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# SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ÉMILE DURKHEIM

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## Abstract

This article intends to make a systematic exposition of the Sociology of religion at Émile Durkheim, in order to show the relationships between Science and Religion from a sociological approach. With it, is also sought to claim the introduction of the social sciences in the dialogue between the Sciences and Theology.

**Keywords:** Science and Religion, Sociology of religion, Émile Durkheim, social sciences, Theology

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## 1. Introduction: Sociology in the ‘Science and Theology Dialogue’

Often in the dialogue between Theology and the Sciences is not bear in mind the contributions of the social and human sciences, and everything remains limited to a conversation between the natural scientists and the theologians. Although this article is not the place where to defend the inclusion of the social sciences in this dialogue, it is important to notice — although incidentally — that Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Economics have currently a fundamental role in the advanced societies. In fact, very often we can verify the ‘shaping power’ on people of certain sociological, economical, anthropological, psychological theories: thus, it is habitual that ordinary people do not know anything about the Theory of Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, and Molecular Biology, neither of the world pictures that these disciplines pose. Nevertheless, sociological affirmations about social reality are very influential in the way of shaping the human and socio-political relations. From my modest opinion, what the dialogue Science and Theology often forgets is that in the daily life of people and in their religious beliefs the most influential reality is not the mathematised physical-natural reality (neither the subquantum world nor the infinite size of cosmos), *but* the socio-cultural environment, which shape their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs: and this socio-cultural and affective setting is the subject matter of Sociology. If Theology does not want to be blind to the way in which

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the social reality influences the theological formulation and the social perception of religion, it will must to include the social sciences in the club of its speakers.

For that I wanted to write on a sociologist. Nevertheless, this paper does not deal with a peripheral issue about the influence of any concrete sociological theory on the configuration of social reality. On the contrary, I concern myself with a basic matter about the problem of the relations between Science and Religion, that a sociologist of XIX<sup>th</sup> century (in the core, therefore, of dispute about the relations between Science and Religion) approached it from a sociological perspective. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) is one of the classic sociologists who belong to the so-called 'Golden Age' of Sociology and he is also one of the first who made a systematic development of our discipline. Although he had training in Philosophy, he soon found philosophy of his period as decadent and purely rhetorical. For this situation he would wish to imitate the investigation's methods of the successful physical-natural science of his age and it extend them toward studying society: thus, he was devoted to creation, systematisation and diffusion of Sociology with a very particular epistemological perspective (cf. *infra*). His characteristic methodological style — original, complex, depth and comparative — and the diversity of topics which he treated, are reasons why Durkheim become one of the more important classic sociologists and author of reference. Of course, in order to recognize his fundamental role in Sociology it does not need to be approved all epistemological and theoretical assumptions of the French sociologist. His peculiar affective and professional relations, his personal circumstances, his support to Republic and to French laicism, and his inexhaustible work of research make difficult to summarize the complex theoretical contributions to study of education, socialism, morality, family, religion, epistemology, etc. For that — and for wider studies —, we send the reader to classic works, fundamentally to Steven Lukes' book, who tries to include and to relate the personal and the intellectual in the broader context of all Durkheim's concerns [1].

My article is much more modest. It tries to briefly analyse the Durkheim's ideas about the relations between Science and Religion. For him this debate is solved from his sociological approach of religion. That is why, before dealing specifically with problem of 'science-religion relation' in the fourth part, it is useful to sum up his sociology of religion, because it is within this broader theoretical-sociological framework where the issue of this paper receives all its meaning. In its turn, his sociology of religion cannot be understood but it is from his sociological epistemology. In fact, in Durkheimian analyses of religion there are all the methodological keys, which he formulated as fundamental ones for considering Sociology as a true science. In this way, the first part is an attempt of summing up the essentials of epistemology of the French sociologist. This means that you must read this article from the first line to the end, because the problem of the relations between Science and Religion is a particular case of his Sociology of Religion, and this one in its turn is a particular case of the general

sociological epistemology. Only if it is born in mind this reading order it will be possible to understand the thought of Durkheim.

## **2. The Durkheimian epistemology: a brief overview**

A characteristic feature of Durkheim's sociology is its stable anchoring in a very concrete and definite epistemology. In fact, the intellectual career of the French sociologist was marked by the continuous effort for building a sociological science with a solid epistemological foundation (indeed, the epistemological concerns are in the core of his research tasks). In the sociology of Durkheim we can recognize two general premises: firstly, sociology must be a science with a similar methodology to the physical-natural sciences based on positivism. Secondly, this positivist science of society is opposed to Philosophy and to Psychology. Let us see what sense these two premises or theoretical assumptions have in the Durkheim's thought.

### ***2.1. Sociology as positivistic science of the social facts considered as things***

Durkheim takes as a model of 'science' the positivism newly formulated by other of the fathers-founders of Sociology, Auguste Comte. It is necessary to bear in mind that Comte had a great influence on Durkheim's sociology. One should not forget also that the Comte's thought defended a became-positive progressive of all the sciences whose last stage would be sociology (to what firstly he gave the name of social physics), as the most complex positive science, because it integrated in its study object (the man like social being or the Humanity) all the contributions of the previous sciences.

Following the formulator of the positivism, Durkheim thinks science always deals with 'things', but not with 'ideas' or 'concepts'. Therefore, his starting point is always the sensation, the sensitive information, the exterior of the things: "since it is for the sensation for which is given us the exterior of the things, it therefore can be said in short: science, in order to be objective, it should start, not from concepts that have been formed without her, but from sensation. It is of the sensitive data of those that it should take the elements of its initial definitions directly" [2]. Indeed this positivism (which in Durkheim is the sum of empiricism and realism and I understand 'empiricism' and 'realism' in their more genuine meaning, and not in the meaning that Hume would give it) is what lead up to the formulation of one of his most well-known and polemic epistemological 'rules' (*règles*): the social facts (*social faits*) must be considered as 'things'. If the French sociologist uses the term 'thing', he do so in its sense more purely realistic: "it is a "thing", indeed, all what is given, all what offers or, rather, it is imposed to the observation. To treat the phenomena like things, it is to treat them in quality of data that constitute the starting point of science" [2, p. 27]. Therefore, in Durkheim the term 'thing' does not have a 'material' meaning as often it was said. Actually, the use of word 'thing' has as a main claim to be opposed to 'idea'. This is so not because sociology must deal with 'material

things' [3], but because sociology must remove the 'preconceived ideas' and, therefore, it have to move away from a *sociological idealism*, which would be limited to an analysis of *a priori* ideas that are taken as starting point of research and according to which needs be adjusted the reality. Despite the semantic ambiguity of the term 'thing' [4], Durkheim claims with his use two goals. (A) Firstly, to make clear the objective and truly scientific character of Sociology, following the positivist paradigm of the physical-natural sciences. Sociology — just as Physics or Astronomy — takes as subject-matter of its researches a set of clearly limited facts that can be, so to speak, 'indicated by the finger' (*montrés du doigt*), and therefore Sociology does not deal with illusions or speculative frenzies. (B) But, *secondly*, what more deeply makes clear the term 'thing' it is the fact that the sociologist finds a reality — social and historically built — which has crystallized and that, therefore, it is imposed on us. Certainly social reality is constructed, but it becomes reified and it ends up compelling or constraining us. This is the real meaning of 'thing': a social fact that, although it is created by human, it comes to us given as such and the sociologist only has to observe it, to describe it and to explain it. Anthony Giddens explains it with very sharpness: "To regard social facts as things is to perform the act of detachment necessary to recognize that society has an objective existence, independent of any particular one of us; hence it can be studied by methods of objective observation. The most important feature of a 'thing' is that it is not plastic to the will: a chair moves if pushed, but its resistance demonstrates that it exists externally to whoever is doing the pushing. The same is true of social facts, even if these are not visible in the way that a physical object like a chair is". [5] From a methodological viewpoint the important thing is that — according to Durkheim — Sociology, just as other sciences, is based on the 'observation'. Thus the social facts, considered as 'things', possess a double quality perceptible through the scientific observation: they are external to the individual and they have a coercive character over him. This is what constitutes the classic Durkheimian definition of a social fact: "[a social fact] consist of manners of acting, of thinking and of feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him" [2, p. 5]. This issue is the theme of the next paragraph.

## ***2.2. Sociology as Science opposed to Philosophy and to Psychology: the Sociologism***

En 1879 Durkheim enrolled in the *École Normale Supérieure* of Paris, where he met Fustel de Coulanges. During his stay in the *École*, he was nicknamed 'The Metaphysician' for his extraordinary interest in philosophical questions. In fact, this nickname will chase him all his life, due to some of his sociological thesis, as the sociologism that we will see later. In 1882 he graduated in Philosophy and, in spite of his later critiques to Philosophy, the fact is that all his life was kept within a characteristic attitude and philosophical

depth. At any rate, from his earlier writings [6, 7], he was making clear his critical opinions about the excessively speculative character of philosophy and began to be guessed his strong positivist inclinations. Durkheim aimed to safeguard philosophy in the secondary education, but for that he demanded philosophy that it stop being an abstract literature (*littérature abstraite*), a mere rhetoric based on an artistic talent “that consists of combining the ideas as the artist combines the images and the forms, for seducing the pleasure and not satisfying the reason, for waking up aesthetic impressions and not expressing things” [2, p. 129]. Philosophy should become more scientific, moving away from metaphysical deductions. The rejection of metaphysics is, in fact, one of basic guiding ideas of Durkheimian epistemology and it will be made clear in the study of religion, with an equally emphatic rejection of the supernatural, as we will see below. Finally, his opposition to philosophy takes as an aim to make of sociology something more than a vague social philosophy, trying to give a positivist consistency to the study of the social facts.

On the contrary, his conception of sociology as opposite to psychology to have nothing to do with the methodology, but with the subject-matter of each of these two disciplines. Precisely, here one finds the theoretical hinge of epistemology of Durkheim: his *sociologism*. As I said above, the social facts are things characterizing for being external and coercive. This double idea has its ‘raison d’être’, precisely, in that the social facts are not produced by the individual, but for society conceived as a ‘collective conscience’. The key for understanding the sociology of Durkheim and his conception of religion, here resides precisely: in the idea of society as a *sui generis* reality, the producer of the social phenomena — especially those that are related to morality — and thus, therefore, society is more than the mere juxtaposition of individual consciences. Precisely, because a society like this conceived exists, it is possible and necessary to have a sociology as anything different from a mere psychology of the individual consciences. Nevertheless, his sociological ‘realism’ seems more to arise from his moral assumptions than from the epistemological ones. This Durkheimian ‘realism’ as opposed to a ‘nominalism’ more weberian, it has been one of the French sociologist's more problematic theses. It found so much numerous critics in both their stage of Bordeaux (1887-1902) and that of Paris (1902-1917). In fact, all the critics came from — in a way or another — of those of Tarde, the social phenomena can be reduced to and explained in individuals' terms. At any rate, “critics continued to characterize this [social realism] (despite his repeated clarifications and disclaimers) as dogmatic, scholastic, even mystical, as unverifiable and unscientific or alternatively as a denial of freedom and uniqueness of the individual, and sometimes as immoral, entailing advocacy of the subordination of the individual to the group”. [4, p. 497]

The Durkheimian concern about the ground of morality led him to presuppose — due to his rejection of posing the problem from a supernatural or metaphysical viewpoint — a social reality that was exercising the role of moral ground: similar to Kant who introduced God as postulate of practical reason. The following text — in connection with the problem of religion that we will treat

later — is very illuminating and its structure seems to be due to a *petitio principii*, since he rejects without arguments a metaphysical ground for morality. If this rejection is accepted, then the conclusion of the French sociologist seems the only reliable one:

“Science is no longer concern about knowing if another reality exists. For Science, only a thing is true, that there exist ways of thinking and of acting that are obligations and that for this reason they differ from all the other forms of action and from mental representation. And since any obligation supposes an authority that forces, superior to the subject forced to the obligation and besides we do not know empirically a moral authority which is superior to the individual except that of the community, it needs to be to consider like being of a social kind all the facts that it presents this character.” [8]

The individual feels that the social facts are external and coercive because they come neither from him/her nor of his/her authority, but of society as a *sui generis* reality. This is not to say that Durkheim denies the society is made up of people: truly, society has as a ‘substratum’ the individuals, but is not reduced to them: “if it is possible to say, in certain way, that the collective representations are exterior to the individual consciences, it is because they do not derive from isolate individuals, but of his grouping; what is very different” [9]. The model he uses for exemplifying his thesis is that of the chemical synthesis, which is not reduced to the sum of its making-up elements but arise new not reducible properties to the making-up parts. It is obvious that in the sociology there is a fundamental conflict with Gabriel Tarde, who had limited Sociology to the study of the individual consciences and the collective behaviour to the social contagion through imitation [10]. Durkheim aimed Sociology should have a proper subject-matter and different from that of Psychology, and for it he introduces his theory of society as a *sui generis* reality and, therefore, as the creator of the social facts which sociology studies. Thus, he fell inside the dangerous field of sociology, which will determine all his sociology of religion.

### **3. Essentials of sociology of religion of Durkheim**

Sociology of religion of Durkheim is complex, full of shade and influences and it presents certain internal evolution. Nevertheless, here I cannot enter a detailed analysis, for that I send the reader to my above cited article, and here I will centre on its basic essentials.

#### ***3.1. Functionalism of Religion: dynamogenic quality and social cohesion***

Durkheim has been classified as one of the precursors of what in Sociology later it would be called ‘functionalism’. In his handling of religion his sociological functionalism makes to him much more respectful on this matter than other authors are. The French sociologist see religion being a constituent institution of every society, inserted — as we will see in the next paragraph Cf. 3.2) — inside the structural human duplicity which is systematized for

Durkheim in his theory of *Homo Duplex*. For this motive, in the Durkheim's work assertions similar to the next one always appear: "This feeling [the religious] has been too general in humanity, it has been very constant so that it could not be illusory. An illusion does not last so many centuries. Therefore, this force that the human feels to come over him must exist really". [11] This affirmation puts a clear difference with Karl Marx who see religion as being an epiphenomenon and, therefore, as a mere subjective illusion lacking of its own substantivity [12]. For Durkheim religion is not an illusion, although its cause is not exactly supernatural, but purely natural.

In spite of the internal evolution that Durkheim's sociology of religion suffered immediately after an epistemological turn about his concept of society, there is an element that remains from his first reflections on religion in his doctoral dissertation: the functional character of the religious *for supporting the social cohesion*. Thus, "[Durkheim] believed that he proved how a society, to cohere at all, shares principles or axioms, the beliefs which are necessary if it is to remain a society; and how religion is a part of these shared principles. He always saw religion in the context of a social pattern of order, of the self-preservation of society as society". [13] Actually, Durkheim goes beyond a mere cohesive function of the religious beliefs, because for him all what is shared strongly by all the members of society acquires religious character.

In accordance with this cohesive functionality of religion Durkheim began, especially in his last works, to see religion more as force and activity than as simple set of representations. This confirms his thesis according to which the 'essence' of the religious does not take root in the intellectual or in the explanation of mystery, not even in the corpus of cosmologies, anthropologies or theologies. Durkheim thinks — even admitting that at first glance religion presents itself as a system of representations — the essence of the religious is located in the field of the action: "the beliefs are not essentially knowledge with those that our spirit enriches: their principal function is to provoke actions" [14]. It has a dynamogenic quality (*dynamogénique*) because it causes and generates action, movement in the believers (Ibíd.). What does this action involve? In that the believer feels that he can more (*Il peut davantage*): "the human has a confidence, an ardour of living, an enthusiasm that does not experiment on ordinary times. [...] It is this dynamogenic influence of religion what explains its being-everlasting" (Ibíd.). This 'force' is what constitutes the 'sacred', which is the real characteristic of religion for Durkheim.

### ***3.2. Religion within Durkheim's theory of the Homo Duplex***

In effect, *the sacred* in its opposition to *the profane* it is what constitutes the real feature of religion and not a supernatural divinity (Cf. *infra*). The important question for us is: what ground has this dynamogenic quality of religion? That is to say: why is there a sacred force which the human being experiences? The answer is the theory of *Homo Duplex* — whose foundation is in the 'social-individual' and 'sacred-profane' dichotomies so essential in the

thought of Durkheim and which have its ground in the sociology earlier explained. This theory of Homo Duplex takes as a task to explain the dichotomy that happens in the human being, it conceived traditionally as the duality of body and soul.

Durkheim takes as a starting point the *undeniable fact* according to which the human “has had, in all time, the alive feeling” of this duality [15]. And going on with his sociological functionalism, he thinks that something that is still standing along all the cultures and ages should to reflect real something: it belongs, so to speak, to the ontological structure of the human being. Besides, this duality there is both in the knowledge and in the action: as for the knowledge, there are the sensations and the sensitive thought, on the one hand (body); and the conceptual thought and the understanding, on the other (soul). As for the action, it there are the egoistic appetites (body) on the one hand, and the religious and moral activity (soul) on the other. This duality is not a mere illusion and, therefore, neither the materialistic nor idealistic monism can account of it. Actually there is a *real duality*, although not in a metaphysical sense, since all the metaphysical dualism does is to hypostatize this duality in two different substances. On the contrary, the duality to which Durkheim refers is seen rather as “simply two circles of interior life, two systems of conscience states which, since they do not have the same origin, do not have the same characters and do not point us in the same sense” [14]. In fact, there is a real opposition between them, a real tension that it needs to be explained and neither reduce it nor eliminate it. But how is this duality between soul and body and between sacred and profane explained? The only way that Durkheim leaves is the sociological approach. And this is translated into the idea of that both the sacred and the animal (in reference to the soul) of the human being comes from society. If the human being suffers and lives a tension between the corporal and the conceptual in the field of the knowledge, and between the egoistic and the altruist-moral behaviour in the field of the action, it is so because he really lives a tension between his double dimension of individual, on the one hand, and of member of a community (the Society), on the other. What comes from society — the animal — is endowed with an authority that sacralize it, while the somatic-corporal and the profane are identified with the individual and lonely life of every person. In this way, religion also has this constrictive character on the individual, and this constriction comes from society, which is over the people.

### ***3.3. Society as foundation of religion: society is God***

According to Durkheim what characterizes the religion is the sacred and not God. This is, in fact, the key approach of his more completed definition of religion: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” [16]. God is not necessary for explaining the human duality and

Durkheim neither considers the reference to or the relation with God should be the essential of religion: the idea of God is not present in all the religions and, in fact, the religious surpass its relation with the divinity. In fact, “it is inaccurate that this idea [that of God] had, in all the displays of the religious life, the preponderant role that was conferred to it” [17]. Between the most important religions Durkheim believes to find in the Buddhism a religion in which any reference to God is absent. Nevertheless, this Durkheimian affirmation about the irrelevance of God as an explanatory factor is an *a priori* epistemological assumption belonging to a sociological approach: “if it is put as a rule of method that all the phenomena that take place in the nature are natural and depend on natural causes, since the religions are between them, it is in the nature where it will have to look for the source or sources of the religious life. Now then, the only moral forces superior to those of the human individual in the observable world are those that result from the grouping of the individual forces, from its synthesis in and for the society: they are the collective forces” [14]. According to Durkheim the unfolding between soul-body and sacred-profane is an expression of the dichotomy between the individual, daily, utilitarian-economic life, on the one hand; and the collective moments of effervescence, on the other.

Thus, since, the *genesis* of the religious experience is in the unfolding — earlier mentioned — of the individual, between the ordinary life and the periods of collective effervescence. These periods are those that acquire a sacred character and, therefore, religious one: “it is conceived without difficulty that, transported to this state of exaltation, the man does not know himself. He feels himself dominated, dragged by a sort of exterior power which makes him think and to act in a different way that in normal time, he has naturally the impression of not being already he himself” [16, p. 312]. Here the definition of religion based on the ‘forces’ that the believer experience is confirmed: the ‘to can more’ that the believer feels. But these feelings and forces, along with both the awe and the sacred love towards that what surpasses the individual, are exactly what the believer believes that it is produced by the divinity: “A God is a moral force that restrict our instincts and our egoisms. But it is also a force that supports us: faith in the salvation, in the protection and defence of God” [18]. But it needs not to be put outside the natural scope the explanation for these feelings; actually “these two roles, society plays them. Society demands the unselfishness of the individual. Besides, the social life comes to reinforce our own life. Any social life gets us carried way to intensity over the average level of the individual life” (Ibid.). The effervescence of the collective rites is the generating of this dynamogenic potential that religion expresses. The person experiences the society as a real God, although “the believers can represent inaccurately the power that they confer themselves” [14]. This force does not come from a supernatural power, but from society, to whom simultaneously they both love and they fear, because society simultaneously both oblige and supports. Society is the only God.

Therefore, Durkheim ends up doing an ontological affirmation about the nature of the divinity: society *is* God. “Entre Dieu et la société il faut choisir”, since: “I do not see in the divinity any more than society transfigured and thought symbolically” [9, p. 74]. This means that for Durkheim religion is identified with the field of *the sacred*, and the sacred it is not another thing than society symbolically thought and put or reified in ‘sacras’, in sacred objects. But the sacredness comes from the community and not from an external domain to her. Religion is only a set of practices and beliefs, with reference to the sacred, which keep linked a community. And if there is a God inside this set it is a mere ‘principle of organization’, it is a ‘principle of grouping and unification’ of all this confused mass of sacred things [17]. But He is the real explanation neither of the religious nor of the sacred.

#### **4. The problem of the relationship between Science and Religion**

Starting from his sociological epistemology and his Sociology of religion, the reconstruction of the Durkheim’s view of the relationships between Science and Religion is very complex. To analyze them in a systematic way it is convenient to differentiate the different possible fields in those potential or real relationships could exist between Science and Religion, and to see in each situation what type of relation there is between them.

##### **4.1. The scientific study of Religion**

The first field — and maybe the most important for Durkheim — in which relationships are given between Science and Religion we can formulate it with the following question: is a scientific study of religion possible? The French sociologist's answer is a firm ‘yes’, and this opinion he has shown it in repeated occasions. Durkheim says that the possibility of a Science of religion is due to that he considers religion as a ‘real’ and ‘true’ something and not a pure ‘illusion’ [19]. Thus, his functionalism religious is the base for a scientific treatment (‘real’, therefore) of religion. He even goes further on: he recognizes the fact that often the scientific analysis of religion has ended up denying the later as contrary to the former. However, for Durkheim: “a conclusion such proves that the task did not have of scientific more than the name” [20]. Religion can only scientifically be studied if it is considered as a ‘fact’ (*fait*) and not an illusion.

Now then, this whole declaration of respect toward religion should be limited. Certainly, for Durkheim religion is real something, but real something that is explained with a mere natural and empiric cause: the *society*. After all, Science of religion in Durkheim is a simple science of society; that is to say, a sociology. If religion is not based on the supernatural and if the only God is society, then a positive Science of religion is certainly possible, but only considering the sacred as a mere symbolic transfiguration of society. Therefore, in spite of the Durkheimian declarations about not subordinating religion to

science, the certain thing is that that claim only makes sense inside his peculiar Sociology of religion. What in fact underlies to the Durkheimian defence of a science of religion it is the fear to that the positive science does not have capacity to arrive to religion and, therefore, that the latter escapes to the scientific thought and, therefore, be autonomous and independent. This would imply to undermine the positivism of Durkheim and to grant a room to the mysterious and metaphysical, which the French sociologist is not willing to grant [21].

In fact, the way in which Durkheim carries out his Science of religion is very illuminating and it shows a clear unreconciled positivism with all metaphysical and supernatural consideration of religion. The study of religion in Durkheim is always based on the view of the sacred as a given, objective and external fact: as we have seen earlier, religion is a social fact, and these are recognizable for its external manifestations. Therefore, the explanations that the believers give of their religious experience can not bear in mind [19]. The scientist that externally studies religion has a more real knowledge that the believer that experiences it and explains it *from inside*. And this is so because the believer makes himself a mistaken idea of what feels: there is not a God, but society as a foundation of the believer's sacred experience. The scientist that studies religion is liberated of that false supernatural representation and, therefore, his function is not to confirm the religion notion that the believer make himself [20]. The only thing he should make is to explain the real cause of the dynamogenic quality of religion, which is not another more than society.

In this way and in this first field of Science-Religion relationships the position of Durkheim is very paradoxical, although coherent with his own epistemology. On the one hand, he does not stop to repeat that he treats to religion with regard and that he does not consider it a simple phantasmagoria. But on the other hand, reducing religion to society (in the terms that we saw above) in fact he is not able to but affirming that religion (just as it is conceived by the believers) it is false and illusory. Scientist has an epistemological position privileged that the believer does not possess. This means that in spite of affirming that a Science of religion cannot be irreligious [11], the certain thing is that only would remain religious inside the characteristic framework of Durkheim's sociology. As a conclusion, therefore, a science of religion as Durkheim wants, it is limited to be a sociology that has as subject matter the influence of society above the individuals. There are not independence and mutual exclusion between Science and Religion: there is an epistemological subordination from later to former.

#### **4.2. The cognitive competition of Science and Religion**

The second field in which Durkheim finds relationships between Science and Religion it has to do with the role that they play in the production of knowledge and of view of world. Here the French sociologist's attitude is very clear and it is very influenced by Comte and his Law of Three Stages, on the one hand, and own Durkheimian conception of religion as force and activity, on the other.

In the first place, as we have seen, for Durkheim the most characteristic for religion is the order of the action and not in that of the thought. The important thing is not its cosmologies, anthropologies, etc. but its dynamogenic quality, its influence in the generation of acts. To consider so religion it has advantages when establishing its relationship with science as a producer of knowledge on the world. In this way, although Durkheim does not refuse that religion continues maintaining its speculative and, so to speak, 'theoretical' capacity, this dimension is losing force before the cognitive accuracy of science, and for that more and more religion has gone being relegated to the practical field. The following text it is very illuminating in this respect:

"Under this relationship, there is room to distinguish between the two very different functions that the religion has completed in the history. Some are vital, of practical order; it has helped the men to live, to adapt to their existence conditions. But, on the other hand, it has been a form of speculative thought, a system of representations dedicated to express the world, a science before science, and a competition science of science as this sets u. I find impossible to ignore that this second function goes more and more declining. Here, the conflict breaks progressively due to the renouncement of religion to its older ambitions. The most recent religions are not cosmologies, but moral disciplines." [20]

In fact, for Durkheim the difference between the theoretical statements of Religion (beliefs and dogmas) and of Science (theories and laws) it is the obligatory: the religious statements are obligatory, while the scientific opinions are free [17]. In this way, the scientist can differ, but according to Durkheim the believer is locked in his dogma and he does not have freedom for dissenting. The capacity to dissent is based on the own positive nature of scientific knowledge, while the believer cannot check and therefore neither to refute his dogmas.

This view of the relationship between the religious and the scientific knowledge it is very indebted of the Law of Three States of Comte. Thus, Durkheim assumes — following Comte — that humanity has evolved from more religious explanations to other more scientific ones and, therefore, more reliable and truer. In this sense, Science more and more it assumes the role of producing knowledge, while Religion and Metaphysics lag behind. When I explained the Durkheim's epistemology we saw that the fascination for science and the positivism is parallel of its rejection for the speculative philosophy and the metaphysical explanations. Besides, due to the negation of any supernatural or mysterious field (numinous) in reality, it is evident that more and more science will occupy the place that occupied the religion in the theoretical field in another

time. However, Durkheim recognizes that this does not mean that religion will disappear in the future.

#### **4.3. The future of religion in a scientific world**

According to Durkheim, the growing weight of science in the theoretical aspect does not imply the disappearance of religion in a world more and more dominated by science. This opinion only can be understood bearing in mind what we have said earlier: if religion is constitutively social and if society is constitutively sacred or religious [22], it is not possible to conceive, then, the future disappearance of religion. The disappearance of the sacred would imply the own disappearance of society. Besides, according to Durkheim, the practical function (the dynamogenic quality) of religion it remains (*reste entière*). In the field of the action “science would not could, in no way, to substitute to religion”. [20]

In this sense, and contrary to Marx or Comte, Durkheim does not believe religion is a passing stage of the human development. The social shock of the historical time of Durkheim was not due to the weakness of a particular religious confession, but to the weakness of “our creative power of ideals” [11]. The old gods and the old ideals are dying but only because those ideals do not respond to the new social necessities. Religion and the sacred as such do not disappear, but the old incarnations and divine personifications. It needs to be to rescue what religion for society has of truly religious, but rejecting the old gods. For that reason, for Durkheim religion of future is “une religion plus conciente de ses origines sociales” (Ibid.) and evidently here Sociology has much more than saying that any theology or metaphysics. Creating some collective ideals scientifically to rise to the time can only stay cohesive the society around the sacred and the sacred can only survive in a cohesive society. Here it is closed the tautological circle which reduces religion to society and society to religion.

In definitive, the relationships between Religion and Science are complex in Durkheim, because they are developed in diverse fields and because, also, they are not easy to define, since they depend on his epistemological and sociological assumptions. Although a positivist as him does not leave certainly any space to the supernatural and metaphysical and he consider scientific knowledge most important for the humanity's moral future than Theology.

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