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## **Abstract: ‘An Army of Civil Servants’: Max Weber and Émile Durkheim on Socialism**

This paper is a comparison of the views of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim on socialism; these two have yet to be compared on this topic. They offered shared critiques of socialism, but differed in assessment of its overall worth, with Durkheim being more welcoming. After considering possible explanations for this divergence I argue it reflects the contrasting methodologies adopted by both. Whilst Weber places questions of the ‘value’ of socialism solely in the conscious of the individual, and therefore beyond sociology, Durkheim sees this as a social question and therefore part of the practical concerns of sociologists.

**Keywords:** bureaucracy; Émile Durkheim; history of sociology; socialism; sociological methodology; Max Weber

The ‘mutual unawareness’ (Tiryakian 1966) Max Weber and Émile Durkheim shared has become such a topic of debate that it has been named the ‘Weber-Durkheim unawareness puzzle’ (Jensen 2012: 2). This debate has established that this was not an ‘unawareness’ as such since both had at least a passing knowledge of each other’s work (cf. Giddens 1987: 182); more a mutual ‘non-utilisation’. However, this has still left contemporary scholars the task of creating a posthumous conversation between the two. Given their intellectual concerns such debates have centred upon factors such as: religion (Bendix and Roth 1971), social action (Münch 1988), methodology (Jensen 2012) and the state (Giddens 1987). There has, to this point, been no sustained attempt to generate a conversation between Weber and Durkheim on the topic of socialism. This is somewhat surprising, given the volume of the writings both produced on this topic and the ‘close connection’ between socialism and sociology (Bottomore 1984: 1).

Therefore, this article is an attempt to construct such a conversation. This is valuable since as soon as we begin this comparison we confront a further puzzle, namely that both start out with a very similar critique<sup>1</sup>, but end up adopting divergent views on the value of socialism as a political movement and ideal. As Tiryakian puts it in one of the few existing mentions, albeit brief, of Weber and Durkheim’s shared interest in socialism:

In political outlook, Durkheim and Weber were also remarkably close. Both had a sympathetic understanding of the working class and its spokesmen, yet both felt that socialism sought too facile a solution to the complexity of the modern social order (Tiryakian 1966:331)

While I will question the views, especially those attributed to Durkheim, in this quote, it does indicate some of the shared starting ground. In what comes I will discuss these similarities

but place an especial focus on their, hitherto unelaborated, divergences. While multiple explanations may initially seem plausible, such differences reflect their contrasting methodologies. As this indicates, this paper is primarily concerned with how Weber and Durkheim approached socialism as a topic (i.e. as an idea, a movement and, in the case of Weber, an actuality); socialism as a social fact in Durkheim's language (cf. Durkheim 1959). It should also be noted that since this article is primarily concerned with comparing the views of the two I do not have the space to critique these. There are already useful sources which critique Weber's (Cacciari 2009: 105-21, Marcuse 1968, Mueller 1982) and Durkheim's (Bottomore 1984: 102-22, Giddens 1982) views on socialism and/or Marxism.

Before turning to this discussion it is worthwhile highlighting the respective objects of Weber and Durkheim's attention. There is some slight divergence here, since Weber was focused largely, though not solely, on a particularly statist reading of Marx and Marxism whereas Durkheim draws his main inspiration from Saint-Simon and French socialism. However, despite this initial divergence there is much similarity between the two. As we shall see, Durkheim did read Marx in some depth and included him in his critique of socialism (Mauss 1959: 3); indeed almost half of the literature Durkheim cited from the school of socialist economics was that of Marx (Steiner 2011: 9). More significantly, Durkheim's definition of socialism as a social fact, studied in relation 'to the social setting in which it was born' rather than via a textual analysis of the 'fathers' (Durkheim 1959: 10) – a 'cultural' rather than 'party political' definition (Scaff 1989: 176) – unites he and Weber. Both see socialism as a set of ideas and a movement sharing the attempt to 'socialise' the economy. While this doesn't remove some differences in their object of analysis, including different national and temporal contexts which I will highlight, it does mean the similarities are enough to provide a meaningful comparison.

### *Weber on Socialism*

Weber is inconsistent in his definition of socialism, sometimes taking its definition as read, other times being more explicit<sup>2</sup>. However, a common theme throughout is a division between private (capitalist) and public (socialist) provision. For Weber whether ‘a society’s needs should be taken care of by business (that is privately)’ or ‘supplied, not privately, but socialistically...by planned organisation’ is a historically omnipresent question (Weber 1918: 282). Therefore, socialism is for Weber equated with a planned economy (Weber 1978: 109-113). While this desire for communal provision, and therefore for socialism, has ‘existed everywhere, at every period and in every country in the world’ it is the modern industrial economy, with its focus on bureaucratisation and the separation of the worker from the ‘means of operation’, as part of its ‘factory *discipline*’ which produced modern socialism (Weber 1918: 283). Weber dates this modern form of socialism to the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* which he calls ‘a scholarly achievement of the highest order’ though at heart a political, or prophetic, rather than scientific text (Weber 1918: 287)<sup>3</sup>. He then, in *Economy and Society*, makes a further distinction based upon the object of this communal provision. When the concern is to collectively organise production, we have socialism, when it is to collectively organise consumption, we have communism (Weber 1978: 112). Whilst these definitions are sometimes collapsed in Weber’s discussions of socialism (cf. Weber 1918, 1921, 2000), most of his critical comments are directed at this definition of socialism.

Therefore, as Mueller (1982) argues, Weber implicitly operates with a limited definition of socialism: state socialism, or, as Mueller (1982: 161) prefers, ‘state capitalism’. Indeed, when discussing the agrarian socialism popularised by the Socialist Revolutionaries at the time of the 1905 Russian Revolution, Weber argues that even this, ‘though disputed’, will inevitably lead to the ‘authoritarian’ camp of state socialism (Weber 1906a: 93). This has an impact on his views regarding the relation between socialism and capitalism since they are, in fact, different logics of provision. These, with the emergence of the nation-state, can occur,

at least to a limited extent, alongside one another. For example, in his discussion of the stock exchange Weber highlights that unlike some other existing institutions they are ‘not strictly “socialist”’ (Weber 2000: 305), leading him to take evidence of bureaucracy in the public sector as evidence for its inevitability under socialism (Weber 1918: 281).

Having outlined Weber’s definition of socialism, let us turn to his critique; this has five points. As Cacciari (2009) highlights, these are primarily critiques of ‘socialist reason’, ideological critiques. While this is true, the fifth – and to some extent, the third – critique also refer to the concrete practice of socialism and socialist movements.

The first critique concerns the potential of socialism to create a ‘dictatorship of the official’ (Weber 1918: 292) through further expansion of bureaucracy. While Weber’s views here are well-known there are certain elements emphasised in his critique of socialism which are significant. These can be separated into effects upon the industrial and political sphere. In the industrial sphere Weber argues that the separation of workers from the means of production, central to Marx’s concept of alienation, is in fact an inevitability of modern organisation due to the increased division of labour and technological advances:

Everywhere we find the same thing: the means of operation within the factory, the state administration, the army and university departments are concentrated by means of a bureaucratically structured human apparatus...This is due partly to purely technical considerations, to the nature of modern means of operation – machines, artillery and so on – but partly simply to the greater efficiency of this kind of human cooperation: to the development of “discipline”, the discipline of the army, office, workshop and business...As long as there are mines, furnaces, railways, factories and machines, they will never be the property of an individual or of several individual workers in the sense in which the materials of a craft in the Middle Ages were the

property of one guild-master or of a local trade cooperative or guild. That is out of the question because of the nature of present-day technology (Weber 1918: 281)

Bureaucracy is therefore an inevitable result of any modern economy, since the advances of technology and business methods makes it 'completely indispensable' (Weber 1978: 223). Officials and workers must increasingly face professional examinations and limit their activity to specific tasks (Weber 1918: 277). Therefore, the separation of the worker from both the means and fruit of their labour is an inevitability, rather than basis for critique, since there is a 'necessity for long years of specialist training, for constantly increasing specialisation...the modern economy cannot be managed in any other way' (Weber 1918: 279). As mentioned previously, Weber highlights the presence of such bureaucratic control in publically run industries as evidence that this is not solely a feature of capitalism.

Weber then turns to considering what the larger industrial sphere would look like under socialism. Here he argues the inevitability of bureaucracy means:

it makes no difference whether the economic system is organised on a capitalistic or socialistic basis. Indeed, if in the latter case a comparable level of technical efficiency were to be achieved, it would mean a tremendous increase in the importance of professional bureaucrats (Weber 1978: 223-4)

This supposed increase in bureaucracy is due to the fact that, lacking market mechanisms, socialism 'would require a still higher degree of formal bureaucratization than capitalism' (Weber 1978: 225) to ensure goods were distributed appropriately.

This then leads to the role of bureaucracy in the political sphere. Given the removal of the private sector, employment can only occur via the state. Important here for Weber is the nature of socialist parties since 'all *parties* of a purely socialist character are *democratic*

parties nowadays' (Weber 1918: 275). By proclaiming their belief in democracy such parties, for Weber, are also implicitly, and perhaps unknowingly, proclaiming their belief in the inevitability of officials since 'democracy has only the choice of being run cheaply by the rich who hold honorary office, or of being run expensively by paid professional officers' (Weber 1918: 276). This itself is not a critique of socialism since, as Cacciari (2009: 113-14) points out, it can be used as justification for a Schumpeterian conception of socialism where officials plan according to the wider public good. Weber's critique therefore is not only that such bureaucracy will increase, but also the effect it would have on the workers. As highlighted above, working conditions would not change under socialism for Weber; what would change is the position of one's boss with workers more at the whim of individual officials since:

A socialist organization would bind all individuals by a single thread and direct these threads into the hands of a central management, which would then, according to its degree of knowledge, direct each individual to the location where it believed that that individual could most purposefully be employed. Today's structure binds each individual to countless others via uncountable threads. Each person tugs on the network of threads, in order to arrive at a position where he wishes to be and where he believes his place to be (Weber 2000: 321)

In this collectivised system the ability to change one's situation as a worker would be closed off since 'it is impossible to strike against the state'<sup>4</sup> and therefore 'the dependence of the worker is quite substantially increased' under socialism, with the only difference being that this dependence is now at the hands of faceless state officials, rather than the owners of capital (Weber 1918: 286).



Weber's second critique concerns the aforementioned lack of market mechanisms – especially prices – in a planned economy. Weber considers all economic systems to contain an 'unavoidable element of irrationality' (Weber 1978: 111), this is why tools such as price, money and capital accounting along with, in certain cases, state intervention (cf. Weber 2000: 334-5), are needed. However, the abdication of these mechanisms in favour of a full blown planned economy based upon need is likely to exacerbate irrationality due to the difficulties of monitoring local demand and providing an incentive to labour (Weber 1978: 110-12). As this indicates, this removal of market mechanisms is also likely to increase the need for socialist bureaucracy, feeding into Weber's first critique.

The third critique concerns the roles of intellectuals in the socialist movement. Weber sees a 'flat contradiction of the dictum that salvation can only come from the real workers' in the fact that the 'vast number' of those involved in socialist movements, especially the leaders, are intellectuals (Weber 1918: 298). Whilst this is a repetition of Weber's bureaucratic critique applied to political parties it also reflects Weber's disdain for such intellectuals personally, as he puts it:

If one looks at them, once can see that they are romantics, emotionally unfit for everyday life or averse to it and its demands, and who therefore hunger and thirst after the great revolutionary miracle – and its opportunity of feeling that they will be in power one day (Weber 1918: 298)

Consequently, 'A debate with convicted socialists and revolutionaries is always an awkward affair. In my experience, one never convinces them' (Weber 1918: 302).

Aside from Weber's personal disdain for such intellectuals<sup>5</sup>, he also argued there were sociological reasons for their disproportionate engagement in socialism. The fact that *The Communist Manifesto* was *prima facie* an academic document which relied upon an

evolutionist conception of history attracted many, as did the promise of power to the party of proletariat which, as we have seen, Weber saw as intellectual-led (Weber 1918: 296-8). Weber also argued that the 'romantic' nature of both proletariat and petit-bourgeois intellectuals (Weber 1906a:70-4) was appealed to by socialism in its claim for immediate action in order to bring about a flourishing of humanity. Indeed, this was why so many intellectuals ended up turning to syndicalism since 'it is the *romanticism* of the general strike and the *romanticism* of the hope of revolution as such which enchants these intellectuals' (Weber 1918: 298). Furthermore, Weber condemns such intellectuals as those who, faced with a choice between more war with revolution or no more war and a delayed revolution, would always, as 'scientifically trained' socialists, choose more war (Weber 1921: 125).

This point leads onto Weber's fourth critique, which is based upon a section of *Economy and Society* entitled 'Modern Intellectual Status Groups and Secular Salvation Ideologies' (Weber 1978: 515-7). Here, Weber argues that socialism is the latest in a line of religious doctrines developed by intellectuals. Its secular appearance masks its fundamentally 'quasi-religious' nature based within concepts of transformation and salvation (Weber 1978: 515). This is, for Weber, particularly problematic in the case of Marxism since, as a totalising religion, it is not possible to select certain elements with which one agrees, but rather one must sign up to the whole gospel (Weber 1921: 125) as:

Like the thoroughgoing Jesuit, the devout Marxist is imbued by his dogma with a blithe superiority and the self-assurance of the somnambulist. Disdaining to strive for lasting political success, and confident of being above reproach, he...is always exclusively concerned with the preservation of the pure faith and – if possible – the increase of his own sect by a few souls (Weber 1906a: 69)

However, like all such movements, Weber believes disillusionment will set in, particularly since publishing socialist texts is unlikely to lead to the commercial success intellectuals crave. Therefore ‘the pendulum of fashion will presently remove this subject of conversation and journalism’ (Weber 1978: 517).

The four criticisms thus far consider socialism as an emergent ideology; Weber’s fifth criticism concerns it as a reality; his comments on the 1905 Russian Revolution and the USSR<sup>6</sup>. In the earlier case Weber highlights ‘the intellectual peculiarity of Russian socialism’ (Weber 1906a: 67) due to its backing in the peasant class and hopes of ‘skipping’ the phase of capitalist development. This necessitates a belief in ‘revolutionism’ which, despite its parentage in both Social Democrat and Socialist Revolutionary parties, is still likely to create the aforementioned need for state socialism and all the negatives this brings (Weber 1906a: 93). When then turning to the USSR, Weber offers two points. Firstly, he argues that what happened following the October Revolution effectively proved the validity of his critique. The Bolsheviks had been forced ‘to accept again absolutely *all* the things that Bolshevism has been fighting as bourgeois class institutions’ (Weber 1921: 100). This includes the bureaucratic controls utilised by capitalism such as the Taylor system, piece work and differential wage systems (Weber 1918: 298-9, 1921: 100). They had also been forced to rehire the entrepreneurs who have the ‘expert knowledge’ needed to run an economy (Weber 1918: 299). Weber also comments on the dominance of intellectuals in the Bolshevik party and their ‘idiotic behaviour’ (Weber 1906b: 217), singling out Trotsky who ‘with the typical vanity of the Russian *littéraeur*’ wanted to use Brest-Litovsk as a means of producing German civil war, to which Weber sighs ‘one cannot make peace with people who are fighting for their faith’ (Weber 1918: 298-300). Secondly, Weber dismisses the USSR as a military dictatorship (Breuer 1992) which, like all military dictatorships, will eventually fall (Weber 1921: 119).

To summarise what has come in this section. Weber defines socialism as the collective and public provision of a planned economy which means he equates socialism with the state, for which he offers five criticisms. Firstly, that the alienation of the worker from the means of production is an inevitable part of modern society and that, due to the inevitability of bureaucratic and official control, socialism is likely to extend this principle whilst making the worker even more dependent upon the state. Secondly, the lack of market mechanisms would allow the irrational elements of the economy to go unchecked. Thirdly, an ideology based upon the rule of the workers was actually dominated by intellectuals attracted by its romanticism and promise of eventual power. Fourthly, this intellectual dominance was partly due to socialism's 'religious' nature. Finally, the early progress of socialism in Russia and then the USSR showed these criticisms to be valid and that socialism could only be achieved by military dictatorship, itself doomed to fail.

In light of these comments it is unsurprising that Weber saw socialism as an ideology to be fought. He thought it impossible to completely defeat socialism since 'every working class will always return to socialism in some sense or other' (Weber 1918: 302). Indeed, Weber is inconsistent about whether intellectuals *should* be trying to defeat it. Whilst above we saw Weber express exasperation about the difficulty of 'convincing' socialists, in his methodological writings he argues that whether 'one should, or should not, be a syndicalist is something that can never be proved in the absence of very definite metaphysical premises, which are not demonstrable, and certainly not by any science of whatever form' (Weber 1913: 90). His final word on the matter is that the goal should be to make sure the form of socialism expressed is 'one that can be tolerated, from the point of view of the interests of the state' (Weber 1918: 302). Here, Weber appears to be echoing the claim in his inaugural lecture of 1895 (cf. Mommsen 1974: 364-70) that 'political economy is a *political* science. It is a servant of politics, not the day-to-day politics of the persons and classes who happen to

be ruling at any given time, but the enduring power-political interests of the nation' (Weber 1895: 16). I will return to these points later in the article. Before then, let us turn to Durkheim's views on socialism.

### *Durkheim on Socialism*

Durkheim is much more systematic and consistent in his evaluation of socialism. Partly this is due to the greater breadth of Durkheim's discussion. There is, of course, his never completed lecture series on socialism (Durkheim 1959) as well as a myriad of book reviews (cf. Durkheim 1885, 1893, 1897, 1899a, 1899b) which Durkheim would often use to develop his own ideas (Giddens 1970). In addition, socialism often lurked in the background of Durkheim's work. The original goal of his doctoral dissertation was to consider the relation between individualism and socialism (Stedman Jones 2001: 111) and we can find oblique references to socialism throughout his oeuvre. Indeed, Mauss argues that socialism was Durkheim's first interest, with the need to establish sociology as a discipline being the only thing able to draw him away (Mauss 1959).

Durkheim begins by rejecting the idea that socialism is a 'science, a sociology in miniature' since, being orientated towards the future rather than cool study of the present or past, it is 'an ideal' which 'concerns itself much less with what is or was than what ought to be' (Durkheim 1959: 5-7). Instead socialism is:

a cry of grief, sometimes of anger, uttered by men who feel most keenly our collective *malaise*. Socialism is to the facts which produce it what the groans of a sick man are to the illness with which he is afflicted (Durkheim 1959: 7)

Durkheim, much like Weber, draws a distinction between communism and socialism. Communism derives from the thought of Plato and is primarily focused on the 'suppression'

of economic concerns (Durkheim 1959: 32-40). Under such a system one's life as a producer becomes private and is no concern of the state, whose personnel are prohibited from economic activity and instead are focused upon communal consumption. Therefore, communism is fundamentally concerned with morality, this is befitting of an ideology developed by philosophers who 'deal with problems of general morality whilst enclosed in study rooms, rather than men of action' (Durkheim 1959: 38). Since these are timeless questions, communism is a doctrine which can be found throughout history, with only slight moderations.

Socialism however, is modern. Rather than wishing to suppress economic concerns, socialism 'demands the connection of all economic functions, or of certain among them, which are at the present time diffuse, to the directing and conscious centres of society' (Durkheim 1959: 19). Therefore socialism is concerned with the social 'organisation' of the economy so that, whilst the economy is not subordinated to social concerns, these should be recognised as having equal importance as economic concerns (Durkheim 1959: 6-28). Therefore, like Weber, Durkheim links socialism, at least in his discussion of Saint-Simon, to the state (Durkheim 1959: 32)<sup>7</sup> and sees it as a recognition of, and a desire to advance, the industrialisation of society (Durkheim 1959: 71). Socialism is therefore modern since it: recognises the centrality of the organic solid division of labour in its claim of the social centrality of occupational activity; rests upon the distinctively modern ability of the state to organise production; relies on the mechanisms of modern science; and emerges as a response to the capitalist economics of Smith and Ricardo (Durkheim 1959: 29-81). Durkheim also rejects the idea that socialism is defined by a concern with inequality or the situation of the workers; socialism is not primarily concerned with 'the stomach' (Durkheim 1959: 26). While the social organisation of the economy is likely to 'make the situation of the great majority less noxious' (Durkheim 1959: 25) and therefore socialism 'means to introduce a

higher morality' (Durkheim 1893: 119), this is always secondary to, and a result of, its key desire to connect the economy to the state. Therefore, unlike communism, socialism is primarily an economic, rather than moral, doctrine, hence Durkheim's economic definition. I will now turn to Durkheim's critique of the socialist doctrines he studied; this has four points.

The first criticism is perhaps not the central one for Durkheim, but given our discussion of Weber is a worthwhile one to begin with. In an early book review Durkheim (1885) highlights the concern that socialism will all too easily become a desire for 'excessive administrative centralization' (Durkheim 1885: 94). By connecting the direction of individual activity to the state it is possible to 'be the enemy of liberty and individual initiative' (Durkheim 1885: 93) and therefore society will become 'an army of civil servants' with each individual 'lost in that enormous mass of the state' (Durkheim 1885: 88). While Durkheim is more willing than Weber to see this as a perversion, rather than natural outcome, of socialism he does warn against this possible tendency for individuals to be 'more dependent on the mass' (Durkheim 1959: 138). Therefore, Durkheim was sensitive to the concerns of Weber regarding the potential for dictatorship by bureaucracy under socialism. These may be unintended consequences or mistakes but 'an erroneous socialism is still socialism' (Durkheim 1893: 114).

This concern is perhaps best placed within Durkheim's second, and major, criticism of socialism: its misunderstanding of morality. As highlighted above, Durkheim does see socialism as attempting to introduce a higher morality, indeed in one book review, somewhat going against his own definition, he goes as far as saying socialism is 'above all moral' (Durkheim 1893: 116). This is partly the case since, as the above quoted definition suggested, Durkheim saw socialism as an economic doctrine which was partly concerned with responding to the 'malaise' or 'moral problems of today' which he agreed were of central importance (Durkheim 1959: 199-204, 1953: 64). However, socialism was flawed in

its attempt to do so. There are three distinct, but interlinked, claims here. Firstly, befitting its Marxist influence, socialism sees economic changes as causal in changes of morality, so that when economic change occurs 'there must consequently result from them changes of equal importance in the social organization' (Durkheim 1897: 132). Therefore, a further change towards socialist economic organisation will, *ipso facto*, produce a new socialist morality. This is why, for Durkheim, all socialist theories, even those which are *prima facie* not revolutionary presuppose an 'overthrow' of the social order since 'the social body must die in order to be reborn' (Durkheim 1959: 132). Needless to say, Durkheim strongly rejected this claim by seeing the 'religious' as existing 'in the beginning' and consequently that it was impossible that 'religion can be reduced to economics' (Durkheim 1897: 135). Therefore, not only was socialism flawed by seeing moral changes in the past as result of economic changes but also, its attempt to treat morality as a *tabular rasa* (Durkheim 1959: 132) is flawed in its assumption this can simply be changed via further economic reorganisation.

This then leads to the second moral criticism towards socialism. By adopting economic materialism socialism in fact shared its key assumptions with orthodox, classic economics (Durkheim 1952: 215-19). In doing so, it reduces the state to the task of 'doing the collective bookkeeping' and consequently lessens the possibility of submitting economic concerns to larger, moral concerns (Durkheim 1952: 216). This is part of the third moral concern whereby, following this 'dogma of economic materialism' (Durkheim 1952: 216), economic activity and growth is seen to be the most important activity of individuals and society; 'progress' becomes the key objective. This exacerbates the economic anomie produced when human appetites are not limited by moral discipline (Durkheim 1952: 201-19; 1959: 197-204). As a result of these criticisms, the 'cause of the uneasiness', namely a lack of moral regulation and the antagonistic class relationships it engendered, will not be removed by a change in the economic system (Durkheim 1959: 202). This for Durkheim was one reason



why Saint-Simon turned to a new form of Christianity in the forlorn hope of using religion to provide such moral regulation (Durkheim 1959: 202-3).

Durkheim's third criticism is focused specifically on Marx. I have highlighted above some of Durkheim's criticisms of Marxist economic materialism, he had three other specific points. Firstly, he criticised Marx for an overreliance on the economic history of England, seeing this as a unique case and unrepresentative of Europe or the wider world (Durkheim 1899a: 124). Secondly, he saw confusion in Marx's role as both philosopher and sociologist, with philosophical explanations used as sociological proof. In particular, he argues that Marx's focus on factors 'that elude both the consciousness and reason', here Durkheim seems to be highlighting the materialist theory of class action, are utilised as causal elements so that 'in a flash all these mysteries are cleared up and a simple solution given to these problems into which human intelligence seemed to be able to penetrate with such great difficulty' (Durkheim 1897: 134). Thirdly, he saw many of Marx's key predictions – such as the assertion that capital will be concentrated in fewer hands – to be false and his normative claim to remove the division of labour, mistaken (Durkheim 1899a: 124-5). These, in addition to the aforementioned claims concerning economic materialism mean that, for Durkheim, 'not only is the Marxist hypothesis not proven, but it runs counter to facts that appear to be well established' (Durkheim 1987: 135).

The final criticism concerns the role of class. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the nature of inequality and class in Durkheim's work (cf. Filloux 1993, Dawson 2013: 73-5, 131-3), suffice to say that Durkheim did see this as a central part of the malaise he confronted. He spoke of how inequality reduced the working class 'to a state of subjection' which is 'accepted only under duress until the longed-for day of revenge' (Durkheim 1992: 11). Importantly for our discussion however, Durkheim criticised socialism for confusing 'the social question with that of the workers' (Durkheim 1899b: 142) and

making itself a class-based ideology. By doing so it reproduces Durkheim's second critique – the marginalisation of morality – since:

The malaise from which we are suffering is not rooted in any particular class; it is general over the whole of society...Thus the problem reaches infinitely beyond the material interests of the two classes concerned. It is not a question of merely reducing the share of one group so as to increase that of the other, but one of refashioning the moral constitution of society (Durkheim 1899b: 142-3)

This mistake of analysis then has fatal political flaws since Durkheim castigates Marxist socialism's aggressive character 'for which it has often been justly reproached' (Durkheim 1899b: 143).

As we have seen, Durkheim offered four criticisms of socialism. Firstly, it has the potential to be despotic by subjecting all activity to centralised economic concerns. Secondly, it mistakenly sees morality as created by economic conditions, meaning it misdiagnoses the causes of the malaise and is mistaken in believing further changes to the economy will change morality. Thirdly, Marx's work contains a number of problems, including extrapolating from an isolated case in England and some mistaken prognoses. Finally, although class – and inequality more generally – are key parts of the malaise, socialism is mistaken to place its appeal within class conflict when the problems of society are found across the class structure.

There are similarities between Weber and Durkheim on socialism. But, thus far I have not highlighted their key difference, namely that, despite the above criticisms, Durkheim came to see socialism as both inevitable *and* worthy. As he put it:

Far from being a retrograde step, *socialism as we have defined it* really appears part and parcel of the very nature of higher societies. Indeed we know that the more history advances the more social functions that were originally dispersed become organised and “socialised”...There seems to be no privileged position for economic functions that would make them solely capable of successfully resisting this movement (Durkheim 1893: 120)

Indeed, he speaks of how ‘industrialism logically ends in socialism’ (Durkheim 1959: 141) and by advocating the claim that economic activity is social and in need of social organisation Saint-Simon and his followers had discovered a ‘fundamental truth’ (Durkheim 2009: 4). The next three sections of the paper will therefore do two things: discuss in more depth where the commonalities and differences between the two can be found and then explore the reasons for the latter.

### *Commonalities and Differences*

What is striking is that these, ‘mutually unaware’, scholars shared notable similarities on the topic of socialism, despite their differing intellectual and political priorities. There are seven key similarities to highlight. Firstly, while seeing the ideas animating socialism as age-old, both highlight the distinctively ‘modern’ appeal of socialism itself. For each, socialism is in effect the ‘other side’ of the industrial coin, akin to claims of socialism being a ‘counter-culture’ of modernity (Bauman 1987). Secondly, both highlight the significance of Marx – though Weber spends more time on this than Durkheim – and have some shared criticisms, most notably concerning the limited success of Marxism as the prophetic creed, rather than branch of science, both saw it as being. Thirdly, both connect socialism to the state, making the primary object of their critique state socialism<sup>8</sup>. Fourthly, as a result of this, they highlight the possibility of dictatorship by an economically-driven state. There is a slight difference

here where Weber sees such dictatorship as an inevitable result of increased bureaucracy, whereas Durkheim sees it an unintended, and perhaps avoidable, result of giving more power to the state. Fifthly, they both see socialism as fighting a losing battle in its desire to reverse the modern division of labour. Sixthly, both could be said to have had an influence on socialist theory. Weber's influence is clear due to his use by figures such as Lukacs and within Western Marxism; Durkheim's impact is claimed by Mauss to reside in 'the closeness of Durkheim's theory [of professional groups] and the practice of the soviets' which could even be called a 'descent' due to Durkheim's influence on Sorel, who then informed Lenin (Mauss 1984: 337-8). And finally, their views on socialism can be summarised by the claim that it aims 'at the wrong target'. For Durkheim, this was due to a marginalisation of morality, for Weber, its (forlorn) critique is actually of bureaucracy. This is a reflection of the fact that 'the non-economic aspects of economic institutions' were a major concern for both (Tiryakian 1966: 331).

The rest of this paper is concerned with their differences. These take two forms, the first concerns differences of focus, including Weber's greater focus on the economic elements of socialism and Durkheim's on morality as well as a greater reliance on the work of Saint-Simon. These differences can largely be explained by differing intellectual projects and national context. A more interesting and thought-provoking difference concerns their aforementioned disagreement on the political value of socialism.

As we have seen, for Weber, socialism was largely to be dismissed unless its demands could be accommodated within the political demands of the nation. Since socialism is, for Weber, state provision, this opens the door to the welfare state and public ownership but seemingly only in very restricted forms, especially with regard to the latter. Durkheim however sees some new form of economic organization as 'natural' (Durkheim 1984: 306), especially

given the fact that the lack of it will inevitably lead to an anomic division of labour (Durkheim 1984: 304). Therefore:

it is a strangely superficial notion – this view of the classical economists, to whom all collective discipline is a kind of rather tyrannous militarisation...[rather] economic activity should be permeated by ideas and needs other than individual ideas and needs...it should be socialized (Durkheim 1992: 29)

Since socialization, connecting the economy to the ‘directing and conscious centres of society’ (Durkheim 1959: 19), was Durkheim’s definition of socialism, we have an acceptance of its main political goal. Indeed, the need for social organisation of the economy was a career long belief of Durkheim’s, found in *The Division of Labour*, even before its famed 1902 preface (Durkheim 1984: 302-6), his writings on economic anomie (Durkheim 1952: 201-19) and up to his final published piece on ‘The Politics of the Future’ (Durkheim 2009).

Moreover, Durkheim’s own alternative, the corporations, is an attempt to realise this demand to socialize (Durkheim 1992: 28-41), framed as achieving the goals of Saint-Simon by other means (Durkheim 1959: 240). Additionally, the banning of inheritance, advocated by Durkheim, is seen by him as a socialist policy (Durkheim 1959: 13). Therefore, the corporation-based system was distinct from the work of Marx and Saint-Simon, but imbibed the principles of socialism. Indeed elsewhere I (Dawson 2013) have shown its links to the tradition of ‘libertarian socialism’. Therefore, to paraphrase Giddens, Durkheim had a ‘guarded’ attitude towards the means of some socialists, but a ‘positive’ one towards their ends (Giddens 1982: 119). The question we face then is why did this difference exist? Especially since Durkheim’s critiques, like Weber’s, are ones of both means *and* ends.

*Explanation for the Differences*

There are four possible explanations which come to mind for the differences between Weber and Durkheim on the ends of socialism. The first, and perhaps clearest, explanation would be to assign the difference to personal politics. To be exact, to say that Weber was a ‘class-conscious bourgeois’ (Mommsen 1974: 88) who, as a nationalist and liberal, inevitably rejected socialism whereas Durkheim, as a ‘republican socialist’ (Stedman Jones 2001: 47-57) was more predisposed towards it<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, this view is easy to find in the literature. For Anderson, Weber found the social order he defended ‘under pincer attack from left and right’ and since ‘Weber’s nationalism was more important to him than his liberalism’ he felt duty-bound to defend the status quo from attacks by socialism (Anderson 1992: 189, 195). We can see a similar claim in Mommsen’s argument that Weber’s continual concern was with encouraging the bourgeoisie to accept its historical fate for exercising power in the national interests (Mommsen 1974). Meanwhile, more approvingly, for Bendix and Roth, Weber ‘pitted a heroic activism’ against the ‘insult to human dignity’ which could be found in the ‘authoritarian habits’ and ‘philistine or petty-bourgeois attitudes’ he detected amongst the socialists (Bendix and Roth 1971: 16). We can also find Weber cast as a forefather of the ordoliberals in Freiburg, and therefore as a major influence upon neoliberalism (Foucault 2008: 105-6)<sup>10</sup>, whereas Durkheim and his followers are seen as ordoliberalism’s natural opponents (Gane 2009: 20).

I do not wish to completely dismiss this explanation since doing so would be to claim that personal views have *no* impact on the selection of topics and their elucidation, a position of value-freedom so extreme that even Weber would object to it. However, I do want to suggest that it is an insufficient explanation.

Perhaps most significantly, explaining theoretical claims solely via biographical and personal details implicitly devalues the explanatory value of that theory. It is reduced simply to the views of a particular individual at a specific time and place, perhaps of interest to biographers

and intellectual historians, but less to social scientists concerned with the world as it is. In this case, Weber's critique of socialism is simply the angry defence of a nationalist seeing his valiant country being attacked, whilst Durkheim's are sage advice from a kind friend. Whilst they can be presented as such, to do so devalues their worth, if any is to be had, for contemporary social and political theory.

Moreover, even were we to accept this explanation, it holds some internal inconsistencies. For example, it is not clear why being a nationalist would preclude being a socialist. Not only do we have a century of evidence to question this claim but, perhaps more significantly for this paper, Durkheim's final advocacy for the socialization of the economy is linked directly to a nationalist claim concerning the greatness of France since: 'A great nation, and one conscious of its greatness, must have a penchant for great things, and this inclination must mark all its undertakings' (Durkheim 2009: 3). Indeed Weber himself, when the interests of the nation called for it, was willing to use the language, if not entirely advocate the ends, of social democracy (Mommsen 1974: 298-9). Meanwhile, although the claims of Weber's bourgeois status may seem especially appealing as an explanation, this also is flawed. While it is difficult to imagine Durkheim saying 'I am a member of the bourgeois classes. I feel myself to be a bourgeois, and I have been brought up to share their views and ideals' (Weber 1895: 23), nor did Durkheim ascribe the bourgeoisie the quasi-Marxist historical role Weber gave them (cf. Mommsen 1974), it is much more difficult to claim Durkheim differed markedly from Weber in class position. Indeed, Durkheim has been termed a 'staunch bourgeois democratic republican' (Miliband and Pearce 2011: 241). Furthermore, as we have seen, Durkheim's approval of socialism was based upon an explicit rejection of its working class character. Therefore, while not totally rejecting the importance of personal politics I want to suggest it is not a sufficient explanation.

Perhaps a more useful approach is to look at historical context. As I have noted the majority of Weber's writings on socialism emerge once it, at least according to Weber's definition, had been established in the USSR. Perhaps Weber's rejection of socialism is linked to what he saw there (cf. Breuer 1992)? These are issues which Durkheim, who died in November 1917, did not have to confront<sup>11</sup>. Again, this explanation seems appealing and, being based upon a hypothetical, is difficult to disprove. Nevertheless, it overlooks the fact that Weber's antipathy to socialism was not a result of seeing the Soviet Union, but rather was career-long. It can be seen in an article published in 1894 (Weber 2000), his writings on the 1905 Russian revolution (Weber 1906a) and in his stated desire, as early as 1890, to fight any defects within capitalism 'from within'. His hope was that socialism could be 'merged with the left democratic wing of the bourgeoisie' (Weber 1988: 135, 223). While it is true that Weber's rejection of socialism becomes more vociferous with the increased power of the SPD the key elements of the critique changed little. Therefore, as I have suggested above, his critique of the Soviet Union is taken as proof for his other criticisms, rather than the reason for them. Consequently, historical context does not fully explain this antipathy<sup>12</sup>.

Let us then turn to an intellectual explanation, perhaps Weber's methodological individualism inevitably opposes a collective political project in a way that Durkheim's collective intellectual approach does not? This explanation has been offered by Mueller who argues:

the individual and his freedom rather than the state and its power stood in the centre of [Weber's] concern...he espouses free individual choice over collectivism, and self determination over regulation, his preference is for free enterprise rather than bureaucratic order, for methodological individualism rather than "the social fact" (Mueller 1982: 153)



Like our previous explanations, this also seems useful, however, when it comes to politics at least, Durkheim shares this focus on the individual. For example, in his intervention in the Dreyfus affair we find him advocating ‘progress towards making a reality of the famous precept: to each according to his labour!’ (Durkheim 1898: 56) and also claiming that the value of the state has been its role as the ‘liberator of the individual’ (Durkheim 1899b: 144). Even more pointedly, his critique of inheritance is that it is ‘contrary to the spirit of individualism’ (Durkheim 1992: 217). Therefore, as suggested by the earlier link of Durkheim’s normative claims to libertarian socialism, a focus on individualism does not preclude, and in fact may be the basis of, Durkheim’s positive attitude towards socialism.

This then leave us with one explanation which is, in my mind, the most plausible. Sayer, when discussing Weber’s relation to socialism, argues that he ‘was not prepared to sacrifice his intellect’ (Sayer 1991: 149) and this, by returning us to the start of this paper and its claim that Weber, like Durkheim, treated socialism as an *intellectual* problem, encourages us to turn to the relationship between intellectuals and politics. It is here, in questions of value-freedom and the role of the sociologist, that we find the key to the differences between Weber and Durkheim on socialism.

### *Socialism and the Sociologist*

Sayer’s statement however is slightly misleading, it was not Weber’s intellect he refused to sacrifice, but rather his value-free methodology. Since socialism was the object of such methodological tools, this section will assess the methods adopted by Weber and Durkheim.

Weber’s discussion of socialism abides by his claim that, in reference to a suggested political alternative, science can show only ‘(i) the unavoidable means; (ii) the unavoidable side-effects; (iii) the resulting conflict of several possible value-judgements with each other in their practical consequences’ (Weber 1913: 85). We have seen (i) in his critique of

bureaucracy and the lack of market mechanisms; (ii) in the claim of the dictatorship of the official and (iii) in his claim of the Bolsheviks adopting all they had been fighting. The result of this position for Weber is that science ‘can force the individual, or at least we can help him, to give himself an *account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct*’ (Weber 1922: 152). This was also demonstrated in Weber’s claim that showing a syndicalist that ‘an action of good intent leads to bad results’ is unlikely to make ‘the slightest impression upon him’ (Weber 1921: 121). In this conception socialism becomes a *value* and, like all values, their initial development, worth and ultimate ends is purely a matter for individual ‘will and consciousness’ (Weber 1949: 54). All that sociologists can say about socialism is contained in the above three precepts. While, as Anderson (1991) suggests, Weber found sticking to this very difficult in cases of politics – it is not clear where castigating socialists as hopeless romantics following a blind faith would fit into this discussion – the broad tenure of the method was followed in the critiques of socialism we saw Weber offer. Therefore the task of sociology, as an empirical science ‘can never be the determination of binding norms and ideals, from which in turn guidelines for practical application might be derived’ (Weber 1949: 52). Weber was being entirely consistent with his methodological principles in making socialism a question of individual value. It is the individual who is the sole determinant of whether these criticisms are enough to make the idea of socialism invalid. It is only our individual ‘god or demon’ which can help us decide this, neither of whom are named sociology (Weber 1913: 72).

Durkheim’s position however, opposes this. As we have seen, he frames his discussion of socialism as that of a social fact. In doing so he implies that its value should ‘be sought in the relationship that it bears to some social end’ (Durkheim 1982: 134), to be more exact, that the value, or lack thereof, of socialism is not a matter of *individual values* but rather of the normality or pathology of that social fact; of *social values*. This must be considerate of the

time and place in which the social fact is being studied – in Durkheim’s language, to the ‘species’ and ‘corresponding phase of evolution’ (Durkheim 1982: 92). This is due to the fact that the ‘normality’ of social facts can only be determined once the wider values of that society – the ‘social ends’ – are established. We have seen this in Durkheim’s link of socialism to the malaise, or ‘the illness’ with which society is afflicted. Such a link highlights that, for Durkheim, socialism emerges as a response to a pathological fact (the lack of moral regulation on the economy) and, in doing so, affirms the normal state (economic socialization). Indeed, Durkheim broaches this topic directly in *The Rules of Sociological Method*:

to know whether the present economic state...with the lack of organisation [Durkheim’s footnote] that characterises it, is normal or not, we must investigate what in the past gave rise to it. If the conditions are still those appertaining to our societies, it is because the situation is normal, despite the protest that it stirs up. If, on the other hand, it is linked to that old social structure which elsewhere we have termed segmentary and which, after providing the essential skeletal framework of societies, is now increasingly dying out, we shall be forced to conclude that this now constitutes a morbid state, however universal it may be (Durkheim 1982: 95)

The footnote Durkheim provides here is especially illuminating. Here he directs the reader to a previously cited book review (Durkheim 1893) where he provides the aforementioned quote that socialism is, due to the trend towards organisation, ‘part and parcel’ of contemporary societies. Therefore, Durkheim can criticise the ends and assumptions of certain socialist ideas, much like Weber, yet also recognise that socialism hopes to affirm values which are social and not simply for individual consideration. Hence, we have Durkheim framing his discussion of socialism in the context of collective values such as individualism, industrialism and the value of social organisation. While this may aim, as a secondary result,

to introduce a *new* morality, such a 'higher' morality can only be considered in relation to our current morality, which it inevitably affirms (Durkheim 1953: 61). Therefore:

in order to study the practical moral problem of today, it is as well to understand the various manifestations of Socialism as well as those of its opponents...But the scientist may be sure, in advance, that not one of these different causes will, in its spontaneous form, satisfy him. One of them may show more practical truth than the others and for that reason merit a certain amount of prejudice (Durkheim 1953: 64)

In this case, I would claim, socialism showed itself as meriting a certain amount of prejudice for Durkheim. This does not change the fact that it is to be criticised, but this criticism is done in light of the wider values socialism hopes to affirm rather than, as in the case of Weber, seeing such considerations of value as purely individual and, therefore, beyond the scope of sociology.

This is not to claim that had Weber adopted Durkheimian methodology he would have shared this prejudice; rather that his methodology *ruled out the possibility* of coming to such a conclusion, regardless of personal orientation. In this Marcuse's claim that by explicitly ruling out the question of the 'ought' Weber takes the 'is' as the guide and that therefore 'formal rationality turns into *capitalist* rationality' (Marcuse 1968: 204), has some merit. However, unlike Marcuse, my claim is that this is a question of methodology.

### *Conclusion*

This article has compared the views of Weber and Durkheim on socialism. I began by arguing that socialism was a central topic for each before going to outline the definitions and criticisms they offered. We saw that both had some common critiques of socialism, notably in its Marxist form, but differed on its overall value, with Durkheim seeing the principles

which animated socialism as both worthy and, to some extent, inevitable. I then considered some, ultimately unsatisfactory, explanations for this difference before arguing that the most plausible explanation was one of methodology. Here we saw that for Weber a sociologist can only assess socialism at a technical level, with its value being a question purely of individual conscious. Durkheim, by positing the question of value as a social concern, argued we can assess the desirability of socialism in light of its ability to affirm socially held values.

Returning to the arguments of Weber and Durkheim on socialism shows us the result of the developing methodologies at the birth of modern sociology. As Jensen highlights, by placing values within the social sphere Durkheim appears to build ‘a bridge from “Is” to “Ought”, in addition to legitimising the *raison d’être* of sociology as being practically applicable’ (Jensen 2012: 47). As a result practical problems, such as the organisation of the economy, remain a ‘constant preoccupation’ of sociology (Durkheim 1982: 160). Therefore the relative approaches of Durkheim and Weber to socialism, highlighting as it does differing conceptions of the relations between sociologists and practical problems, demonstrates the early, and continuing, cleavage concerning methodology and normativity in sociology.

## Notes

1. Indeed, the quote which makes up the title of this article, seemingly indicative of Weber’s view of socialism, actually comes from Durkheim: ‘socialism turns society into an army of civil servants on more or less fixed salary’ (1885: 88).
2. This can partly be explained by the time of Weber’s writing and audience. Apart from some comments in his early writings, including a discussion of socialism as a ‘cultural community’ at the first meeting of the German Sociological Society in 1910 (cf. Scaff 1989: 176-7) and in his writings on the Russian revolution of 1905 (Weber 1906a), almost all of Weber’s writings on socialism emerge during the war and after,

when socialism as a movement was strong and, in many of these texts, had been established in its Soviet form. In addition, Weber's most sustained discussion of socialism (Weber 1918) was a speech given to Austrian army officers to counter the socialist propaganda of the time (Radkau 2011: 492). Given these factors Weber probably thought defining socialism to be superfluous. This is in contrast to Durkheim since the majority of his writing on socialism happened *early* in his career with his lecture course on socialism (Durkheim 1959) being delivered in the academic year 1895-6 where, although many of his students were already politically active (cf. Fournier 2013: 209-14), socialism was still to establish itself fully in France. Leaving aside differences of methodology, Durkheim therefore would have found a definition essential.

3. During this discussion I will be providing critiques of Marx offered by both Weber and Durkheim, the accuracy of such views is beyond the scope of this paper and my discussion of these views should not be read as acceptance of their validity.
4. This reflects Weber's view that class-conscious organization cannot succeed unless workers are confronted with their 'immediate economic opponents' (Weber 1978: 305), i.e. those drawing surplus value from their labour. The state, as a body standing in for the 'collective' who actually draw the surplus value, would not be such an opponent.
5. Shown most viciously in the case of Rosa Luxemburg. During an election address Weber said she 'belonged in the zoo' (Radkau 2011: 507).
6. In classifying Weber's views on the USSR as a critique of socialism I am assuming Weber's position and leaving aside the controversial issue of whether this actually was 'socialism'. Suffice to say, Weber has been criticised for equating the USSR with socialism (Mueller 1982), but also praised for highlighting what some see as the

inevitable ends, either solely or partly, of Marxism (Bendix and Roth 1971, Sayer 1991).

7. Durkheim does recognise the possibility of a ‘worker’s socialism’ which contests state socialism. Nevertheless, any socialism ‘from below’ is still likely to demand a ‘greater development of the state’ (Durkheim 1959: 26).
8. This is a complex point. Both may seem to be open to the critique of substituting state socialism for socialism *tout court*, which Mueller (1982) raised against Weber. However, both indicate an awareness of other forms of socialism, if not subjecting them to the same level of discussion. For example, both discuss syndicalism (cf. Fournier 2013: 540, Weber 1913, 1918) although this is often separated from ‘socialism’, as in Weber’s aforementioned claim of the appeal of syndicalism vis-à-vis socialism. Weber also, in his writings on Russia, discusses differing forms of socialism though, as we have seen, still argues these inevitably create state socialism (Weber 1906a). Meanwhile, Durkheim, perhaps befitting his studies and duties as a book reviewer, was familiar with diverse socialist writers such as Proudhon, Owen and Fourier, and differing socialist theories, like agrarian or Christian socialism (Durkheim 1899a: 121). What we can say is that, despite such knowledge, both reserved their systematic critique for state socialism and, especially in Weber’s case, see this as its inevitable outcome.
9. There is a complication here in that Weber and Durkheim experienced different forms of nationalism. In Durkheim’s case it could be said his republican socialism chimed with ‘republican nationalism’ which, in its claim of all being ‘French’ marginalised the significance of other factors, such as Durkheim’s Judaism. Therefore, it could be claimed, Durkheim had a unique investment in this form of nationalism (Dingley 2008: 23-44). As will be indicated below, my claim is that we should question this

separation of personal politics, and its role in their intellectual work, between the two, as in Durkheim's nationalist defence of socialism.

10. Although Weber's influence on the ordoliberalists and then neoliberalism is contested (cf. Gane 2012: 72-94).
11. Mauss did see these events and, as we have seen, draws a link between Durkheim's work and the practice of the Soviets, despite being critical of Bolshevism (1984). While it is tempting, especially given Mauss' broadly Durkheimian analysis here, to allow him to 'speak for Durkheim' this would be a mistake. As Gane (1984) points out, Mauss' views on socialism are impacted by his activism and more 'anti-capitalist' views than those held by Durkheim. This was indicated by their profound personal disagreements on the future of socialism (cf. Fournier 2006:26-7).
12. While beyond the scope of this article, the more fruitful source of comparison between Durkheim and Weber here would be concerning Russia. Both argue Russia constitutes a unique political case due to the desire to create a bourgeois state regime without its constituent groups (Durkheim 1902, Weber 1906b). In Weber's case he sees this as part of the explanation for the failure of the 1905 Duma and an explanation for the first 1917 revolution (Weber 1906b, 1917).

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