

Emile Durkheim

Durkheim's Professional Goals:

- I. Find a scientific basis for social order (collective conscience)
- II. Use sociology to explain how society works (division of labor)
- III. Establish sociology as a separate discipline from philosophy or psychology

Durkheim proposed that "collective conscience" is at the basis of mutual trust, and subsequently the basis of social order.

Durkheim explained that people will not "honor" economic or social contracts without a precondition of trust/solidarity; a feeling of moral obligation based on collective conscience.

He referred to this precondition as "precontractual solidarity"

What causes people to trust one another?

What about physical force?
Could this be what initially caused people to "honor" contracts rather than trust?

Thinking of today, when there is a lack of mutual trust in the workplace, what happens?

What does the employer do?
The employees?

Employers look over the shoulder of employees. Fire them without cause.

Employees have lower productivity. Create unions. Have little commitment to the organization.

What did Durkheim believe caused people to trust one another?

A collective (shared) Consciousness

So what does Durkheim mean by Collective Conscience:

"It is a feeling of contact with something outside yourself that does not depend precisely on any one person there, but which everyone participates in together."

Durkheim suggests that when multiple persons are focused on the same thing, moral agreements develop.

That is, moral agreements and subsequently rituals result from multiple social interactions.

What are some "positive" rituals that strengthen the collective conscience?

- saluting the flag
- Pledge of allegiance
- National holidays
- Religious holidays
- Sporting events?

The moral agreements, rituals, and obligations eventually become a part of a collective conscience that each person has and contributes to.

As the collective conscience grows (in the form of "society"), criminal and civil laws are created to enforce the moral agreements and obligations.

Social order is created.

What allows for social order?
Is it common moral order (Durkheim, Comte) or rational self-interest (Saint Simon, Marx)?

No. 5 A&M beats UNT with goal in extra time

from UNT sports information
COLLEGE STATION — The North Texas soccer team was 45 seconds away from tying the 1985-ranked team in the nation, but Texas A&M snuffed with a 2-1 double overtime victory after Katie Mueller scored on a free kick outside the 35-yard line Sunday at 10:58 a.m.

North Texas soccer

THE AM. 2, UNT 1

Despite being number 150 in the first half, the Mean Green offense converted its first opportunity at the start of the second period. Katie Mueller scored her first goal of the season, and it was a big one. The goalie forward shot from in the box and placed it to the left of a diving keeper.

The Aggies continued to pepper the Mean Green goal with shots throughout the second period, but North Texas goalkeeper Jackie Kometz held strong, recording one of her best performances of her career. The resilient senior finished with a career-high 25 saves.

It wasn't until the 124th minute that the Aggies were able to penetrate the Mean Green defense and tie the game, 1-1, after a strike in the penalty box following a free kick.

Durkheim defined two types of division of labor:

"mechanical solidarity"
(few occupational positions, eg. a tribe)

"organic solidarity"
(many occupational positions; like organs of the body that are different but work together)

With mechanical solidarity everyone expects others to do the same as themselves.

When they do not, the anger and subsequent punishment is severe (cut off a hand for stealing a loaf of bread)

How might this be related to, say, anger at another motorist when you are driving?

With organic solidarity comes less anger when moral norms are broken.

This is because people have more difficulty understanding the circumstances of the other.

Example: highly industrial societies have weaker punishments than less industrialized societies. And, white collar crime is more acceptable.

Durkheim also discussed the relationship between deviance and the collective conscience.

What is deviance?

Deviance is the breaking of accepted rituals or moral feelings/beliefs held by the collective conscience.

Is deviance functional or dysfunctional for society or perhaps it affects society in both ways?

Why did Durkheim believe that deviance and crime is functional for society and its collective conscience?

Crime clarifies and defines what is important to the collective conscience.
Crime helps maintain solidarity through the ritual of punishment.

III. Durkheim attempted to show the importance of studying society as a separate discipline from philosophy or psychology.

In Durkheim's book Suicide, he used the scientific method to show that the explanations for suicide go beyond only psychological explanations.

How might he have done this?
What are some social causes of suicide?

Durkheim showed how the level of "social solidarity" (mechanical and organic) is related to suicide.

Are any of the causes of suicide related to one's feelings of attachment to the community? Perhaps feeling disconnected from the collective conscience?

Those least integrated into society are most likely to commit suicide (men, higher educated persons are more individualistic, being single)

The rate of suicide is down (i.e. less) during national crises.

Applying Durkheim's theory of "social solidarity," why might this be?

Durkheim in his book: The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, studied many primitive societies. He found a wide range of perspectives on what God is:

from belief that God is in an object, to God is an idea/spirit, to there is no conscious God (Buddhism and Confucianism).

Just as a feral child acted like a wolf because that is how s/he was socialized,

Durkheim concluded that people act and believe the way they do because of how they were socialized

Durkheim concluded:
"there is not one reality but many"

He found that "reality" varies with regard to perceptions of time, space, causality, God, the self.

What is ethnocentrism?

For example: the physical world is not what we see because we have superimposed our own values and beliefs over it.

And, one's perception of "space" is determined by the society one is in.

In Durkheim's study of religions, what would you guess was the one commonality of all religions?

the worship of sacred objects and ritual ceremonies (they did not all agree that there is a conscience God).

Thus, Durkheim found that religious or sacred ceremonies produced social solidarity or a sense of belonging and subsequently social order.

Does this seem reasonable?

Durkheim believed that the God worshiped by religions is only a symbol for the collective conscious (or could he have gotten it reversed?).

And, the structure of society (mechanical vs organic) effects the collective conscious and so the view of God.

The Bible's Old and New Testaments were written for two different societies, one mechanical and one organic.

How is the view of God treated differently in the two Testaments?

Finally, Collins notes that Durkheim believed it was through the social solidarity produced from rituals and collective conscience that society remains at peace.

Where would you place the U.S. today on the continuum of social solidarity (i.e., weak to strong)?

Thank You.

Meditation/Religion and society
(positive effects)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZtkBi2LXI8&feature=related>

Religion and Society (negative effects)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxTZv8c_GBM&feature=related