in national groups, Barrès aimed to foster hatred of foreigners and the resentment of the fact that the influx of foreign workers lowered wages and the standard of living. Anti-Semitism was a rallying point – a potent social formula which galvanised and unified the masses as it goaded action: the Jews caused the poverty of the workers for they, together with their cosmopolitanism, were the masters of France. Cohesion would follow by tying workers to the patrie in this way. He rejected ideas of equality: the idea of
the patrie involves inequality. These were the themes of his campaigns in both 1898 and 1902 (Sternhell 1973: 54).

**Action Française**

Barrès was an inspiration to the *Ligue de la Patrie Française*, which in February 1899 had 40,000 members and was well funded. Its membership went from relatively moderate Republicans to anti-Semitic nationalists like Barrès. Maurice Pujo and Henri Vaugeois left to found AF later in 1899 and established a new journal, the *Revue de l’action française*. This became a newspaper in 1908, the daily organ of ‘integral nationalism’. Charles Maurras joined, and it became a counter-revolutionary, racist, monarchist, Catholic and anti-democratic movement. AF was opposed to individualism, democracy and democratic institutions, parliamentarianism, universal suffrage and liberal values (Sternhell 1986: 36).

The philosophy of Maurras was grounded in ‘the overwhelming mood of decadence and disgust that followed the French defeat of 1870’ (qtd in Weber 1962: 9). The founder of ‘integral nationalism’, he held that a true nationalist places his nation above all else. He admired Auguste Comte and detested the Enlightenment philosophers who inspired 1789. A Provençal royalist, who fought for the restoration of the monarchy, he hated ‘Hebraic thought and all the dreams of justice, of happiness and equality it drags in its wake’ (1962: 8). He admired the Catholic Church, particularly its role in the Middle Ages.

Initially and bizarrely, Maurras held that order can be achieved through literature and the style it embodied. He extolled the simplicity and clarity of the Classical style and opposed it to lush and vague Romanticism, which was a source of barbarism for him. It was the literary errors of Romanticism which led to the political error of the Revolution of 1789: Rousseau was the worst of the Romantics. Romanticism, in his view, was ‘the author of anarchy and evil’, while Classicism ‘stood for the principles of order, form, hierarchy and discipline’ (Weber 1962: 77). There must be saner and more virile literature; a good writer must call on tradition. For him, this meant the Catholic Church, the French language, Roman law and the royalist policies of the kings of France.

For Maurras, only a corrupt society could be as split as France over the Dreyfus Affair. He laid the blame on the foreigners in France, who did not share in its tradition and could not respond in a French way to such a crisis. It was the growing number of foreigners (whom he called ‘metics’) who were betraying France, including Freemasons, Protestants and Jews. In 1899, it was revealed that the evidence, central to the condemnation of Dreyfus, was a forgery made by the officer Hubert-Joseph
Henry (1846–1898). This was ‘patriotic’ claimed Maurras; although false, it was true ‘for the honour of all’. Henry’s suicide was ‘the first blood’ of the Affair. Journalist Edouard Drumont republished the Gazette de France article ‘Le Premier Sang’ in his Libre Parole, claiming that all tricks were ‘fair enough’ (Harris 2010: 240). So given an innocent man versus the authority of the army, it is the latter which must prevail.

The idea of a raison d’état was central for AF: it was its ‘supreme law’ (Weber 1962: 28). It overrode all questions of innocence and justice. Maurras questioned the right to doubt and the use of liberty – the decisive factor was the nation as represented by the state. They repudiated the idea of liberty as the basis of social order. ‘The rights of man’ had dominated political thought for over a century; the Dreyfusards branded them to justify their opposition to the state. Against the Dreyfusards and the tradition for which they stood, AF set out to refute individualism, democracy and the Protestant conception of free will: ‘It based its arguments on one principle only: the existence of the Nation represented by the State’ (Weber 1962: 28).

These ideas have a history, and unfortunately they had a future.

The Long Shadow of Counter-Revolution and the Path to Vichy

The influence of AF lasted until the demise of the Vichy regime towards the end of the Second World War. ‘The daily paper lived until the summer of 1944, when it came to an abrupt end with the regime it had done its share to inspire leaving behind an intricate web of political and ideological influences that still exists after nearly twenty years’, wrote Eugen Weber (1962: 3). Indeed, one can see the inheritance even now with the rise of the Front National and even the campaign for Frexit in France.

For Pascal Ory, Sternhell’s work has illuminated the ideology of fascism in France, which has often been left in the shadows (2003: 51). Barrès was a forerunner of twentieth-century fascism in his blending of authoritarianism and socialism; he was anti-democratic and anti-parliamentarian, anti-capitalist and supported the cult of leadership (Sternhell 1973, 1986). He married the idea of state socialism with nationalism and thought of the result as the solution to the social question. His thinking was central to the development of a specifically French fascism and to its collaboration with German fascism under the Vichy regime.

Indeed, the ground for this collaboration was prepared in the 1930s: Between the two World Wars, AF dominated ‘the political horizon of intellectuals’ (Weber 1962: 517). In fact, Maurras ‘taught a whole generation about counter-revolution’ (1962: 510). For example, one of the leaders of the Vichy regime, Joseph Darnand, was surrounded by men ‘imbued with
the purest Mauraussian spirit’; his infamous Milice Française (involved in the terrible Rafle du Vel’ d’Hiv) drew heavily on Maurras’s ideas (1962: 510). The National Socialist Marcel Déat argued that

it was important to rediscover the biological notion of race; it is something to be preserved; it is the point of departure for the conquest of the future. It requires purification and defence. France is thus invited to tighten its ethnic identity . . . to practice eugenics . . . So an abstract fraternity must be replaced by kinship of blood’. (qtd in Sternhell 1986: 24).

There were two ideological formations in France at the time. The first stemmed from the Revolution of 1789, which was rationalist and Republican. The other stemmed from the Counter-Revolution, which was anti-rationalist and anti-Republican. The irony of the interpretation of Durkheim’s thought is that he is often put in the latter camp whilst he is intellectually a descendant of the former. Robert Nisbet (1952), for example, has insisted on the influence of traditionalism on Durkheim, though I have challenged this idea (Stedman Jones 2001: 24ff). What united ‘the right ideologically in France’, according to one scholar, was ‘the fundamental attack on reason and the rights of man’ (McClelland 1970: 36). The leading thinkers of the Counter-Revolution were de Joseph Maistre and Louis de Bonald; they rejected the Revolution of 1789 and the philosophy which led to it. Faith and revelation was opposed to reason, whose exercise in Cartesian methodic doubt was the ruin of France; they extolled instinct in society. The logic of divine politics, with its absolute view of sovereignty, must govern the social order. They rejected democracy, individualism and the concept of right. AF shared this view and, like the Traditionalists, it used the concept of organic unity to oppose individualism – just as Comte also used it to oppose right and freedom of mind. For Nisbet, Durkheim’s organicism comes from these Traditionalist thinkers. I will challenge this notion below. I have argued that the ‘vulgar’ interpretation of Durkheimian thought marries positivism and traditionalism and thus ties him to the movement of proto-fascism (Stedman Jones 2001).

AF married traditionalism with positivism. It was « simultaneously monarchical, traditionalist and positivist » (Parodi 1924: 149). They were attracted to positivism precisely for its ‘reactionary, anti-revolutionary and anti-democratic character’ (Parodi 1924: 153; my translation). It is worth remembering just how much Durkheim opposes the central tenets of both. First, from Comte also AF drew its anti-individualism: Durkheim on the contrary rejects Comte’s claim that intellectual individualism leads to anarchy (1955: 186). As we will see below, he argues that individualism, understood in a particular way, can establish a moral unity for France. He supports individualist values and the concept of right – an anarchic concept for Comte. And from both traditionalism and Comte, AF derives
its opposition to democracy; on the contrary, the value of democracy for Durkheim is that it liberates and individualises thought (1950: 125). Both Comte and traditionalists were opposed not only to democracy and individual right, but also to rationalism. Against this, for Durkheim, rationalism and individualism mutually imply each other: Rationalism is the ‘intellectual expression of individualism’ (1925: 10). For the traditionalists, it was illegitimate to oppose justice to the established order, whereas ‘the task of the most advanced societies is a work of justice’ for Durkheim (1893: 381).

From the traditionalists, AF derived its interest in order and hierarchy together with the non-rational basis of this belief. Comte stressed the instincts; for him, the preponderance of the instinctive over egoism is what makes society possible. I have shown that Durkheim’s statement ‘the progress of conscience is in inverse relation to that of instinct’ (1893: 338) is a swipe at both Comte and AF (Stedman Jones 2001). So the model of society for AF was a unified authoritarian structure. Its members believed in a principle of supreme authority, which subordinates the individual to the whole in the interests of unity and hierarchy. When we add to this the Comtean denial of freedom of mind and right, then, at this historical moment, we have a central logic of fascism, when it is coupled with racism.

It is important to remember not just the future collaboration under Vichy, but also the consequences of these ideas at the time. Hatred and disdain characterised the group, and they particularly hated Jean Jaurès (Parodi 1924: 151). The French nationalists were overjoyed at his assassination in 1914 at the hands of Raoul Villain, who ‘always carried a copy of Action Française and attended their meetings’, and who treated Jaurès as a traitor for his internationalist pacifism (Weber 1962: 90–91).

The Philosophical Path to the Understanding of Nationalism

We have seen that the question of nationalism was central to the Dreyfus Affair. The national interest was invoked as support for the false accusation made against Dreyfus. Against such toxic nationalism, was Durkheim able account for it as a genuine form of society without conceding truth or right? How could he use organicism and holism without conceding to Barrès? And how could he uphold truth and reason without falling into the trap laid by the anti-Dreyfusards about intellectuals betraying their country? Lastly, how could he account for and support an individualism which does not break social bonds? As we shall below, one answer to the last question is the concept of the ‘individual in general’ and one answer to the second and third questions is internationalism. If he could marry nationalism with internationalism, he would in one sense have opposed right-wing nationalism. But how does he do this philosophically?
For many, Durkheim’s article ‘L’individualisme et les intellectuels’ (1898b) is his most famous intervention in the Affair, and Stephen Lukes (1973) has reminded us of its importance. But we must turn to this other 1898 article, also written in mid-Affair, where he undermines the arguments made for ethnic identity as the basis for nationalism together with physiological determinism and organicism.

This undermining, however, is not evident at first sight; a clearly philosophical piece, published in the *Revue de Metaphysique et Morale*, ‘Répresentations individuelles et représentations collective’ (1898a) takes on a piquancy given the date of its publication and the political background against which it was written. The philosophical theme is the nature of representation, in individual and collective forms, which he opposes to the views of Julian Huxley and Henry Maudsley, who ‘reduce conscience to be only an epiphenomenon of physical life’ (1898a: 14). However, this ‘scarcely anymore has any defenders’ (1898a: 14). Why, then, rehearse the arguments against the ‘physiological’ conception of the mind (1898a: 26) at this juncture, unless there is a present and more toxic use of a similar theory? I suggest that it was Barrès and his ethnic nationalism that was the elephant in the room here. If Durkheim could counter more distinguished arguments for physiological determinism, he could then undermine its weaker formulation.

Durkheim offers a strong argument for the mind as representation and for its irreducible nature: ‘L’esprit lui même, c’est-à-dire les représentations présentes et passes qui le constituent’ (1898a: 31). It is through this argument that he rejects the reductionism of what he terms the ‘physiological account of the mind’: ‘Rien n’autorise à supposer qu’une représentation, si élémentaire soit-elle, puisse être directement produite par une vibration cellulaire’ (1898a: 41). The activity of the mind as representation shows that it is not simply a result of physiological processes; the mind is not epiphenomenal. This reductionism makes ‘la vie psychique’ an appearance without a reality (1898a: 23). The main concepts he uses against physiological reductionism, which he calls ‘intellectual nihilism’ (1898a: 22) are Renouvierist: the mind as representation, the psychic(“psychique”) and ‘la vie representative’.

Charles Renouvier’s thought was important for the pro-Dreyfusards, particularly because of his account of the concept of right and of freedom of mind. But also his development of the logic of representation was particularly significant here: He showed that knowledge is only possible through representation and that this is logically independent of the material.¹ Durkheim’s central argument is for the reality and specific nature of representation: ‘Pour en admettre la réalité, il n’est pas du tout nécessaire d’imaginer que les représentations sont des chose en soi’ (1898a: 31). He
attacks not only reductionism, but also materialism and mechanism: ‘Plus la representation s’éloigne de la sensation pure, plus aussi l’élément moteur perd d’importance et de signification positive” (1898a: 31). The activities of the higher mental functions, central to conscious mental activity, show the autonomous functioning of the mind: They can impede action and therefore have an autonomy from the physical functions: ‘Les fonctions intellectuelles supérieures supposent surtout des inhibitions de mouvements comme le prouvent et le rôle capital qu’y joue l’attention et la nature même de l’attention qui consiste essentiellement dans une suspension, aussi compète que possible, de l’activité physique’ (1898a: 31).

This is a phenomenological point; the conscious orientation of the mind to a given portion of reality is determined by the mind itself. Durkheim opposes this to the idea of ‘automatism’: ‘Plus cette faculté de connaître ce qui se passé en nous est développée plus aussi les mouvements du sujet perdent cette automatisme qui est la caractéritique de la vie physique’ (1898a: 15). Barrès’s idea of human beings as ‘automata’ is clearly rejected also through the idea of the psychic and of the indeterminacy of conscience: ‘Un agent doué de conscience ne se conduit pas comme un être dont l’activité se réduirait à un système de reflexes . . . cette indétermination relative n’existe pas où il n’existe pas de conscience et elle croît avec la conscience’ (1898a: 15). (We should remember his claim in 1893 that it is the development of ‘psychic life’ which differentiates human beings from the animals and the realm of the instinctive [1893: 338].)

AF relied on the view of man as essentially irrational – that is, as not motivated rationally but as driven through the biological and historical, and by feelings and associations (Sternhell 1986: 36). The idea of a popular unconsciousness was also central to its view; it is this which must be activated to have a nation built on action, energy and force (1986: 36). This was central to AF’s anti-intellectualism: Barrès did not ask what doctrine was true, but which one would stimulate action and enable victory (1986: 36); this followed from his account of the forces of the unconscious which must dominate reason. Significantly, Durkheim addresses the question of the unconscious here, and argues against the idea of a complete unconsciousness: He rejects that this is ‘purely physical’ (1898a: 36). In other words, there is always an element that is available to conscious reflection. To show that unconscious forces are in touch with more conscious powers of the mind is to undermine this fascist account of popular energy and its role in nationalism. That is, there is no simple and unimpeded source of popular energy if there is always the possibility of reflection and critical detachment from it. Elsewhere, Durkheim argues that there are unconscious forces in the human being, but that these ‘obscure tendencies’ must submit to the reflective power of understanding. There must be a ‘faculté d’arret’ (1925: 40).
Nationalism involves the concept of resemblance, for the nation is in part a collection of those who are like us – that is, those who resemble us. A significant aspect of this article is Durkheim’s account of resemblance: The force of his argument is that neither physicality nor simple contiguity can explain this. It requires psychic activity and the higher functions of the mind. It is above all the activity of the mind in relating one thing to another, which is involved here. The consciousness of resemblance involves ‘relation sui generis’ (1898a: 27), and this involves a judgement; this is active at the level of consciousness rather than at the physical level.

Further, AF calls on the concept of tradition, which can only be real for us if we can remember – that is, the concept of tradition involves memory. It is significant that another aspect of this article is his treatment of memory: in line with his general thesis, he argues that the physiological theory of the mind cannot explain the mental phenomena of memory. In other words, AF cannot account for what it needs in the concept of tradition, which is a viable theory of memory. This requires a theory of consciousness and representative life: When these are acknowledged, then ‘la conception d’une mémoire psychologique devient intelligible’ (1898a: 37).

It has always been widely acknowledged that organicism is central for Durkheim: The interconnected nature of society, where the parts are interdependent, as like in an organism, is central to its holism. But does his view really come from traditionalism, as Nisbet suggested (1952: 169)? How does this accommodate ‘la personne humaine’? For traditionalism, the organic nature of society is not only hierarchical but is also tied to divinity; its holistic nature stems from God. Philosophically, it is tied to a transcendent absolute. It is significant that Durkheim here rejects ‘ideal-ist and theological metaphysics’ which ‘derive the part from the whole’ (1898b: 44). His account of organicism, to the contrary, involves pluralism and composition: ‘Combination presupposes plurality” (1898a: 28). It is important to acknowledge that his view of society involves composition: A ‘composed order’ (ordre composé) is a complex set of relations which have a relative duration (1893: xxxii; 1895: 86). So we must connect philosophical pluralism with the idea of composition, both of which come from Renouvier. Logical pluralism is central to the logic of composition, and this opposes absolutist holism: ‘From Renouvier came the axiom that a whole is not equal to the sum of its parts, and that this is at the basis of his realism’ (1913: 326). The significance here is that this account does retain the concept of whole, but does not entail subordination in terms of the interest of the whole as does ‘theological metaphysics’.

So Durkheim has undercut the reductionism involved in the materialist and mechanist conception which underlies Barrès’s ethnic nationalism and with it physiological theories of race. He opposes philosophical pluralism to its organicism and contingency to its determinism.
There are further considerations relating to his philosophical language which pertain to what we must consider next: his famous article ‘L’Individualisme et les intellectuels’. Central to these considerations is what Durkheim calls the necessary condition of social life in *Les Règles*: the ‘conscience particulière’ (1895: 103). The idea of a necessary condition is very important: It indicates that factor without which nothing else can happen. The ‘conscience particulière’ has been ignored in Durkheim scholarship; in this, it shares the fate of its associated concept of ‘conscience’. But it is crucial to understanding his theory here, particularly as it concerns the question of right.

This concept had significance during the Affair, where Renouvier’s logical and political thought was important for the Dreyfusards, precisely because he established the reality of the concept of right and that of individualism. A constant of Renouvier’s thinking is the centrality of the right of the person: The duty of the state is to establish the rational right of the individual (Picard 1908: 110). This can only be realised in a democratic republic. He opposes any theory which establishes a ‘raison d’état’ which justifies oppression and the denial of rights. This establishes a new ecclesiastical type of authority which not only denies freedom of mind and autonomy of action, but also the reciprocity of rights and duties which justice demands. He has in mind Comte’s Great Being and Hegel’s *Geist*. He uses the word *particulier* to qualify each conscience and to indicate a real and indissoluble individuality (1869: 301), which in turn gives a foundation to the idea of right. Renouvier’s account serves to retain these morally and politically whilst preserving the interest of explanation in wholes. For him, logical pluralism as holism is compatible with right and free thought, for this sustains no absolute which transcends which can be used to serve moral and political subordination.

*L’Individualisme et les intellectuels* (1898)

This article is a response to Ferdinand Brunetièrè, who was member of the Ligue des Patriotes and who supported the views of the anti-Dreyfusards. Against these, Durkheim defended the role of intellectuals and the principle of intellectuality in society: He supported the freedom of expression and of free thought generally – which as we have seen were held to be anarchic elements for Comte and AF. Individualism, free thought and the concept of right are central to Durkheim’s arguments against AF here.

It is here that he most clearly defines individualism: He clearly differentiates his account from that of political economy (1898b: 263). He condemns the negative individualism of political economy and rejects its ‘moral misery’, which reduces society to being no more than a vast apparatus of production and exchange (1898b: 262). In contrast, his account has respect
for the ‘human person’. The human person is an ideal in this ‘cult of man’ in which human beings are both objects and agents (1898b: 262). The latter addresses itself to the personne humaine, which is the touchstone whereby good is distinguished from evil (1898b: 264). It is important to note here that Maurras called the personne humaine ‘a myth and as absurd as ideas of freedom, equality and right’ (Parodi 1924: 156).

This individualism is a glorification not of ‘the self’ (le moi); it is not the type of individualism which is based on egotism and self-interest. Rather through it humanity is respected and made sacred. Individualism is understood through l’individu en general (‘the individual in general’) (1898b: 268). From this stems a sympathy for all human misery and a desire to combat it, for it entails a greater need for justice. This cult of man has ‘the autonomy of reason as its first dogma and free thought as its first rite’ (1898b: 268). This concept of l’individu en general is important. It is a transnational, indeed trans-ethnic, definition of the supreme value of the human being which is independent of both ethnic identity and of race. For Durkheim it is a collective representation and is sustained by the irreducibility of representation to biology and thus to race or ethnicity.

So properly understood, individualism can be a source of moral unification: “Not only is individualism not anarchy it is from now on the only system of beliefs that can assure the moral unity of the country’ (1898b: 270). Indeed, Durkheim holds that individualist values are ‘l’âme de la nation’ (1898b: 274) (This unusual use of l’âme by Durkheim might be connected to an article that Brunetière entitled ‘Les ennemis de l’âme française’.) Most importantly, he repudiates the idea of a ‘reason of state’ (raison d’état). ‘There is no raison d’état which can excuse an attack against the person when the rights of the person are above the state’ (1898b: 265). In other words, there is no necessary subordination of the individual’s rights to the state.

But how sociologically true is it that individualist values are the soul of the nation? There is little historical evidence of this in nineteenth-century France. Durkheim regretted the weakness of individualism here and the ease with which ‘authoritarian regimes’ were accepted: Old habits die hard (1950: 92–93). However, to institute an individualist morality it is not sufficient to ‘affirm’ it; rather, it must be based on a social order which is durable (1950: 95). So how this finds social and historical roots given both the situation of France in Durkheim’s time and the terrible history of the twentieth century is another question. Philosophically, the idea of the individual in general relies on the irreducibility of representation and is an ideal which Durkheim believes can be found in the social and historical process, despite considerable setbacks. We must also remember that an ideal is also that which can stimulate and lead this process; it can intervene in the process of becoming.
Nationalism

These considerations are an important prelude to Durkheim’s development of the idea of nationalism. It is a clear example first of his account of social phenomena as consisting ‘entirely in representations’ (1895: xi) and of their irreducible nature, and second of his account of human beings as driven, not by biology and the instinctive, but through conscience and by psychic life. Through the above analysis, we can see that Durkheim has taken patriotism away from questions of race, blood and soil, so common in the discourse of the political right of his days, and located it within social and historical consciousness – in irreducible forms of consciousness. This constituted a rejection of the French fascist thinking which went on to enable Vichy. Durkheim rejects its pseudo-philosophical theories which underlie the idea of ethnic identity as the basis for nationalism. National identity need not be a block to wider forms of social being and the formation of European solidarity, for nationalism is an aspect of social and historical consciousness which can change and transform into wider and more inclusive forms. He retains the idea of patriotism without conceding to nationalist exclusivity.

He acknowledges the nation as a social reality. The nation is ‘composed of co-ordinated elements’ (1885: I.373; italics in original). This shows that the logic of composition and theoretical pluralism are central to his renewed organicism. It is in terms of this that he can identify nationalism as a real social phenomenon. Amongst social organisms, there is first the sexual aggregate, second the family, third the tribe, fourth the communes and the nations, and last international aggregations (1886: I.39). So the nation is preceded by the tribe, runs alongside communes and is succeeded by international forms.

In La sociologie et son domaine scientifique (1900), Durkheim defines the substratum of society in its external form first by the extent of territory, second by its geographic situation vis-à-vis other countries and third by the form of its frontiers: Each group is part of the soil which it occupies (1900: 21f). Does this idea of the substratum not seem to establish frontiers which would support national exclusivity? Territorial cohesion, based on exclusive nationalism, was central to the integral nationalism of AF. Elsewhere, Durkheim argues that a patrie is a society which ‘opposes itself’ to other societies of the same kind (genre), just as the individual self opposes itself to other individual selves. Indeed, a patrie is ‘a collective personality’ (1909: 221). Just as a frontier is the limit to the collective personality so it is for a patrie: The frontier marks the periphery of the social body (1909: 221).

But morphological formations, Durkheim argues, are not static; there are migrations, which instil movement. Besides these manières sociales d’être
(‘social ways of being’) are façons sociales d’agir (‘social ways of acting’). These are modes of thought and action (1900: 24) that are central to the collective activity which lies at the heart of society (1900: 22). So there is a socially creative tension between the group and its limits and growing forms of consciousness. The structural relations of society are subject to ‘becoming’ (devenir). This philosophical concept enables the recognition of the changing and developing nature of the human relational structures which are social formations. These can be driven by an ideal: There can be a progressive expansion of social relations.

So the becoming of social relations can be developed, for this is to create a vaster civilisation through extending social relations – that is, there can movement beyond the nation; national identity need not be a hindrance to the formation of vaster patries. There is a paradox in history which Durkheim notes: Frontiers are not being effaced historically; rather, they are being accentuated, from the nomads without a territorial base to growing territorial limits. There is here a historical movement from the imprecise and vague to the more precise. But at the same time, nationalities tend to get closer and form international associations of all kinds – for example, the formation of the German patrie (1909: 223). Moreover, after the ‘barbarian’ invasion, there was ‘minimum individuation’; nevertheless, great national individualities have grown through history together with associations between nations. For example, in the Middle Ages there was the Christian Empire (1909: 223).

The idea of the patrie as an organised society allows this idea of vaster formations. In ‘Débat sur le nationalisme et le patriotisme’ (1905: 178ff), Durkheim deals with patriotism in terms of political society. Patriotism, he says, is a feeling which attaches the individual to political society seen in a certain way. The patrie is a political society ‘felt in a certain way’. He says that the patrie ‘is a political society viewed from the affective side’ (1905: 180). So nationalities can have a community of civilisation without being linked by a political tie (e.g. Finland, Poland). France is mixture of the two: it is at once a state and a nationality.

Durkheim rejected le nationalisme chauvin and nationalist exclusivism – a nationalism which puts one’s country above others. It is interesting to note that by 1913 AF aimed to re-establish French supremacy in Europe. Meanwhile, Durkheim’s argument in his 1909 lecture ‘Morale civique et patrie’ is that all ‘civilisations are incomplete’, so he rejects the idea of national exclusivity. Indeed for him the identity of culture is not essential to that of the patrie: The community of culture is not a sufficient condition of the patrie – it is simply adjuvant (‘helpful’); it can be totally absent as in the case of Switzerland (1909: 221). The community of historical memory is more important than this, as was shown in the war of 1870 (1909: 221). So, since all civilisations are incomplete, the idea of national exclusivity
must be rejected. Rather, we must work to establish a *patrie plus vaste*, a vaster civilisation.

His lecture at the *Société Francaise de Philosophie* meeting in December of 1907, presented as ‘Pacifisme et patriotisme’, and his lecture of 1909, introduced above as 'Morale civique et patrie', are significant historically and politically. AF was becoming stronger and more vociferous. Its first congress was in 1907, and its journal became a daily paper, *L’Action Française*, in March 1908 and lasted until 1944 with the demise of Vichy. The group was active in the Sorbonne; there were riots inside and outside the Sorbonne in 1909; it had thugs on the street in the guise of newspaper-sellers.

In 1907, Durkheim engaged in a discussion of pacifism, in which it is defined as the doctrine of a durable peace between nations; this entails that ‘anti-patriotic internationalists’ and ‘patriotic nationalists’ are equal adversaries. Durkheim agrees and holds that neither anti-patriotism nor nationalism is defensible (1907: 293). The doctrine of pacifism, argues Durkheim, cannot be made up of the juxtaposition of two negations. We need a positive end to which we can be attached, and this involves the *patrie*.

Both war and peace involve that of the *patrie*; Durkheim places this in the context of an organised society: ‘Nous ne pouvons vivre en dehors d’une société organise, et la société organisée la plus haute qui, c’est la patrie’ (1907: 294). Thus, anti-patriotism is a ‘real absurdity’. In this acknowledgement of the centrality of patriotism, he can be seen as answering the accusation of AF that socialists were unpatriotic (Weber 1962: 125). It is important to note that it is precisely because he defines *la patrie* as an organised society that he can oppose nationalist pride and jingoistic patriotism (*patriotisme chauvin*).

The question arises: What kind of *patrie* we should wish for? Durkheim’s arguments go to the heart of his rationalist humanism and his hopes for the development of a European society in a direction counter to that espoused by the neo-monarchic and anti-Semitic AF. Below, we have a clear statement of Durkheim’s internationalism and his humanism. Internationalism and humanism converge in his concept of *la patrie humaine*; he envisions wider forms of identity in a European *patrie*. There is a form of identity beyond the nation and which encompasses European humanism and which opposes chauvinistic nationalism: ‘Par dessus cette patrie, il en est une autre qui est en voie de formation, qui enveloppe notre patrie nationale; c’est la patrie européenne, ou la patrie humaine’ (1907: 294).
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**Note**

1. See Renouvier (1912: I.38–40). The rejection of matter as being known independent of representation follows from his argument that there can be no knowledge of things in themselves. In particular, knowledge of the material follows his principle of number, so the logic of composition governs this. As Gaston Milhaud says: ‘Il affirme l’irreducibilité des faits chimique aux faits mécaniques, des faits organiques aux faits physic-chimiques, des faits psychiques aux faits organiques . . . et il affirme précisément parceque’il n’embrasse plus de la chose en soi’ (1927: 75).

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