

Young Durkheimians and the temptation of fascism: The case of Marcel Déat

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Abstract

In this article we assess the general claim that Durkheimian sociology has reactionary, fascist, or totalitarian affinities, and the specific claim that Marcel Déat's Durkheimian background was a significant factor in his becoming a Nazi sympathizer. We do so by comparing the different trajectories of the interwar generation of young Durkheimians and find that only one, i.e. Déat, can be said to have become fascist. Indeed, what characterizes this generation of Durkheimians is the variety of the ways in which they responded to the crises of the interwar years, both politically and scientifically. Nonetheless, most remained on the political left, and during the war many younger members of the Durkheimian group either fled the country or were involved in the French Resistance. As the only personal link between the Durkheimian group and fascism, Déat's career is of particular interest. Instead of Déat's being an orthodox Durkheimian, his successive engagements embody the intellectual fragmentation and heterodoxy characteristic of the interwar generation. We outline Déat's career by foregrounding the conjunctural and dispositional factors that we believe point toward a more plausible explanation of Déat's transformation than does an internalist history-of-ideas approach according to which his political evolution can be explained by reference to an underlying intellectual continuity. Déat's fascism is better explained by the repeated frustration of his political and intellectual ambitions that ultimately led to a fateful accommodation with Nazi power than by any tendency inherent to Durkheimian sociology.

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Introduction

Despite Émile Durkheim's firm commitment to the republican left, some commentators have made the case for a right-wing Durkheim. They have sought variously to demonstrate the influence of reactionary anti-Enlightenment and counter-revolutionary thinkers on Durkheim, the bourgeois conservatism of his republicanism, or the fascist and totalitarian implications of his sociology. Although diverging in detail, these interpretations all highlight Durkheim's emphasis on moral integration and social order in arguing for Durkheimian sociology's right-wing authoritarian affinities.

This characterization of the political implications of Durkheimianism lives on implicitly in the prevailing historical accounts of Marcel Déat's political transformation from one of the leading lights of French socialism to a notorious Nazi collaborator. Having attempted a career in sociology and associated with the Durkheimian group before launching his political career, Déat represents a direct historical link between Durkheimian sociology and fascism. Historians have seized upon this connection to help explain Déat's political trajectory, suggesting that Déat's sociological training predisposed him towards fascism.

In this article we assess the general claim that Durkheimian sociology has reactionary, fascist, or totalitarian affinities, and the specific claim that Déat's Durkheimian background was a significant factor in his political evolution. We do so not through an exegetical analysis of Durkheim himself, but by comparing the different trajectories of the interwar generation of young Durkheimians. Our intention here is not to prove the impossibility of a conservative or fascist interpretation of Durkheimianism. Nor do we have any pretension of opposing to this interpretation one that is truer and more correct. Our aim is more modest: to revisit the debate on the political implications of Durkheimian sociology by highlighting its concrete political legacy. In our view this has been a neglected aspect of the debate, which has mostly taken place at the level of ideas and their interpretation. Although we do not deny the possibility of a right-wing interpretation of Durkheimianism, we nonetheless suggest that an examination of its concrete legacy does have implications for the historical plausibility of such an interpretation.

In looking at this political legacy, we find that only one young Durkheimian, i.e. Déat, can be said to have become fascist. Indeed, what characterizes this generation of Durkheimians is the variety of the ways in which they responded to the crises of the interwar years, both politically and scientifically. Nonetheless, most remained on the political left, and during the war many younger members of the Durkheimian group either fled the country or were involved in the French Resistance.

As the only personal link between the Durkheimian group and fascism, Déat's career is of particular interest. But to what extent was Déat a Durkheimian? We find that far from being an orthodox Durkheimian, Déat instead embodied the intellectual fragmentation and heterodoxy characteristic of the interwar generation of young Durkheimians. We outline Déat's career by foregrounding the conjunctural and dispositional factors that

we believe point toward a more plausible explanation of Déat's transformation than does an internalist history-of-ideas approach according to which his political evolution can be explained by reference to an underlying intellectual continuity. We argue that Déat's fascism is better explained by the repeated frustration of his political and intellectual ambitions that led to a fateful accommodation with Nazi power than by any tendency inherent to Durkheimian sociology. In other words, in the only historical case that appears to support the thesis of Durkheimian sociology's right-wing authoritarian affinities, Durkheimian sociology in fact plays only a marginal role in explaining Déat's eventual fascistization.

Durkheimian sociology, conservatism and fascism

Durkheim's *dreyfusard* engagement, his staunch secularism and his sympathies for the non-Marxist tradition of French socialism place him firmly on the republican left within the political cosmos of the French Third Republic. Nonetheless, some have argued that Durkheim's sociology has deeply conservative, and even totalitarian, political implications. These interpretations took root after the First World War, when sociology had become part of the republican school curriculum and members of the younger generation perceived Durkheimian sociology as a sociodicy of the republican order. It was as part of a generational revolt against this order that Paul Nizan railed against those Durkheimian university professors whom he accused of peddling a 'doctrine of obedience, of conformism' (Nizan, 1998[1932]: 125). In Nizan's view it was in the name of this Durkheimian science of morality that primary school instructors taught children to 'respect the French *patrie*, to justify class collaboration, to accept everything, to commune in the cult of the flag and bourgeois democracy' (ibid.). This supposed 'inclination to maintain the existing order of things' is also what Lewis Coser, who was himself a student at the Sorbonne in the 1930s, had in mind when he said that there could be 'no doubt that Durkheim considered himself a conservative' and that he was 'clearly within the conservative tradition' (Coser, 1960: 212, 215).

Others have seen in Durkheimianism an affinity for a frankly reactionary, authoritarian and even totalitarian politics. A young Claude Lévi-Strauss chastised sociology for being 'conservative and even reactionary', which he attributed to the 'necessary consequences' of Durkheim's 'initial error' of hypostasizing society (Lévi-Strauss, 1931: 14). Robert Nisbet elaborated on such a view by seeing in Durkheim the reactionary influence of counter-revolutionary and anti-rationalist thinkers such as de Bonald and de Maistre (Nisbet, 1965). For Nisbet, Durkheim's emphasis on the moral primacy of the social, the necessity of authority, the integrative function of the sacred, and the organismic character of society all represent a 'massive attack upon the philosophical foundations of liberalism' (ibid.: 28).

The claim of a Durkheimian affinity for totalitarianism rests on much the same logic. For example, M. Marion Mitchell argued that in exalting the group over the individual, there evolved in Durkheimian sociology 'a conception of the nation which foreshadowed some of the principal doctrines of the militant Action Française, of the Italian Fascists, of the Russian Bolsheviks, and of "one-hundred-per-cent" Americans' (Mitchell, 1931: 88). Moreover, Mitchell claims that Durkheim's successors 'openly discarded the

Positivist religion and replaced it by the religion of nationalism' (ibid.: 106). Alexandre Koyré claimed that the supreme value of social cohesion within Durkheimian sociology necessarily implied a justification of all morals and values that, in given circumstances, assured such cohesion. According to Koyré, Durkheimian sociology must thus 'be placed side by side with "totalitarian" regimes' in condemning the right to free inquiry and justifying a conformist morality (Koyré, 1934: 263–4). As for the Durkheimians' affinity for socialism, Koyré explains this away as a 'conformism of progress' and a 'desire to swim with the current' (ibid.: 264).

Perhaps the most famous of these critiques has been that of Danish sociologist Svend Ranulf. Ranulf takes Tönnies, Comte and Durkheim to task for effectively indulging in 'fascist propaganda' by their 'propagation of the view that the society in which they were living was headed for disaster because of its individualism and liberalism and that a new social solidarity was badly needed' (Ranulf, 1939: 34). Ranulf asks whether the rise of fascism was not 'an event which, in due logic, Durkheim ought to have welcomed as that salvation from individualism for which he had been trying rather gropingly to prepare the way?' (ibid.: 31). Echoes of Ranulf's blanket condemnation of the sinister implications of classical sociology remain. Thus Marcel Stoetzler has recently argued that, by even addressing the same questions as nineteenth-century anti-Semitic discourse (e.g. the rise of egotistical utilitarianism and the moral dislocations of modern society), classical sociology, including the Durkheimian tradition, unwittingly disarmed itself in the face of anti-Semitism and fascism (Stoetzler, 2010). Though recognizing the liberal socialist affinities of Durkheimianism, Dick Pels nonetheless warns of the 'dangerous cross-roads . . . where social science, socialism, and fascism meet and intercalate' (Pels, 1993: 76). For Pels, the classical tradition's hubristic pretension to 'knowledgeable organization' and its 'spokespersonship' for the social could, given a certain radicalization and authoritarian inflection, take a fascist form (ibid., 2000, 2001).

Of course, there are important differences between reactionary conservatism and totalitarian fascism and the relationship between the two has been a lively topic of debate among historians (Eatwell, 1995; Griffin, 1991; Paxton, 2004; Payne, 1980; Soucy, 1986, 1995; Sternhell, 2000[1983]). The above-mentioned critics thus not only have disparate understandings of Durkheimianism as a whole, but also differ in their specific appreciations of its political implications. Nonetheless, for our purposes what unites their interpretations is a view that Durkheim's privileging of moral integration and social order not only displayed a family resemblance with right-wing streams of thought, but also justified an authoritarian nationalist politics. Another distinction could be made here between those for whom Durkheimianism is *essentially* conservative, fascist, or authoritarian, and those for whom it is only *potentially* so due to the intrinsic ambivalences in Durkheim's thought.¹ For the purposes of this article, however, what matters is that both views refer these unsavory political ideologies back to inherent features of Durkheimian sociology, suggesting that they are in large part derived from, or in some way expressive of, the inner logic of Durkheimianism. This explanatory significance, in both its strong deterministic or its weak probabilistic senses, of Durkheimian sociology with regard to fascism is precisely what we question.

The afore-mentioned interpretations of Durkheim have elicited some reactions, though they have more often been ignored. Steven Lukes (1969, 1973) has argued that

these approaches are predicated upon a fundamental misunderstanding of the Durkheimian project. In particular, he has highlighted Durkheim's reply to Ferdinand Brunetière during the Dreyfus Affair as a 'conclusive refutation of a certain interpretation of [Durkheim] as fundamentally anti-liberal and anti-individualistic, as a right-wing nationalist, a spiritual ally of Charles Maurras and a forerunner of twentieth-century nationalism', an interpretation that Lukes attributes to a 'selective misreading of certain of [Durkheim's] writings and, in some cases, a mistaken importation into his centralized guild socialism of the connotations of fascist corporatism' (Lukes, 1973: 338–9). According to Lukes (1969, 1973), in 'L'individualisme et les intellectuels' Durkheim (1898) set out to demonstrate that the individual and society were not in fact opposed to one another, and that individualism, defined by its elevation of the human person to an absolute and inviolable principle, was the *conscience collective* appropriate to modern industrial society, such that defending the rights of the individual was also to defend the interests of society. In this way, Durkheim reconciled a concern for social order and integration with an uncompromising defense of the individual.

Our concern in this article is not to adjudicate between these different interpretations of Durkheimian sociology through an exegetical analysis of Durkheim and his disciples. We do not deny the possibility of interpreting Durkheimianism in a conservative, authoritarian, or fascist direction, nor do we doubt that there is sufficient ambiguity within Durkheimianism to make a logically coherent case for this interpretation. Unlike Lukes', our intention is not to refute this particular understanding of Durkheim at the level of ideas by claiming errors of interpretation. Rather than engaging in this kind of textual criticism, we approach the debate from a different angle and look instead at the concrete political legacy of Durkheimian sociology in the interwar years. Doing so, we argue, can help us to assess the historical plausibility of the discussed interpretations of Durkheimianism. Indeed, if we accept that Durkheimian sociology has reactionary or fascist affinities, we might expect to find Durkheimian reactionaries or fascists in the interwar years, when Durkheimian ideas were well-known and when authoritarian and fascist politics were in their heyday. The absence of such a connection, on the other hand, would suggest that this interpretation was not, historically, a plausible one. Moreover, it would suggest that Durkheimianism has little to no explanatory power in accounting for the rise of authoritarian or fascist politics.

The prevailing attitude among Durkheim scholars is perhaps best summed up by Ivan Strenski when he accuses Ranulf of indulging in an 'impressionistic exercise' and points out Ranulf's inability to cite 'a single instance of any fascist who ever claims to have been so influenced by Durkheim' (Strenski, 2010: 113). Although we agree with Strenski's general assessment that a concern with social solidarity is not *ipso facto* conservative or totalitarian, the problem is that there *is* in fact at least one fascist who did claim a Durkheimian heritage: Marcel Déat.

A promising young student, Déat worked closely with Célestin Bouglé at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) and was involved in the production of the second series of *Année Sociologique*. Seemingly destined for a university career in sociology, Déat instead entered a career in politics. He was a prominent figure within the socialist Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) until his expulsion in 1933. He would finish his political career as a notorious Nazi sympathizer, founding the collaborationist and

fascist Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP) in 1941. Fleeing to Italy after the war, he would be tried *in absentia* and in 1945 be condemned to death for treason.

Here, then, is a clear connection between Durkheimian sociology and fascism. But to what extent does Déat's sociological background explain his political trajectory? The authoritarian and fascist interpretation of Durkheim lives on in many of the prevailing accounts of Déat's stunning political transformation. Thus Donald N. Baker has written that 'the flaws in Déat's thought were largely those of the sociological tradition to which he belonged' (Baker, 1976: 116). Just as Déat's 'effort to relate sociological theory to socialist doctrine led him inexorably towards the right-wing' of the SFIO, so too did his contemplations on 'sociological truth' and his emphasis on social solidarity over class struggle set him down the path to collaboration (ibid.: 114). Stanley Grossman sees in Déat's openly totalitarian organicism of 1942 an extension of an earlier Durkheimian corporatism highlighting the morally integrative functions of intermediary groups (Grossman, 1975: 26). Philippe Burrin, too, invokes Durkheimian sociology's resonance with Déat's 'totalizing aspirations' (Burrin, 2003[1986]: 47). Owing to its assumed Durkheimian influence, Déat's socialism supposedly privileged 'the organization and moralization of society' over its 'emancipation' and 'attached more importance to the organic collective than the individual' (ibid.: 47–8). Pels has suggested that Déat's fascist turn was the product of a sort of radicalization and *étatization* of the knowledge-political project of an 'intellectuals' socialism' inherited from Durkheim (Pels, 2000, 2001). Georges Albertini, writing about the sociological influence on Déat's socialism, remarked that 'if one reflects on it, one realizes that Célestin Bouglé and Léon Brunschvicq, these two high priests of "la démocratie socialisante", are the spiritual fathers of the only French doctrine of an authoritarian and national socialism' (Varennnes, 1948: 12).²

There is wide disagreement on when exactly to date Déat's transformation. Whereas Alain Bergounioux sees in the pre-war Déat little more than a typical reformist socialist whose formulations prefigured postwar social democracy, Burrin argues that Déat was progressively drawn in the 1930s into what he calls the 'magnetic field of fascisms' (Bergounioux, 1978; Burrin, 2003[1986]). Others have dated Déat's transformation earlier, emphasizing the continuities between his particular brand of socialism and his later fascism. A version of this 'continuity thesis' has been put forward by Zeev Sternhell (2000[1983]), who has claimed a continuity between Marxist revisionism and fascism. Sternhell argues that Déat's doctrinal revisionism, which came to be dubbed 'neo-socialism', already contained the essential elements of fascism: the idealist revision of Marxism, the principle of class collaboration within a national framework, and the reorganization of the state along corporatist lines. Thus, according to Sternhell, Déat's 'national socialism of the collaboration period is the very same as that of the heyday of neo-socialism' (ibid.: 281). Although Sternhell does not underline Déat's Durkheimian formation as plainly as some others, its connection to Déat's fascism is implied, given that he does not see any essential metamorphosis in Déat's career. Indeed, he claims that 'Déat's sociological analysis... as easily explains the evolution of [his] thought as well as [his] subsequent engagement' (ibid.: 278–9).

To different degrees, then, Déat's Durkheimian influence has been invoked as a factor in his political transformation.³ But how fair is this assessment? The issue is not

whether Déat was in some ways influenced by Durkheimian sociology, although we question the degree to which Déat can properly be called Durkheimian. Rather, the issue is whether this supposed influence can explain his fascism. The explanatory significance of Déat's Durkheimian past is precisely what is suggested by an internalist history-of-ideas approach, which we define as an approach that treats a given ideological discourse as the realization of the inner logic of a preceding ideological discourse such that the development of the former can be adequately explained mainly by reference to features internal to the latter.

In what follows, we survey the varied intellectual and political trajectories of the young Durkheimians during the interwar period, thereby throwing into doubt any over-hasty attempts to draw a straight line between Durkheimian sociology and Déat's fascism. We then outline Déat's career by foregrounding the dispositional and relational factors that set this sociologist and reformist socialist down the path to fascism. In doing so, we hope to suggest the basis for a more plausible sociological understanding of his transformation than that provided by an internalist history-of-ideas approach.

Young Durkheimians: Academic and political investments in a time of crisis

Before returning to Déat's case in more detail, we turn now to the political commitments of the other young Durkheimians. To do so in the proper context, however, requires briefly outlining the state of the academic field in France during the interwar years and indicating some of the consequences of the economic and political crises of the 1930s for the younger generation of intellectuals.

Following the institutional expansion and academic renewal of the years between the 1880s and the First World War, the French academic field during the interwar years displayed a pattern of stagnation and progressive closure. Contributors to the leading journals in the human sciences formed a gradually aging population in which relatively few younger members entered. In philosophy, the average age of contributors to the two central journals, the *Revue philosophique* and the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, went up from about 40 in 1905 to slightly over 60 in 1935 (Vogt, 1982). Sociology journals displayed the same tendency. While the average age for the first series of the *Année sociologique* (1898–1912) was 34, this went up to 46 for the second series of the *Année* (1925–7) and to 47 for the *Annales sociologiques* (1934–42) (Heilbron, 1985, 2015).

The image of a gradually aging academic establishment and a relative lack of young newcomers is directly related to the academic field and the academic job market. The decades from the 1880s to 1914 had been a period of growth and improved chances for an academic career, which favoured the introduction of new disciplines like psychology and sociology. After the First World War, prospects for a university career diminished. Teaching positions in the Faculties of Letters stagnated between 1920 and 1940, while the number of students continued to rise (Heilbron, 1985). Members of the older generation, who had obtained academic positions when they were still relatively young, remained in position and often continued their teaching. Celestin Bouglé, for example, taught at the Sorbonne from 1908 to 1939. Occupying several other important positions as well – he also directed the *École Normale Supérieure* – Bouglé was a favourite target

for the criticisms that young intellectuals like Nizan addressed to the ‘watchdogs’ of the academic order (Nizan, 1998[1932]).

When the economic situation of the country declined following the stock market crash of 1929, tensions between the academic establishment and aspiring younger intellectuals increased. Unemployment rose steadily, even for holders of university degrees, and even the best-qualified had difficulty obtaining the positions they aspired to (Weil, 1937). Alarming reports spoke of the growing ‘intellectual proletariat’, and one of the spokesmen of the younger generation, Denis de Rougemont, published his *Journal d'un intellectuel en chômage* [Diary of an Unemployed Intellectual] (1937).

Representatives of this ‘generation of 1930’ spoke of themselves as a generation in revolt (Winock, 1975: 19; Loubet del Bayle, 1969). The revolt of intellectual youth was articulated by small groups, some within existing organizations, like the ‘Young Turks’ of the Radical Party, Déat’s neo-socialists, and the ‘Révolution Constructive’ group within the SFIO, but often also outside the established institutions, around little journals ranging from the extreme left to the extreme right: *Je suis partout* (founded in 1930), *Réaction* (1930), *Esprit* (1932), *Combat* (1935), *Revue marxiste* (1929), *Critique sociale* (1931). All these initiatives were animated by angry young men and the occasional woman who were confronted with shrinking job prospects, diminishing expectations and a widening gap between their experiences and the outlook of the older generation.

In sociology the continuity of the Durkheimian program was menaced as well (Marcel, 2001). After the flowering of the group around the first series of the *Année sociologique*, the interwar years were a period in which collaborative efforts diminished and internal differences came to the fore. When new volumes of the *Année* were published (1925, 1927), they opened with obituaries of 17 people who had died during or shortly after the war. Its successor, the *Annales sociologiques* (1934–42), was no longer a regular and coherent periodical. It was published in 5 separate series and, in spite of allegations about forming a closed school, the Durkheimian group, in reality, disintegrated.

The internal weakening of the group manifested itself above all in a growing split between two wings of the Durkheimian network: research scholars and university teachers (Heilbron, 1985). Research scholars (Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, François Simiand) had positions in a small research school, the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (EPHE), where they taught advanced seminars for small numbers of students. Mauss was the pivotal figure of the research wing of the Durkheimian network (Fournier, 1994). The university teachers (Bouglé, Albert Bayet, Paul Fauconnet), on the other hand, had positions in the Faculty of Letters, where they taught sociology to growing audiences of philosophy students. Bouglé was the central figure among the university professors. In spite of the internal weakening of the group, Durkheimian ideas and approaches developed fruitfully in a wide variety of scholarly domains, ranging from anthropology and history, to social psychology, economics and economic history. Most of the creative development of Durkheimianism, however, occurred outside of sociology proper, notably in institutions like the EPHE (Conklin, 2013; Heilbron, 1985, 2015; Steiner, 2010). This paradoxical phenomenon of a relative standstill within the discipline itself and innovative developments outside of sociology is also recognizable in the recruitment of younger collaborators.

The second series of the *Année sociologique* had only 4 collaborators who were born after 1890 (see Table 1). Three of them (Déat, Bonnafous, Laubier) were philosophers

Table 1. Younger collaborators (born after 1890) to the Durkheimian journals during the interwar years.

<i>Année sociologique</i> (1925, 1927)	<i>Annales sociologiques</i> (1934–42)
Max Bonnafous (1900–75)	Raymond Aron (1905–83)
Marcel Déat (1894–1955)	Pierre Depoid (1909–68)
Françoise Henry (1902–82)	Valentin Feldman (1909–42)
Jean Laubier (1901–88)	Georges Gurvitch (1894–1965)
	André Kaan (1906–71)
	Henri Laufenburger (1897–1965)
	Gabriel Le Bras (1891–1970)
	Michel Leiris (1901–90)
	Anatole Lewitzky (1901–42)
	Georges Lutfalla (1904–64)
	Robert Marjolin (1911–86)
	Henri Mougín (1912–46)
	André Philip (1902–70)
	Raymond Polin (1910–2001)
	Philippe Schwob (1905–?)
	Jacques Soustelle (1912–90)
	Jean Stoetzel (1910–87)
	Paul Vignaux (1904–87)
Number of younger collaborators: 4 out of 38.	Number of younger collaborators: 18 out of 46.

from the ENS and were involved with the school's Centre de Documentation Sociale (1920–40), which Bouglé directed.⁴ The fourth young collaborator, Françoise Henry, was a student of the prehistorian Henri Hubert. She was the first woman to join the Durkheimian group but would soon leave France to take up an academic position in Ireland. None of the 4 newcomers would contribute to the successor of the *Année*, the *Annales sociologiques*.

Recruitment for the *Annales sociologiques* clearly reflected the growing dispersion of the Durkheimian network. Five separate series were published by only loosely related subgroups, each of them headed by a central Durkheimian. The 'general sociology' series was directed by Bouglé and was handled by philosophers he recruited from the Centre de Documentation Sociale (Aron, Kaan, Mougín, Polin, Stoetzel) and by those who frequented the centre (Feldman, Marjolin). Mauss's series on the sociology of religion contained reviews by some of his students (Leiris, Lewitzky, Soustelle). The third series covered law and morality and had occasional contributions by younger philosophers who wrote on moral philosophy (Feldman, Polin, Vignaux). The economic sociology series had some newcomers specializing in economic issues (Lutfalla); the last series handled nearly all the other themes (aesthetics, linguistics, social morphology, statistics) and recruited some newcomers as well, but they were established specialists rather than young scholars (Depoid, Laufenburger).

The recruitment pattern of the younger scholars indicates two distinct groups. The larger group of younger contributors were *normalien* philosophers (Aron, Bonnafous, Déat, Kaan, Laubier, Mougín, Polin, Schwob, Stoetzel, Vignaux) and those directly related to them (Marjolin, Feldman); they revolved around Bouglé's Centre de Documentation Sociale. The other, somewhat smaller group consisted of students of Mauss,

Hubert, or Simiand from the EPHE (Henry, Leiris, Lewitzky, Soustelle, Lutfalla), and specialized in anthropology, history, or economic issues. While in the network of research scholars continuities with regard to Durkheimian ideas and approaches prevailed, discontinuities and generational ruptures marked the *normalien* philosophers.

The younger philosophers from the ENS were not so much faced with the peculiarities of specialized research areas, but rather with the divergence between their own expectations and the declining possibilities that their education offered. Some settled for a teaching career in secondary education, but having gained access to the selective ENS, many of them saw *lycée* teaching in the provinces as a temporary passage to more valued positions. Since the actual chances for a university career were slim, many were eventually tempted by non-academic investments, such as in politics or literature. The predominant characteristic of this group of philosophers was not so much a specific attraction to any political doctrine in particular, but rather a tendency to look for alternative intellectual orientations and for career perspectives different from the ones that the previous generations had pursued.

The intellectual reorientation towards philosophy was visible in the rupture with the predominant forms of rationalism and the active import of philosophical currents like phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism and psycho analysis (Fabiani, 2010; Gouarné, 2013; Pinto, 2009). In sociology a similar movement occurred with the introduction of Max Weber and other German authors (Mannheim, Scheler), or in the pleas by Jean Stoetzel and others for more American-style empirical research. Raymond Aron, who turned to German philosophy of history and Weber, typically expressed a very similar 'allergy' to the Durkheimian school as did those who turned to Marxism, like Nizan.

Many young intellectuals in the 1930s combined their quest for new intellectual perspectives with political commitments. The dispersion of the young Durkheimians' scientific pursuits was echoed by the diversity of their political engagements. Yet of the known political commitments of the 22 young Durkheimians listed in Table 1, most were and remained on the left. Some were members of the Communist Party (e.g. Feldman, Mougín) or close to dissident communist currents (e.g. Soustelle).⁵ More were members (e.g. Bonnafous, Déat, Marjolin, Philip), or fellow-travelers (e.g. Aron, Gurvitch) of the SFIO, although Aron would be converted to liberalism by the end of the decade.⁶ Still others took heterodox positions related to their novel intellectual pursuits, such as Leiris and Lewitzky's efforts in the Collège de Sociologie to contribute to a 'sacred sociology' in response to fascism (Falasca-Zamponi, 2011). During the 1930s, with the economic crisis and the rise of national socialism in Germany and fascism in Italy, the political spectrum became more diversified. Instead of observing a predominant tendency, the actual process of reorientation displayed varied political affiliations, ranging from the extreme left and more moderate and centrist positions to, occasionally, somewhat more traditional, though not reactionary, religious affinities, both Roman Catholic (Le Bras, Vignaux) and Protestant (Philip). There seems to have been very little political coherence among those associated with the Durkheimian group who came of age intellectually and politically in the interwar years. Nonetheless, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War most were at least positioned to the left of the political spectrum.

Déat did not start his career on the far right, but displayed Nazi sympathies only during the German Occupation. None of the other younger members were tempted by

reactionary or fascist politics, nor did they become ideological collaborators with the Occupation authorities. This was even the case with those who early on had the most in common politically with Déat. Max Bonnafous was a close political ally of Déat's throughout the 1930s, following him out of the SFIO in 1933 with the other neo-socialists.⁷ Robert Marjolin was associated with the 'Révolution Constructive' group within the SFIO whose ideas were in part influenced by Déat. André Philip helped to popularize the ideas of Belgian socialist Henri de Man, whose brand of socialism has often been compared with Déat's and who would also become a Nazi collaborator. Yet during the Occupation both Marjolin and Philip would become key figures in the French Resistance. Bonnafous, on the other hand, like Déat, rallied to the Vichy regime, becoming a Vichy minister in 1942. But Bonnafous would stop short of Déat's Nazification, resigning his post in 1944 after the entry of Joseph Darnand and Philippe Henriot into the government, but not before using his position to aid the Resistance, thanks to which his case was dismissed during the postwar purge trials (Raymond, 'Max Bonnafous').

During the Second World War some of the young Durkheimians fled the country. Georges Gurvitch and Paul Vignaux, for example, went to the USA, where they taught at the New School for Social Research, while others (e.g. Aron, Marjolin, Philip, Souse-telle) went to London where they had more or less close ties to General de Gaulle and served in various capacities the Free French government-in-exile. Several others became active in the underground Resistance. Valentin Feldman, who taught philosophy in secondary schools, was executed in 1942 for his participation in the communist resistance.⁸ The Hegel scholar André Kaan and the statistician Pierre Depoid were active in the Cohors-Asturies resistance network organized by philosopher and mathematician Jean Cavailès, with Kaan surviving deportation to Buchenwald before returning to teaching after the liberation (Granet, 1974). The ethnologist Anatole Lewitzky, a pupil of Mauss, belonged to one of the very first Resistance networks in France based at the Musée de l'Homme. The group was betrayed, and Lewitzky was executed in 1942. Gabriel Le Bras, a Roman Catholic law professor who had close ties to some of the Durkheimians, received the Médaille de la Résistance (Gaudemet, 1969).

It is clear that most members of the Durkheimian group did not follow the allegedly reactionary affinities of Durkheimian sociology, but, on the contrary, participated in a variety of anti-fascist initiatives not only before but also during the war. Moreover, upon closer inspection the intellectual continuities with the earlier generations of Durkheimians were, in fact, relatively weak. There was a significant degree of continuity among the relatively small number of pupils of Mauss, Hubert and Simiand, but among the larger group of philosophers this was rare. The political trajectory of Déat, furthermore, was unique among the younger collaborators in the interwar years. There is thus little evidence for postulating an intellectual lineage connecting the work of Émile Durkheim to fascism or collaborationist politics.

Déat and Durkheimian sociology

Before sketching Déat's path to fascism, it is worth reconsidering to what extent he could be called a Durkheimian. True, Déat had been a promising sociologist before embarking on his political career.⁹ It was Bouglé who turned Déat onto sociology while at the ENS

and became his intellectual patron, appointing him secretary-archivist of the Centre de Documentation Sociale in 1920 and arranging for his return to the ENS in 1925 in order to facilitate his dissertation work on the 'judgement of values'. During this time Déat published actively in scholarly outlets, collaborating with Bouglé on a bibliographical guide for sociology students (Bouglé and Déat, 1921) and writing a short survey of the field (Déat, 1925a). Déat also collaborated on the second series of *L'Année sociologique*.

Even long after he abandoned his academic career, Déat maintained some ties with the Durkheimian group. Thus, for example, he was invited in 1938 to speak on 'social organization and philosophy' in front of Bouglé, Brunschvicq and Dominique Parodi at the Société Française de Philosophie (Déat, 1938). He also kept up a correspondence with Mauss, with whom he shared political sympathies (Fournier, 1994). Is it then fair to say that this Durkheimian association determined his later political commitments? One passage in his unpublished wartime journal might seem to suggest so. Remarking during the 'Phoney War' on the 'primitive, spontaneous, and lively' nature of 'the German religion' as opposed to the 'transcendent, intellectualized, and bloodless' gods of the West, Déat wrote:

The ideas of Durkheim and of Lévy-Bruhl are perfectly confirmed by totalitarianism. Sociologists . . . should not forget it. (Déat, 8 November 1939, *Journal de guerre* [unpublished])¹⁰

One should not, however, overstate the influence of Durkheimian sociology. Déat's main connection to the Durkheimian group was through Bouglé, and his scholarly interests placed him distinctly within the philosophizing wing of Durkheimianism represented by university professors like Bouglé. Indeed, Déat's scholarly production reflected Bouglé's own interests in neo-idealist philosophy (Déat, 1925b), psychology (Déat, 1921, 1924, 1926a, 1926b, 1926c) and sociological popularization and synthesis (Déat, 1925a). Himself a 'dissident' and heterodox Durkheimian, Bouglé was in fact a kind of conduit out of Durkheimianism for many of his students (Heilbron, 1985; Marcel, 2001; Vogt, 1983). This seems to have been the case with Déat.

For Déat, Durkheimian sociology was only a starting point whose limits he sought to transcend. Though he would never finish his dissertation, Déat's description of his project suggests that it owed more to Bouglé's unique influence than to the Durkheimian problematic as such. W. Paul Vogt identifies several points of divergence between Bouglé and the Durkheimian problematic: a rejection of the methodological unity of the social and natural sciences, doubt regarding a purely objectivist approach to social facts, an appreciation of psychological introspection, and a deep skepticism of sociology's ability to normatively judge the value of social and moral ends (Vogt, 1983). These would indeed be hallmarks of Déat's scholarly thinking. Déat's point of departure in his dissertation was precisely the gulf identified by Bouglé, *contra* Durkheim, between the sociological determination of ends that prevailed in a given society and an evaluative judgement of those ends. Déat recalls being interested, albeit without '*élan*', in the 'attempts of the "science of morals" and of objective sociology to pass from the "indicative" to the "imperative"' (Déat, 1989: 24). Yet by the time Déat began working on his dissertation in the early 1920s, the 'limits of Durkheimian sociology were clearly apparent' to him (*ibid.*: 142). Déat was particularly dissatisfied with Durkheim's solution

to the problem of relating the 'judgements of value' to 'judgements of reality', and claimed that it was 'henceforth impossible to hold oneself to a narrowly objectivist and positive method'.¹¹ Already, he claimed, 'psychologists had moved beyond this framework' (*ibid.*).

Déat distanced himself from Durkheimian sociology along the tracks laid down by Bouglé. For example, he looked towards psychologists like Georges Dumas and André Lalande for the sources of psychic value judgements. He also began a serious study of German philosophy that he hoped would lead out of the Durkheimian impasse and provide a firmer grasp of the relationship between valued ends and practical action. Beginning with Kant, Déat subsequently studied Dilthey, Windelband, Rickert, and the German historicists' distinction between causal explanation and intellectual intuition. He was 'led step by step to study Meinong, Toennies, Simmel, and, by Brentano, driven all the way to Husserl and to Phenomenology' (Déat, 1989: 142–3). Déat describes then being on an 'important path, that which led to Scheler or to Troeltsch, and finally to Heidegger and to existentialism' (*ibid.*: 143). In the end Déat, like Bouglé, concluded that there was an 'irrefutable and insurmountable distance between concept or notion and concrete reality' (*ibid.*).

Linked to the Durkheimian group mainly through his mentor Bouglé, Déat's intellectual preoccupations were thus characteristically eclectic and in most cases fit poorly with the Durkheimian problematic. Indeed, it was the unsatisfactory way in which Durkheim resolved the relationship between fact and value that pushed Déat towards metaphysics, psychology and German philosophy. Déat's long-lasting interest in conjugating fact and value, knowledge and action, was not simply an extension of his Durkheimian training, but rather a reaction to the impasse of Durkheimianism. In other words, it was precisely Durkheimian sociology's inability to provide him meaningful political guidance that drove him away from it. It would thus be dubious to draw a straight line from Déat's Durkheimianism to his later politics. Indeed, in his major political statement while still a socialist (Déat, 1930), the influence of Sombart is deeper than that of Durkheim.¹²

The vicissitudes of Déat's career

Habitus and self-concept

Déat's political trajectory cannot be adequately explained by a supposed affinity between Durkheimian sociology and fascism. Not only does the variety of political position-takings by interwar French Durkheimians belie this notion, Déat was himself only marginally a Durkheimian. But if Déat's fascist turn is not reducible to his Durkheimian training, nor is it reducible to his other intellectual influences. Complicating an internalist history-of-ideas approach that stresses continuities in Déat's thought is the eclecticism of the latter. Hence the conflicting emphases put on either Déat's rationalism (Baker, 1976) or irrationalism (Grossman, 1975; Sternhell, 2000[1983]) in explaining his politics, with some even invoking both (Burrin, 2003[1986]; Pels, 2000). This eclecticism was also a feature of the non-conformist milieu of the 1930s that straddled both the left and the right and served as a politically ambiguous way station for those who like

Déat were rethinking their political allegiances (Irvine, 2008; Loubet del Bayle, 1969). Yet although Déat to a certain extent came to be a part of this milieu, the heterogeneity of political outcomes exhibited by this generation despite having supposedly shared in a common ‘spirit of 1930’ (Loubet del Bayle, 1969) makes the latter a poor concept for explaining particular trajectories. That the non-conformist spirit was ambiguous and could be realized on the left as well as on the right is perhaps true, but this does not help us to understand why for Déat the future specifically belonged to fascism. Indeed, the explanatory value of any reference to the ambiguities of intellectual influences is limited, whether it be the ‘spirit of 1930’, Durkheimianism, or even the French republican tradition, for the task is precisely to account for why a particular path was taken even within this ambiguity.

None of this is to deny that Déat’s intellectual sources provided him with an enduring set of references; rather, our point is that these were not the driving force of his political evolution. We argue that Déat’s path from a promising sociologist to a socialist politician and finally to a Nazi collaborator is better accounted for by reference to the conjunctural vicissitudes of his career. Déat’s fascism was not the realization of some essential tendency in his thought, but rather the culmination of a series of accommodations resulting from the repeated frustration of his political and intellectual ambitions.

Recollections by Déat’s contemporaries all stress his intellectual talent and his evident ambition. Though doubtless colored by hindsight, the basic portrait of his disposition accords with what we might expect from someone with Déat’s particular social trajectory. Born into a modest family of *petits fonctionnaires* in a small provincial town, by his intellectual precociousness Déat earned a rarefied spot at the Lycée Henri-IV, a Parisian preparatory school typically reserved for the privileged.¹³ In 1914, Déat was accepted to the prestigious ENS, where he excelled (Cointet, 1998).¹⁴ Déat thus represented ‘the perfect profile of the Third Republic “boursier” [scholarship student], for whom school was a natural path of social promotion’ (Bergounioux, ‘Marcel Déat’). Déat owed everything to his intellectual ability and to the school system that consecrated it. Given the quasi-miraculous nature of this scholarly consecration, it is little wonder that Déat would develop a supreme confidence in his abilities and a typically intellectualist faith in the power of ideas. Indeed, according to Georges Lefranc, a fellow socialist and *normalien*, what characterized Déat most were a kind of Machiavellian ambition and a belief in ‘the value of ideas, in their absolute value, in their efficacy’ (Lefranc, 1980b).

Those who knew Déat have tended to corroborate Lefranc’s judgement. The communist Marcel Prenant, who knew Déat as a student, described him as ‘intelligent and active’, though also ‘very infatuated with himself and too ambitious to stay honest for too long’ (Prenant, 1980: 44). Georges Cogniot, another communist and fellow *normalien*, claimed that Déat was at that time ‘already marked by the stigmas of careerism’ (Cogniot, 1976: 68).¹⁵ Raymond Abellio, whose path crossed Déat’s both within the student socialist movement and later within collaborationist circles, wrote in his memoirs that Déat was ‘a man who was carried away by the order of reason from which he drew the effects of eloquence’ (Abellio, 1975: 59).¹⁶ Abellio went on:

Under a deceptive exterior of a too uniformly rhythmic and ill-tempered eloquence, this Nivernais peasant with a temperament of fire...remained a methodical professor, a

sociologist of prudent methods who, paradoxically, defended opportunism with vehemence, all while substituting for a world too real, too dense, constructions adroitly tied together by his rhetoric. (Abellio, 1975: 92–3)

Déat's scholastic intellectualism and his ambition seem to have stayed with him throughout his life. For example, Jules Moch recalls socialist leader Léon Blum saying in 1929 that Déat was 'fundamentally bad and jealous', that he had 'an ambition that he hides poorly' and that he was 'mean and covetous' (Moch, 1970: 66).¹⁷ Henry du Moulin de Labarhète, Pétain's trusted adviser in Vichy, described Déat as a '*normalien* of the plebs, inflated with academic pride, consumed by political ambition' for whom 'transitions seemed easy' (du Moulin de Labarhète, 1946: 318). Even those who were politically sympathetic to Déat have painted a similar picture. Thus Barthélémy Montagnon, whose political career largely mirrored Déat's, wrote that Déat was 'above all a grand intellectual' and that his 'marvelous intellectual mechanism monopolized his whole existence and neglected all else' (Montagnon, 1969: 139). Georges Albertini, Déat's right-hand man during the Occupation, also observed the same qualities. According to Albertini, Déat's 'simple modesty hid an immense pridefulness made of a prodigious esteem for himself and of a calm contempt for others' (Varenes, 1948: 251). Moreover, Déat's 'prestigious intelligence' was marked by an 'impulsiveness that did not allow him to slow down when it got carried away with an idea' (ibid.: 50). Albertini concludes his portrait of Déat by asserting that we cannot understand him if we

... forget that he was a victim of French education. This University, of which he could have been one of the glories, it is it that lost him. It taught him the manipulation of ideas and not that of men. The humanities distanced him all the more from human reality as they taught him to find more joy in the seductive and corrupting game of speculative intelligence. From the *École* too came this propensity to act on others only through the detours of reasoning and demonstration. (Varenes, 1948: 253)

From humble origins to elite student, Déat's ambition was nourished by an intellectual arrogance consecrated by elite schools and seemingly justified by the quasi-miraculous nature of his social promotion. Owing his success to nothing but the quality of his mind, Déat demonstrated an overdeveloped self-confidence in his intellectual abilities while exhibiting the social unease typical of a provincial habitus.¹⁸ Déat's ambition was thus deeply intertwined with his scholarly consecration. Indeed, it was as an intellectual that Déat related to others and saw the world. As we will go on to suggest, Déat tended to transmute personal rivalries and political problems into questions of theory and doctrine, such that his many bids for power were always accompanied by a claim to intellectual innovation.

Yet Déat's intellectualism should not be confused with a coherent vision of the world striving to realize itself through the various turns in his life. As noted earlier, Déat's thinking was highly eclectic. This eclecticism suggests that there was not really a particular content to Déat's 'intellectual self-concept' (Gross, 2002, 2008), but rather that his self-concept was as an intellectual *tout court*, and that this self-concept did not so much determine his position-takings as it did the way in which he sought to rationalize them.

Typical in this regard was an attempt by Déat in 1938 to justify his recent political engagements to a presentation of the Société Française de Philosophie in terms of a synthesis of Marx and Descartes. Bouglé expressed skepticism, remarking that the link between Déat's politics and his philosophy was 'a little artificial' and that his politics were not 'more Cartesian than Marxist, or more Marxist than Cartesian' (Déat, 1938: 62–3). Asked to justify himself, Déat's only response was pitched at a high level of generality, answering that both Marx and Descartes had recognized the power of knowledge to effect, quoting Engels, the 'leap from necessity to freedom' (ibid.: 64). One might say, then, that Déat's was indeed a 'knowledge-political project' (Pels, 2000, 2001), but that the ideational content of this project was less important than the vague and self-serving affirmation of the power of knowledge itself, to which Déat maintained a privileged claim. In other words, what Déat carried into politics from his education was not a particular set of ideas, Durkheimian or not, but a particular relationship to ideas that, embodied in a scholarly habitus and constituting his self-concept, functioned as a kind of symbolic capital and thus his claim to political credibility. For Déat, sociology and philosophy were less the source of his politics at any time than they were markers of distinction guaranteeing his intellectual superiority and legitimating his political position-takings.

Political trajectory

The significance of Déat's ambition and intellectualist pretensions can be fully grasped only in their relationship to his political failures. As Bergounioux notes, 'Rarely has a political project been marked by a greater failure' (Bergounioux, 'Marcel Déat'). Indeed, from his time in the SFIO to the German Occupation, Déat's political ambitions were repeatedly frustrated. Yet what was frustrated was not a singular and unchanging political vision. Rather, Déat's political failures touched off a series of ideological adjustments that took him far from the ideas of his youth and culminated in a complete identification with fascist totalitarianism. Déat's political trajectory was marked by repeated attempts to stake a new position for himself in the political field. Moreover, his intellectualist tendencies amplified the logic of distinction within the field such that each new position-taking was accompanied by a justificatory doctrinal revision. But at every step Déat was constrained by the structure of possible position-takings in the field so that each political repositioning and each ideological reformulation was simultaneously an accommodation with the particular conjuncture of the political field. It was this logic that, under the crisis conditions of war and occupation, sealed Déat's fate.

Déat launched his political career in earnest only after his academic ambitions seemed to stall. Though he was already active in the SFIO, after graduating from the ENS in 1920 Déat's priority seems to have been a university career, for the sake of which he returned to the ENS after a brief stint at a provincial *lycée*. But in 1926 Déat took advantage of an opportune legislative by-election to become the SFIO deputy for the Marne. Though in retrospect this marked the end of Déat's academic career, he seems to have genuinely hesitated about his professional future.¹⁹ This kind of double investment in academics and politics was not uncommon in a period of crisis in French higher education, when many promising students were forced to convert their

academic capital to other fields. But if politics in the end turned out to be more propitious for Déat than academia, he did not for all that abandon his scholarly pretensions. Indeed, in reinvesting his academic capital in the political field, it was as an intellectual that Déat entered socialist politics, and it was in socialist politics that he sought to realize his intellectual ambitions.

By his own account, between 1926 and 1933 Déat sought to ‘conquer the party from the inside’ (Déat, 1989: 196). Seen by many within the SFIO as Blum’s successor as party leader and even as a ‘future Jaurès’, Déat had a promising career ahead of him in the socialist movement (Lefranc, 1980a: 157). Déat was always aligned with the minority of the party that advocated ministerial participation in bourgeois governments. As the participationist wing gained in strength in the late 1920s Déat became one of its chief spokesmen, and rumors began circulating that he sought to replace Paul Faure, an opponent of ministerial participation, as party secretary (Lefranc, 1963: 290). Beaten in the 1928 elections, Déat turned down a provincial teaching post to become the administrative secretary of the SFIO parliamentary group with Blum’s support. From his new position, Déat engaged in a ‘veritable frenzy’ of activity, becoming one of the party’s most active propagandists (Déat, 1989: 218).

Déat’s base of support also included young intellectuals within the party, many of whom came from the same Parisian student milieu and appreciated his willingness to challenge what they saw as an outmoded orthodoxy.²⁰ Déat’s attempt to provide a theoretical foundation for participationism culminated in the publication of *Perspectives socialistes* (1930). In this ‘Bible of all French socialist parliamentarians who . . . wanted to arm their ambition with some apparatus’ (Abellio, 1975: 93), Déat advocated building an ‘anti-capitalist’ coalition with the middle classes and using state control to orient capitalist development in a more social direction. While some have seen in this book a precursor to his later fascism, placed in its context it is better understood as a justification for a governing coalition with the center-left Radical Party in anticipation of the 1932 elections. Indeed, the book was only a more theoretically sophisticated version of a reformist tendency within European socialism that had long rejected orthodox Marxist fatalism and believed in the capacity of socialists to govern effectively even within the framework of capitalism.²¹

If Déat had hoped to influence party strategy by the force of his intellect, the book did not have the desired effect. In his memoirs Déat lamented the ‘profound and total silence in the interior of the party’ surrounding the book (Déat, 1989: 236). He was especially stung by Blum’s silence, and the book’s publication marked Déat’s ‘intellectual and moral rupture’ with him (ibid.: 237). In reality the book did provoke some discussion, but it tended to be critical. For example, the powerful leader of the SFIO’s Nord Federation labeled Déat’s views ‘neo-socialism’, writing that the book represented not a ‘renewed attempt at revisionism’ but rather a ‘complete upheaval of socialist theories and tactics’ (Lebas, 1931: 35). With the seemingly tacit approval of the party leadership, Déat was chastised for proposing an ‘entirely new socialism, unknown until yesterday’, and a ‘new doctrine’ that replaced that of Marx and Engels (ibid.: 35, 63). To the extent that the publication of *Perspectives socialistes* and its reception did have an effect, it was to transmute what had hitherto been a debate over the tactic of ministerial participation into a debate over doctrinal heresy and to raise the specter of excommunication.

Déat having made himself its chief theorist, his fate was tied to that of the participationist minority. Déat's actions were inscribed in the increasingly divisive conflict between the socialist parliamentary group, dominated by participationists, and the largely anti-participationist party leadership. Déat's tireless propaganda activity increasingly brought him into conflict with Faure and Blum, who dominated the party apparatus.²² Things would come to a head after the 1932 elections, in which the socialists finished behind the radicals but did well enough to become an indispensable partner to any left-wing government. The resulting intensification of the factional struggle within the party risked provoking a schism as the parliamentary group repeatedly violated party discipline. At the same time, perhaps sensing the tide turning in favour of the participationist minority, Déat became more strident in assuming the role of doctrinal heretic. The breach only widened with a press campaign by Blum condemning 'neo-socialism' in the aftermath of the 1933 party congress, where Déat's ally Adrien Marquet infamously proposed 'order', 'authority' and 'nation' as new bases for socialist propaganda (Parti Socialiste, 1933). Despite initial reservations, the logic of the situation would carry Déat towards an identification with Marquet's language in an increasingly self-conscious 'neo-socialism' (Montagnon, Marquet and Déat, 1933). The eventual censure of participationist indiscipline by the party apparatus ruined Déat's ambition to 'conquer the party from within'. Déat was faced with the choice of either following the dissident parliamentarians into an inevitable schism, or returning to the fold. However, the doctrinal cast that his interventions came to take effectively made the latter impossible, as it would entail renouncing the very basis of his political credibility. Déat would be expelled from the party in November 1933.

Déat's 'neo-socialism' was not the cause of the 1933 schism but its product. Having invested his political ambitions in an eventual victory of the participationist wing of the SFIO, Déat could not help but give his ambition an intellectual form. But far from being a ready-made doctrine, 'neo-socialism' was at first just a clever polemical label. Following the ebb and flow of the factional struggle, it was elaborated into a distinct doctrinal alternative only as the participationists' bid for supremacy, and with it Déat's ambition to lead the party, foundered. Dispossessed of a party, the battle had furnished Déat with a new doctrine.

Neo-socialism was geared towards the interpellation of a new political force. The middle classes came to be privileged as the dynamic center of the 'anti-capitalist' coalition, and emphasis was placed on national over class solidarity as the basis for a 'preventive and directed revolution' from the center (Déat, 1934). Yet, neo-socialism did not amount to fascism.²³ Déat's program in this period consisted in combating the dislocating effects of the economic crisis and in doing so denying fascism a constituency. Indeed, even the infamous triptych 'Order, Authority, Nation' must be understood in this context.

Neo-socialism was an attempt to create a new position in the political field. Déat created a new party that he hoped would rally the 'vital forces' of the nation and become the fulcrum of a broad republican majority (Parti Socialiste de France, 1933).²⁴ But the Parti Socialiste de France (PSdF) would get off to an inauspicious start. Failing to inspire a similar schism on the left of the Parti Radical and congenitally split between doctrinaire neo-socialists and older parliamentarians who were disinclined

to share the desire for ‘doctrinal rejuvenation’ (ibid.), the new party quickly degenerated into a rump parliamentary grouping in which the neo-socialists became only more marginal when the PSdF merged with other independent socialist parties in 1935 to form the Union Socialiste et Républicaine (USR). The 1936 elections were disastrous for the neo-socialist elements in the party, with Déat, for example, losing his seat.²⁵ As Bergounioux notes, there is ‘not much sense’ in speaking of a neo-socialism after 1934 (Bergounioux, 1978: 406).

Déat was a victim of the political conjuncture. If the idea had been to become the center of gravity of a broad republican majority, the Popular Front dashed these hopes. A riot by right-wing paramilitary leagues on 6 February 1934 raised the specter of fascism in France and set in motion a rapprochement between socialists, communists and radicals that culminated in the Popular Front. Although the USR joined the alliance, with the political initiative lying to its left the party was deprived of its *raison d’être* and became a marginal element in the coalition. At the same time as the dynamic of the Popular Front monopolized the left and thus foiled his political ambitions, Déat began looking rightward to build an alternative coalition. The basis of this coalition would be the idea of planism, which gradually replaced neo-socialism in Déat’s political imagination.

Inspired by Belgian socialist Henri de Man, planism was a doctrine calling for immediate structural reforms instituting a mixed economy and economic planning. Though socialists and unions advanced their own versions of planism, Déat’s version leaned further to the right.²⁶ Building relations with modernizing elements of the bourgeoisie, Déat hoped that his planist efforts would become the foundation of a rightward extension of the Popular Front into a ‘National Front’ capable of transcending old ideological divisions. Indeed, whereas neo-socialism had seen itself as a stage on the way to socialism, Déat’s planism positioned itself as a reconciliation of capitalism and socialism and took on a technocratic and corporatist cast palatable to its class sponsors (Bergounioux, 1978: 407–8).

Déat’s ‘revolution from the center’ would prove to be impossible in the polarized politics of the Popular Front period (Déat, 1989: 300). On the one hand, Déat’s initiatives were rebuffed on his left by other planist currents and by de Man himself for their conservatism and abandonment of proletarian socialism (Lefranc, 1966, 1974). On the other hand, Déat’s vision of a planned economy was met with suspicion by the middle classes who remained attached to liberal economic values (Ruhmann, 1989). Déat’s attempts to exploit and theoretically legitimate his liminal position thus ran up against the objective limits of the political field. Caught between a self-confident left and an increasingly reactionary right, Déat was out of step with the political reality of the Popular Front.

The end of the Popular Front in 1938 did not benefit the USR, with the political center of gravity bypassing it to its right as the Parti Radical rallied its constituency to a frankly right-wing government. However, the emerging political conjuncture shaped by an intensifying anti-communism and the threat of war would provide new opportunities for Déat. Déat became a vocal partisan of appeasement, seeing peace as the precondition for his vision of national renewal. Moreover, with the Popular Front coalition coming apart and the left increasingly divided between pacifists and those resigned to

the inevitability of war, conditions were favourable for the centrist political reclassification that Déat had sought. Déat effectively became one of the leaders of the peace camp after the publication of an infamous article in which he categorically refused to 'die for Danzig' (Déat, 1939).²⁷

The year 1939 marks the 'point of departure of Déat's final conversion' (Cointet, 1998: 157). If Déat's calls for national renewal and his growing indulgence towards Nazi aggression expressed a 'subterranean seduction' (Burrin, 2003[1986]: 302) that made him 'available' for fascism (Bergounioux, 1978: 411), on the war's eve he had not for all that 'made the jump over the barricade' (Burrin, 2003[1986]: 301). But having failed repeatedly in his ambitions, Déat became 'prey to growing frustrations that exacerbated [his] wish for power' (ibid.). It was the dynamic unleashed by war and Occupation that would finally give an undeniably fascist form to this ambition.

The war and the Occupation completely up-ended the political field. Déat's calls for a national front, his anti-communism and his accommodationist 'anti-antifascism' meant that he could plausibly expect a role in Pétain's *Révolution nationale* (Bergounioux, 1978: 408). Indeed, voting to grant Pétain constitutional powers in July 1940, Déat initially sought his future in the Vichy regime. Pierre Laval, Pétain's head of government, had nourished Déat's hopes of becoming a minister in the summer of 1940. Déat was also encouraged to draw up a proposal for the creation of a *parti unique* [single party] that would be the instrument of the *Révolution nationale*. On both counts, however, Déat would be bitterly disappointed. Not only was Déat coolly received by Pétain and his entourage of traditionalist reactionaries, but even Laval's patronage seems to have been insincere (Burrin, 2003[1986]; Cointet, 1998; Gordon, 1980).

Failing to implant himself in Vichy, Déat sought his political fortunes in Paris instead. The move would be a fateful one. Before coming back to Paris, Déat was more concerned with finding a *modus vivendi* with a victorious Germany than with emulating Nazism. Even his project for a *parti unique* amounted less to a call for the totalitarian transformation of France than to a vague bid for influence within the framework of Vichy (Prost, 1973). Only after being spurned by Vichy and coming to Paris did Déat decisively come to identify with fascist totalitarianism. As Burrin suggests, with his 'temperament and his personality', Déat would 'probably have known a much less extreme evolution' had he become minister in the summer of 1940 (Burrin, 2003[1986]: 455).

In Paris, Déat used his daily column in *L'Œuvre* to reposition himself as a virulent critic of Vichy conservatism. He was arrested on orders from Vichy on 14 December 1940, a day after Laval was himself sacked by Pétain, but the German Embassy immediately intervened to free Déat. Henceforth Déat's fate would be tied to Laval and the German Occupation authorities. In Laval Déat saw a fellow partisan of robust collaboration and his best hope for an eventual accession to power. Indeed, it was with the ostensible goal of returning Laval to power that Déat founded the Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP) in the beginning of 1941. But under conditions of Occupation, Déat was also dependent on Nazi favour for the realization of his ambitions. This became only more the case after Déat's expected ministerial post failed to materialize even after Laval's return to power in 1942. Déat's commitment to the Nazi war effort thus only deepened, and it was only through German pressure that he was finally appointed Minister of Labour and National Solidarity in March 1944.

Déat came to cast himself and the RNP in a Nazified image as he competed with other collaborationist parties to be the Germans' preferred partner in a future European order. For example, Déat increasingly invoked a racial discourse of 'blood' and 'soil', and anti-Semitism became an explicit theme of RNP propaganda as he came under attack from more established anti-Semites on his right. So too did Déat put his pacifism aside to join with other collaborationist parties to create a volunteer force to fight on the Eastern Front (Cointet, 1998: 236–45). In keeping with his intellectualist pretensions, Déat more than others sought to rationalize his collaborationist engagements. Thus he began explicitly calling for a 'totalitarian civilization', distinct from a merely 'authoritarian' Vichy, and outlined his vision of an anti-Semitic, anti-Bolshevik and anti-Masonic totalitarian party-state modeled after Nazi Germany (Déat, 1942a, 1942b). Déat even argued that the 'German Revolution' was the ultimate realization of the French Revolution, and likened the German war effort to the Battle of Valmy (Déat, 1944).

Burrin perceptively characterizes Déat's politics at the end of the Occupation as a 'collaborationist fascism' driven by a desire for recognition from the Nazi occupier that intensified with every failed bid for power (Burrin, 2003[1986]: 445–59). But whereas Burrin attributes this to a kind of psychological 'fixation' with Hitler's embrace, we believe that Déat's progressive identification with Nazi fascism can be explained by the objective conditions of the political field under the Occupation and the particular way in which he related to these conditions (ibid.: 457). Déat's adoption of an unconditional pro-Nazi posture makes sense as a kind of accumulation of symbolic capital within the heteronomous political field of Occupied Paris wherein political legitimacy was conditional on German recognition. Competing with other collaborationist forces, Déat was caught in a spiral of radicalization, and seemed only to redouble his alignment with Nazi Germany at every political setback. Déat's ambition was such that no step in this direction was too far. Moreover, his intellectualist disposition turned every practical accommodation to the occupier into a moral and philosophical solidarity that, committed to paper in his daily column in *L'Œuvre*, left him nowhere to go but forward in collaboration. According to Montagnon, it was this 'need to write' that sealed Déat's fate:

Running a newspaper was his dearest wish. But one needs a daily editorial, one must say what one thinks about events. And inexorably, first with hesitation, then every day more clearly he commits himself. He senses resistance around him, he must overcome it, he cannot retreat. With his great talent, he fashions a doctrine. He must back up his earlier statements. He founds a party, the R.N.P. But the latter is secretly fought by more violent rivals. Will he be outflanked? No, he hardens his position, he goes as far as Doriot . . . he is bound by his own dialectic. He writes a book: *Le Parti unique*. Every day, another link attaches him to the camp of those who will drag him in their downfall. (Montagnon, 1969: 139–40)

Déat was thus a 'prisoner of the daily editorial' and the 'victim of his intellectual machinery', which left him no choice but either to 'disavow and despise himself, or to persist and rush headlong into the absurd' (Brissaud, 1965: 103). Déat's dependence on the Occupation authorities was such that he would stand with Nazi Germany until the bitter end, fleeing to Sigmaringen with a motley crew of ultra-collaborationists as the Allied armies advanced, convinced that the tide of the war could yet turn.

Conclusion

Contrary to what an internalist history-of-ideas approach would suggest, Déat's totalitarian fascism at the end of the war is not explained by his earlier neo-socialism, much less his Durkheimianism. Just as Déat's political trajectory was unique within the interwar Durkheimian group, so too was his collaborationism unusual among neo-socialists and planists in its total commitment to Nazi hegemony. Other former socialists associated with the RNP balked at its progressive Nazification.²⁸ The emphasis on social solidarity and organization that were at the core of Durkheimian sociology, neo-socialism and planism thus did not necessarily entail fascism. If they were all part of what Karl Polanyi calls the societal 'counter movement' against liberal capitalism, the particular political form and meaning that this movement took was nonetheless irreducible to this fact and in reality quite diverse (Polanyi, 1944).

The steps of Déat's trajectory – aspiring sociologist, reformist socialist, neo-socialist, centrist planist, intransigent pacifist, Vichy pretender and Nazi true believer – were conjunctural adaptations to changing fortunes. In a discourse analysis of neo-socialism, Steve Bastow claims that the relation between the Déat of 1933 and that of 1941 is 'not one of logical necessity, but of a process of argumentation through which a series of possible avenues was followed up, leaving other possible avenues ignored' (Bastow, 2000: 47). But if these choices were not logically entailed by Déat's previous position-takings, neither were they purely contingent. Déat's 'process of argumentation' cannot be understood without reference to his penchant for argumentation and the principally intellectual way in which he related to politics. It was in inculcating this intellectualist disposition and self-concept that Déat's academic training was crucial to his political career. Nor can Déat's choices be understood apart from his outsized ambition, cultivated by a promise that repeatedly went unfulfilled. With every blocked ambition, Déat shifted to a more propitious political terrain. Moreover, having converted his intellectual aspirations into the political field and staking his political distinction on his intellect, Déat had a taste for intellectual novelty and scandal, predisposing him to give every political vicissitude a moral and theoretical significance that committed him to a *fuite en avant*, a flight forward. At each step in his evolution, Déat's politics represented an adaptation to a particular state of the political field and an elaboration of a new position within it. Far from being driven by an inexorable logic tending towards fascism, Déat's thinking was always the conjunctural product of a negotiation with circumstance. Only with the particular conditions of the Occupation did Déat seal his fate.

Notes

1. Pels (2000, 2001), for example, recognizing the novelty of Durkheim's 'third way' between Spencerian individualism and statist *Kathedersozialisten*, is concerned with the *potential* affinity of this scientific 'third way' with the political 'third way' of fascism.
2. Claude Varennes was Georges Albertini's pseudonym.
3. Of course, the afore-mentioned authors differ in the extent to which they point to an underlying ideological continuity to explain Déat's fascist turn. Still, many at least implicitly claim that some aspect of Déat's fascism can be explained by his prior intellectual commitments

in a relatively straightforward way, as evidenced by their treatment of his Durkheimian formation. Thus even Burrin (2003[1986]), who otherwise appreciates the contingent factors that inflected Déat's trajectory, often ends up invoking the ideational factors that drove Déat towards fascism.

4. Funded by Albert Kahn and the Rockefeller Foundation, the Centre de Documentation Sociale was a library specializing in contemporary social problems. Though not technically a research institute charged with forming students, it nonetheless had pedagogical ambitions, hosting conferences attracting a broader public and playing an important role in the political education of many *normaliens*. On the center, see Heilbron (1985), Marcel (2001) and Sirinelli (1988).
5. Among the communist sympathizers was also Georges Friedmann, the pioneering sociologist of work who in the 1930s was close to the Durkheimian group, though not among the 22 young collaborators to *Année* or *Annales*, and who, like Déat, assisted Bouglé at the Centre de Documentation Sociale.
6. An affinity for socialism was not atypical even for older Durkheimians. Though Durkheim himself was not a socialist and though Bouglé was associated with the moderate Parti Radical, Mauss, Halbwachs, Simiand and Fauconnet were all at one point socialists.
7. Like Déat, Bonnafous came under the influence of Bouglé while at the École Normale Supérieure, and like Déat he was an especially promising sociologist. Indeed, both Mauss and Halbwachs identified Bonnafous in 1934 as a 'coming man' in the field (Käsler, 1991: 115, 144). Named *maître de conférence* in political sociology at the Bordeaux Faculty of Letters in 1930, Bonnafous would nonetheless be tempted by politics, becoming Adrien Marquet's chief of staff at the Ministry of Labour in 1934. Bonnafous's politics tacked closely alongside Déat's in this period.
8. Mougin, another communist, was a prisoner of war (1940–5) and died shortly after the liberation, too young to finish the PhD on the middle classes he had started under the supervision of Maurice Halbwachs.
9. According to Georges Lefranc, who knew both Déat and Bouglé during this time, Bouglé considered Déat 'one of the future leaders of sociological research' (Lefranc, 1963: 288).
10. Déat's statement echoes Mauss's correspondence with Ranulf, in which he writes that the rise of Nazism is a 'veritable tragedy for us, a strong verification of things we had indicated, and the proof that we should have rather expected this verification through evil than a verification through good' (Mauss quoted in Ranulf, 1939: 32).
11. In 'Les jugements de valeur et jugements de réalité' (1911), Durkheim argued that whereas descriptive accounts of extant social norms and ideal values are both grounded in social reality, values represent a different order of reality produced through collective effervescence. Hence it is possible to normatively judge extant social values without recourse to metaphysics. Déat was critical of the circularity of this solution, claiming that it was problematic to make of society at once the ideal, the source of the ideal, and the means at the service of the ideal (Déat, 1925a: 93). Ultimately, this formulation was still too conformist for Déat, who believed that it did not provide an adequate grounding for ameliorative social action. Déat characterizes Durkheim in his memoirs as 'a type of Hebrew prophet in search of Yahweh, who, in appearing to identify to the "social" with the "sacred", did not intend at all to uncrown the divine nor to attempt its intrinsic transcendence' (Déat, 1989: 142).
12. Echoing Sombart's definition of capitalism emphasizing the spirit or *Geist* of capitalism, Déat defines capitalism as a particular 'type of civilization', and historical materialism as 'the

- psychological and sociological method of analysis that corresponds to capitalist civilization and mentality' (Déat, 1930: 23).
13. Déat began his education at the primary level, but would switch to the secondary track. At the time in France, secondary education did not necessarily succeed primary education, but rather constituted a concurrent track generally reserved for the kids of more privileged families who could afford to pay for the *lycée* (primary education was free). Rarely did children in the primary track jump to the secondary track, and when this did happen it was usually with the help of a scholarship. For more on the education system in Third Republic France, see Talbott (1969).
 14. Though accepted in 1914, Déat's matriculation was postponed to 1919 due to his service in the First World War.
 15. Of course, as communists Prenant and Cogniot had an axe to grind against Déat. Déat himself denounced the 'communist hatred', 'violence' and 'bad faith' of Cogniot at the ENS (Déat, 1989: 132).
 16. Before changing his name, Abellio was known as Georges Soulès. Soulès, like Déat, started his political career in the SFIO but became a member of the fascist Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire (MSR), which joined Déat and the RNP at the beginning of 1941 before splitting off again later that year.
 17. The severity of these remarks struck Moch all the more because of Blum's usual 'indulgence'. In the 25 years that Moch knew Blum, he claims to have witnessed only three personal, as opposed to political, condemnations pronounced by Blum, one of these being against Déat (Moch, 1970: 66, 90).
 18. Déat's biographer, Jean-Paul Cointet, notes that his defining traits were already fixed during his time in school: 'a social complex, an excessive self-confidence, intellectual arrogance, certainty of his unique superiority, that of reasoning intelligence' (Cointet, 1998: 26).
 19. According to Georges Lefranc, Déat told him in 1927: 'I don't know if I will continue on the parliamentary path. I could, as Bouglé is pushing me to, write my dissertation, join the senior administration of public instruction, become director in the ministry' (Lefranc, 1980a: 160).
 20. Déat was elected president of the student socialist federation in 1928.
 21. Bergounioux claims that the book was 'in the lineage of State interventionist reformism that privileges immediate action' (Bergounioux, 1978: 399).
 22. With Blum's assent Faure removed from under Déat's authority a nascent documentary office for propaganda, placing it instead under the aegis of the party apparatus, which he controlled (Lefranc, 1963: 291–2).
 23. Blum had raised the issue of the neo-socialist dissidents' 'contagion' by fascist ideology (Blum, 1933). Déat and his allies took umbrage at this, and they insisted on their democratic commitments.
 24. The party's call to 'reorganize the State, rejuvenate its machinery, restore its power' and its goal of restoring economic order through the organization of credit was meant to appeal to the middle classes, on which it staked its political distinction (Parti Socialiste de France, 1933: 2).
 25. Déat had for a couple of months been the Minister of Air in Albert Sarraut's caretaker government before the 1936 elections.
 26. For the different planist currents in the SFIO and the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), see Lefranc (1966, 1974). For the popularity of planism in this era, see Jackson (1985).
 27. André Brissaud calls the article 'the most explosive published in the world press' between 1919 and 1939 (Brissaud, 1965: 93).

28. For example, Marquet and Montagnon were involved in the founding of the RNP but quickly took their distance from the party. Charles Spinasse, who had been a planist within the SFIO and founded the pro-collaboration paper *Le Rouge et le Bleu*, was expelled from the RNP after publicly criticizing Déat's totalitarian drift (Gordon, 1980; Burrin, 2003[1986]).

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