


DIFFUSED RELIGION OF VALUES*

UDC 316.2 Durkheim E

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Abstract. *Modern diffused religion is not very different from that of the past. Indeed, it is precisely its persistence that gives it its peculiar characteristic. Diffused religion of values is the result of a vast process of religious socialization that continues to pervade cultural reality and not only that: it embraces central categories of religious behavior. It is reasonable to maintain that we are faced not only with a religion based on values largely shared, since they have been diffused chiefly through primary and, later, secondary socialization, but these very values can be seen in themselves as a kind of religion.*

Key words: *religion, values, socialization, morality, faith. Emile Durkheim.*

1. FROM THE SOCIOLOGY OF MORALITY TO THE RELIGION OF VALUES

Once again Durkheim's thought proves to be fertile and seminal for empirical research that takes place long after the author's passing, more than a century ago. According to Durkheim (1920), morality is a set of principles or values that originate from the community, have been consolidated over time and have been introjected into individuals through different forms of socialization, starting with the primary one in the family. From this stage onwards, a continuum has been created, with a common thread running through the entire existential cycle of the subjects, even if not always in a completely visible way (Durkheim 1922). We could speak of a sort of karst phenomenon, which is active but does not become perceptible.

Then there is another peculiar characteristic of values: they are an obligation perceived as desired and as such considered sacred (Durkheim 1912, 1924, 1925). Consequently, values have much to do with religion, to the point of suggesting that they derive directly from it, so much so that they are connected to it. In more explicit terms, it seems legitimate to say that there would be a kind of religious morality or moral religion. It would therefore

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be difficult to establish a clear separation between morality and religion, or rather between religion and morality (Durkheim 1925; Engl. ed. 1961). After all, values, in this case, arise from a religious perspective, from a higher, metaphysical level, to which the sacredness of the group and the community is not extraneous, indeed it is quite intrinsic.

Nor should it be forgotten that values also correspond to institutions, structures, rituals, myths, narrations, symbols and people, which characterize the various moments of socialization processes, become part of everyday life, and a sort of mental and behavioral habitus. The same happens with religious beliefs. So, the diffusive dynamics are similar and convergent, and what is more, they may have the same contents.

2. SOCIALIZATION AND DISSEMINATION OF VALUES

The reinforcement of life's guiding principles occurs without interruption, especially in the infantile phase. Their implantation is comparable to that of a vaccine, which then also has its reminders, moments of reinvigoration, of a return to the predefined order, to the ranks, so to speak. It is often the celebrations, the solemnization of rites of passage and collective liturgies that reaffirm the relevance of values, making them even more enduring and resilient.

Among the principles with the greatest impact is certainly that of respect for the human person. This particular value is one of the most pervasive and can become even a typically secular feature, despite its likely religious origin (just think of the precept "love your neighbor as yourself", notoriously of Christian derivation and reflected in the so-called golden rule of not doing to others what you would not want done to yourself) (Ammerman 1997).

In addition to primary socialization in the family, one can also think of secondary socialization in schools, where values can continue to be transmitted, emphasized and cultivated, to make the heritage of values built up earlier, starting from the first years of life, more solid and resilient.

Durkheim's thinking has evolved over the years. This is not the place to follow it in all its developments. It, therefore, seems more appropriate to focus on a precise moment in his academic career and on the historical period he lived in 1902-1903 when he gave his course at the Sorbonne in Paris on moral education, of which we have 20 lectures written down in full, as they were probably dictated in the classroom. From the very first lecture, his concern was clear: "it has been decided to give our children, in schools, a purely secular moral education, by which is meant an education which precludes any reference to the principles on which revealed religions are based and which is based exclusively on ideas, feelings, and practices justifiable by reason alone, in short, a purely rationalistic education" (Durkheim 1961, 3).

3. MORALITY AND RELIGION

A few years after Durkheim's course on morality, on 9 December 1905, a law was passed in France, sanctioning the separation of Church and State, not exactly in an anti-religious key, because freedom of worship was guaranteed from the first article (Larkin 2004; Poulat 2010). Religious institutions were called "cultic associations". Almost all the sacred buildings belonging to the state, departments and municipal administrations were made available for worship.

Durkheim, who had a very particular and in some respects original way of thinking about morality, and who was endowed with a strong spirit of modernity and not detached

from a purely scientific viewpoint, thus fulfilled, at least in part, his wish. The essential nucleus of the French scholar's sociological vision is contained in the text of the first lecture in his course mentioned above. It is a few but intense pages, full of reflections and considerations, which deserve to be re-read to understand its deep meaning.

In brief and main points: at the beginning of human history, morality and religion went hand in hand, since the contents of one were not very distinguishable from those of the other and were reinforced by a reference to the divinity that presided over everything. With the passing of the centuries and the advent of science, promoter of rationality, the idea of a separation between the two spheres, moral and religious, became more widespread. But, the absolute distinction between the two visions of reality risks, in Durkheim's view, reducing the relevance of morality, which is no longer supported by reference to the divine. What is needed, then, is a new push forward, in search of other contents and different values that, leaving aside belief in God, can ensure the survival of society against the individualistic pressures that are adverse to morality.

It is worth following more closely, step by step, the reasoning of Durkheim, who takes note of the fact that "education has been secularised for centuries. It has sometimes been said that primitive peoples had no morals. This was a historical error: there are no people that do not have their morals, but the morals of the lower societies are not ours. It is characterised precisely by the fact that it is essentially religious" (Durkheim 1961, 6).

Thus, in times far removed from us, there would have been a certain overlap between morality and religion, which was justified and consolidated by recourse to the divine being, to whom acts of worship, considered obligatory, were addressed. In practice, early morality and religion did not direct human beings' attention to their fellow human beings, but rather to a God, revered according to pre-established forms and handed down from one generation to the next over the centuries: "the most numerous and important duties are not those which man has towards other men, but those which he has towards his gods. The main duty is not to respect one's neighbour, to help him, to assist him, but to perform the prescribed rites with precision, to give to the gods what is due to them and, if necessary, even to sacrifice oneself to their glory" (Durkheim 1961, 6).

The author's crucial consideration is quite clear: the objective of morality has been distorted since it does not concern people but a supernatural power, towards which one turns one's gaze and performs liturgical services. The latter, then, are practiced with great care and meticulousness, since this is the very meaning of religion, at least in Cicero's interpretation (*De natura deorum ad M. Brutum liber secundus*: 28, 72), applied to the religious fact, which Durkheim seems to know and echo when he uses the expression "with precision". The philosopher and orator from Arpino wrote "*qui autem omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter retractarent et tamquam relegerent, sunt dicti religiosi ex relegere*" (those who, on the contrary, follow diligently and as if they observe with care all that concerns the cult of the gods are called religious by the verb *relegere*). It is precisely for this reason that "moral education could not but be as essentially religious as morality itself, and only religious notions could serve as the basis for an education whose main object was to teach a man how to behave towards religious beings" (Durkheim 1961, 6).

Way ahead of his time, the French scholar observed that "although there are still religious duties in the strict sense of the word, that is, rituals addressed only to the divinity, the place they occupy and the importance attached to them are shrinking" (Durkheim 1961, 7). If reverence for God is reduced, it does not lose its moral role. In truth, Durkheim objects,

“moral discipline was not instituted for him but men” (Durkheim 1961, 7). This is precisely the point: morality leads to the worship of God, but is not oriented in favor of humanity. To this end, secular and rational education has been promoted, but it is not enough to expunge religious content. But, it is not enough to remove the religious content. Instead, there must be a complete change, of course, aimed at overcoming the existing combination of morality and religion. This can be achieved by unearthing in religious realities certain moral elements to be remodeled and re-proposed in a rational key.

Nor should it be forgotten that morality carries with it an aura of sacredness, saved from religion and because morality and religion are perceived as emanations of divinity. If religion were to be separated from morality, the latter would suffer because it would no longer have its sacred character. To Durkheim, it seems appropriate to find a functional substitute for the divine in empirical reality. But, he also saw the risk of depriving morality of its main source of legitimation. For this, “it is not enough to discard, we must replace. It is necessary to discover those moral forces which men have not yet learned to depict for themselves except in the form of religious allegories” (Durkheim 1961, 11).

The remedy is to be found in symbols, to be used in socialization, without mythological and theological mediation. But, we also need other new tools, other ideas, which are different from those of the past, together with the full awareness of being able to move towards other horizons. Not only that. We must aim to go beyond private morality and the simple realization of peaceful exchanges because this is not enough. The goal to be achieved is to set oneself an ideal through an industrious activity, all aimed at nourishing itself by having recourse to new sources. Thus, the moral education system has to be reformed from scratch, drawing also on some useful elements from the past and taking into account the changes that have taken place in the meantime.

It was Durkheim’s conviction that morality could indeed be shared on a societal level, but in the last years of his life, he saw his illusions about the possibility of a cohesive society fall apart. Moreover, during the First World War, he was an absolute pacifist, unlike Simmel and Weber (Maniscalco 2010). Deeply saddened by the death of his son in combat, the Sorbonne sociologist died soon afterwards.

4. MORALITY AND VALUES

Morality is made up of norms, behavioral rules, ideals, values, representations of reality and states of individual and collective consciousness that are translated into concrete and empirically more easily detectable acts, generically called customs, practices and conduct. However, there is a tendency to distinguish what sociologists, and especially French ethno-anthropologists, call *moeurs*, i.e. ways of acting, feeling and thinking that correspond to customs, habits and models of behaviour considered socially and culturally acceptable. Philosophical, sociological and speculative reflections on all this, in general, fall within the scope of ethics.

The most problematic question concerns the foundation of morality and in particular its origin, which is attributed in turn to religion, reason, so-called natural law and evolutionary psycho-physical heredity. However, it is sociology that has a sort of primacy on the subject, following the great efforts of one of its founding fathers, the aforementioned Émile Durkheim, who, in his teaching entitled “Morals and Sociology”, sought to go beyond the speculative

perspective and move on to both the interpretation of facts and the possible social application of the results of research.

His interest in the problem of the transmission of moral content to new generations was also not accidental. After all, the main idea was to constitute sociology as a moral guide for society, to respond to the challenges of anomie, lack of integration and the consequences of development, with particular reference to the division of social labor (Durkheim 1893).

Another concern of Durkheim's was the maintenance of social order, cohesion and solidarity, which was greatly challenged by excessive individualism. He, therefore, aimed to recognize the value of respecting the individual from a collective perspective. His vague idea of a "collective conscience" was transformed into that of "collective representations", the contents of which were beliefs and moral values, i.e. religion and morality together, both of which were aimed at pursuing the objective of the common good or, better, of communion with others. This could also take place regardless of God, but giving importance to the community and its particular ways of acting. This led to a form of sacralization of the person and, in fact, of community living.

Durkheim's project is quite explicit in the above-mentioned lectures of 1902-1903, which focus on secular morality and are developed along three lines: the spirit of discipline, i.e. duty, attachment to social groups, i.e. self-denial, and autonomy of the will, i.e. freedom (Durkheim 1961, 17-157). Once the theoretical framework has been broadly and persuasively explained, Durkheim turns to the practical, operational aspects, with particular attention to the educational relationship with the child. In this context, the sociologist from Épinal moves along very concrete themes, with examples and solutions ranging from training to classroom discipline, from the influence of the environment to rewards, from the teaching of science to that of history (Durkheim 1961, 158-266).

5. FROM VALUES TO RELIGION

The theme of values brings with it a considerable complexity, which concerns, as already examined, the contents of the definition, but then extends to the plurality of meanings that accompany it, starting obviously and primarily with the diatribe on value judgments and the need for a non-evaluative sociological approach (Weber 1922). Well, in this regard it should be made clear that especially in research on religiosity it would be extremely misleading to let even the smallest interferences run their course, from the choice of the subject to the delimitation of the questions to be addressed, from the composition of the sample to the type of interviewers, from the number and characteristics of the researchers to the type of methods to be used. In this sense, every effort is mandatory to ensure the research team's marked heterogeneity of origin, ideological orientation, gender, age and competence, regardless of the level of responsibility and the task to be performed by each member. It can be said that any possible presence of pre-existing bias would certainly have been reduced, if not eliminated, thanks to the fact that in our qualitative survey, involving a total of 164 subjects, 80 people were involved, including scholars, analysts and surveyors, with a ratio of almost 2 to 1 between the number of respondents and the number of researchers in various capacities. Therefore, the diversity of the respondents in the research was such as to prevent the prevalence of an interpretative line due to the influence of any specific individual.

In Durkheim's view, it is preferable to consider facts as objects, to avoid both value judgements and prejudices. One can practice "axiological neutrality", as Weber puts it, without condemning or approving, to understand the phenomenon under scrutiny better. However, it should not be forgotten that the scholar always has his own "value-relationship" and is therefore likely to respond to his study interests, his idiosyncrasies, the values of his reference environment and his basic orientations. It is also for this reason that in our research, space was given to a multi-method approach, to mitigate the weight of personal choices, more or less conscious.

The greatest attention was paid, however, to the values advocated, declared and experienced by the interviewees. The respondents express opinions and perform actions according to their vision of reality, which to a large extent depends on the relationship with the values that govern the individual's social behavior. When people act, at whatever level, they usually do so with an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of their action. They tend, therefore, to be convinced of what they are doing. And they experience the relationship that is established between the desire for something and the object of their desire itself, which acquires value in its turn. In short, we go from the values that constantly accompany social actors to the values they attribute to what they aspire to obtain, possess, attain and manage.

If the researcher is obliged not to assert (it is precisely the case to use this verb) his values, because he is obliged to respect the rules of science and his professional deontology, the other interlocutors, i.e. the real protagonists of every investigation, are quite obviously free to express value judgements all the time, weighing up the convenience or otherwise of saying and doing, thus making the sociologist's work of analysis possible. A respondent's attitudes and behavior are, however, dictated by basic values, precognitions, norms and habits.

Above all, the declarations of a respondent, questioned in a completely free or guided way, make it possible to grasp the links between different types of values, e.g. political, economic, social, religious, and the cultural context of belonging, as well as to establish what role the respondent plays in a community or the larger society.

This raises the question of the different values that can influence the individual. These may be values possessed and cultivated by the individual, or collective principles derived from constant and lifelong attendance at a group, association, organization or church. But, how can individual values be distinguished from collective ones? An adequate knowledge of the areas with which the respondent is familiar is therefore necessary.

There is a very close link between the religious dimension and values, as we have already seen. It is a long-standing link. Ancient societies took it for granted, as a matter of routine, without raising any problems. This gave rise to communities that tended to be homogeneous, with fairly homogeneous beliefs, behaviors and rituals that were very similar to those of the past. In practice, values were to a large extent of a religious nature and had as a connecting point a deity or several gods. Most decisions were made based on religiously motivated assessments, which, moreover, had a strong dose of sacredness and respectability.

With the advent of modernity and secularization, the connection between morality and religion went into crisis, which is why the essential values were no longer just religious but significantly differentiated. With the disenchantment of the world, the previous spell was broken and societies experienced greater stratification, starting with the division of labor (Durkheim 1893). The communion of values was shattered, with the demands of industrial society prevailing.

The values of the group to which they belonged were no longer able to withstand the new individual needs. There was a shift from community values to greater personal

autonomy. In this way, the same religious content no longer distinguished individuals, who had previously been cohesive in their adherence to family, parental, friendship and co-religionist groups. There has indeed been an erosion of religious values, but those who have resisted the trends and kept their previous traditions alive have not disappeared completely. It must be borne in mind that values cannot remain the same over millennia and centuries. Societies move on, progress, change from generation to generation. New impulses come to the forefront of society and move the entire societal system to other places. Conflicts of values also arise within a religion, with supporters of the status quo and advocates of change at all costs on opposing sides. The history of religions abounds with examples of splits that have originated from disputes over values: from Ashkenazis to Sephardim in the Jewish world, from Catholics to Protestants in the Christian sphere, from Sunnis to Shiites in the Islamic sphere and from Mahayana to Hinayana in Buddhist culture. In short, there are many realities in which we are witnessing a real “war of the gods”, as Weber put it, i.e. a very close confrontation between values and identities. To make Weber's thinking more specific, one can speak of values acting as “gods of various orders”, i.e. deities that give rise to a polytheism of values (Weber 1997b). The conflict between values increases more and more as society becomes more rationalized. Dualism concerns the contrast between the ethics of principles or convictions (an attitude typical of the religious person) and the ethics of responsibility or taking responsibility for consequences (a mode typical of the political person) (Weber 1997a).

6. VALUES AND FAITH

Without wishing to reopen the long-standing and debated question of the difference between religion as Church and religiosity as sentiment, of Simmel's memory (Simmel 1992, 167-168), it is useful instead, at least in our case, to consider the concept of religion in a sense that is very similar to the idea of belief and in particular to the fact of believing that there is something and that it has real consistency.

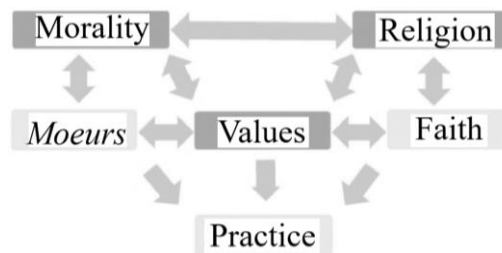
Values have a bidirectional relationship with religion or belief: they are a founding part of it and are influenced by it at the same time. Take, for example, the values most mentioned and appreciated by our 164 respondents in our national research in Italy a few years ago: family, respect, justice, solidarity, welcoming and sharing. These are all concepts which it is not difficult to label as Durkheimian because they are peculiarly present in the works of the French sociologist: first of all, the idea of solidarity (Rosati 2002), which in some way also suggests the other elements (think of family solidarity, solidarity-based attention towards others, solidarity-based feelings of social justice for all, the spirit of generosity inherent in hospitality and the generosity of sharing). The other values most often recalled in the interviews are work, sport, friendship and honesty, which, in continuity with the main values mentioned above, confirm the altruistic propensity already present in the family, respect, justice, solidarity, welcoming and sharing: altruism is a sociological category that is Durkheimian (1961, 207-222), as well as Comtian (Comte 1851: 566). After all, work is at the heart of everyday life on weekdays just as sport is at the heart of everyday life on Sundays, while friendship and honesty merely reiterate the attitude of openness to relationships and consideration for one's interlocutors. It is hardly worth noting that these same values can also be found in religions other than the one that is most widespread in Italy (Catholicism), albeit with different attenuations or emphases.

This, however, supports the conjecture of the existence of a virtuous circle between religion and values, with constant interactive exchanges, implemented through positive retroactions, i.e. reciprocal adaptations.

From religion (or belief that) one then moves on to faith (or belief in), emblematically represented by trust in God, which in turn produces a double effect concerning values, since it reinvigorates them and is consolidated by them. The process is completed by the externalization of religion, faith and values in religious practice, a usual field of research for the sociology of religion, especially in the second half of the last century.

To the same extent, another parallel development should be taken into account, which originates from morality, is reinforced through the repetitiveness of customary behavior, that is, the *moeurs* mentioned by Montesquieu (1748), and is expressed in participation in religious rites and other manifest acts of lived religiosity.

The set of processes described has its internal organization that can be represented graphically in the figure below (Fig. 1), in which the pair constituted by morality and religion acts as the source and matrix of the flow that reaches the *moeurs*, values and faith and then reverberates, finally, in practice.



Opinions on religion vary among the respondents. Some considered it to be the simple fruit of a family upbringing (“I grew up in a religious family, where I received certain teachings and I carry them on”), but for others, it “serves to explain something where science does not reach” or, according to a more secular view, it has a typically cultural character to be valued positively, as a useful social tool.

For those who make their views known, religion is generally recognized as having certain importance. More than half of our Italian respondents (a total of 138 out of 164) attach great importance to religion: 72 out of 138. Others, on the other hand, consider it to be of negligible importance (32 out of 138) and still, others deny any importance (34 out of 138). In practice, there is a four-way split, because the 32 people who did not express any opinion should be added (Cipriani 2020).

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DIFUZNA RELIGIJA VREDNOSTI

Moderna difuzna religija nije mnogo drugačija od one iz prošlosti. Zapravo, upravo njena postojanost daje joj njenu posebnu osobenost. Difuzna religija vrednosti rezultat je širokog procesa religijske socijalizacije, koji nastavlja da prožima kulturnu stvarnost, ali ne samo nju: ona obuhvata ključne kategorije religijskog ponašanja. Razumno je tvrditi da se suočavamo ne samo sa religijom zasnovanom na vrednostima koje su u velikoj meri zajednički prihvaćene, jer su se širile prvenstveno kroz primarnu, a zatim i sekundarnu socijalizaciju, već se te iste vrednosti mogu posmatrati kao vrsta religije same po sebi.

Ključne reči: religija, vrednosti, socijalizacija, moral, vera, Emil Dirkem.