David Émile Durkheim (French pronunciation: [ɛml dyrkœm]) (April 15, 1858 – November 15, 1917) was a French sociologist. He formally established the academic discipline and, with Karl Marx and Max Weber, is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science.\[1\]

Durkheim set up the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895, publishing his Rules of the Sociological Method. In 1896, he established the journal L'Année Sociologique. Durkheim's seminal monograph, Suicide (1897), a study of suicide rates amongst Catholic and Protestant populations, pioneered modern social research and served to distinguish social science from psychology or political philosophy.\[2\] Durkheim refined the positivism originally set forth by Auguste Comte, promoting epistemological realism and the hypothetico-deductive model. For him, sociology was the science of institutions, its aim being to discover structural "social facts":

"A social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations."\[3\]

Durkheim acknowledged the limitations of sociology, noting the necessity in social science to form theoretical concepts in the abstract:

"Science cannot describe individuals, but only types. If human societies cannot be classified, they must remain inaccessible to scientific description."\[4\]

Durkheim was a major proponent of structural functionalism, a foundational perspective in both sociology and anthropology.\[5\] [6] He remained a dominant force in French intellectual life until his death in 1917, presenting numerous lectures and published works on a variety of topics, including social stratification, religion, law, education, and deviance. Marcel Mauss, a notable social anthropologist of the pre-war era, was his nephew. Durkheimian terms such as "collective conscience" have since entered the popular discourse.\[7\]
Biography

Childhood and education

Durkheim was born in Épinal in Lorraine, coming from a long line of devout French Jews; his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had been rabbis. At an early age, he decided not to follow in his family's rabbinical footsteps. Durkheim himself would lead a completely secular life. Much of his work was dedicated to demonstrating that religious phenomena stemmed from social rather than divine factors. While Durkheim chose not to follow in the family tradition, he did not sever ties with his family or with the Jewish community. Many of his most prominent collaborators and students were Jewish, and some were blood relations. The exact influence of Jewish thought on Durkheim's work remains uncertain; some scholars have argued that Durkheim's thought is a form of secularized Jewish thought, while others argue that proving the existence of a direct influence of Jewish thought on Durkheim's achievements is difficult or impossible.

A precocious student, Durkheim entered the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in 1879. The entering class that year was one of the most brilliant of the nineteenth century and many of his classmates, such as Jean Jaurès and Henri Bergson would go on to become major figures in France's intellectual history. At the ENS, Durkheim studied under the direction of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, a classicist with a social scientific outlook, and wrote his Latin dissertation on Montesquieu. At the same time, he read Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. Thus Durkheim became interested in a scientific approach to society very early on in his career. This meant the first of many conflicts with the French academic system, which had no social science curriculum at the time. Durkheim found humanistic studies uninteresting, and he finished second to last in his graduating class when he aggregated in philosophy in 1882.

There was no way that a man of Durkheim's views could receive a major academic appointment in Paris. Thus in 1885 he decided to leave for Germany, where he studied sociology in Marburg, Berlin and Leipzig. As Durkheim indicated in several essays, it was in Leipzig that he learned to appreciate the value of empiricism and its language of concrete, complex things, in sharp contrast to the more abstract, clear and simple ideas of the Cartesian method.
Academic career

Durkheim traveled to Bordeaux in 1887, which had just started France's first teacher's training center. There he taught both pedagogy and sociology (the latter had never been taught in France before).[15] From this position Durkheim helped reform the French school system and introduced the study of social science in its curriculum. However, his controversial beliefs that religion and morality could be explained in terms purely of social interaction earned him many critics.

The 1890s were a period of remarkable creative output for Durkheim. In 1892 he published The Division of Labour in Society, his doctoral dissertation and fundamental statement of the nature of human society and its development.[16] Durkheim's interest in social phenomena was spurred on by politics. France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War led to the fall of the regime of Napoleon III, which was then replaced by the Third Republic. This in turn resulted in a backlash against the new secular and republican rule, as many people considered a vigorously nationalist approach necessary to rejuvenate France's fading power. Durkheim, a Jew and a staunch supporter of the Third Republic with a sympathy towards socialism, was thus in the political minority, a situation which galvanized him politically. The Dreyfus affair of 1894 only strengthened his activist stance.

In 1895 he published Rules of the Sociological Method, a manifesto stating what sociology is and how it ought to be done, and founded the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux. In 1898 he founded the journal L'Année Sociologique to publish and publicize the work of what was, by then, a growing number of students and collaborators (this is also the name used to refer to the group of students who developed his sociological program). Durkheim was familiar with several foreign languages and reviewed academic papers in German, English, and Italian for the journal. In 1897, he published Suicide, a case study which provided an example of what the sociological monograph might look like. Durkheim was one of the founders in using quantitative methods in criminology during his suicide case study.

By 1902 Durkheim had finally achieved his goal of attaining a prominent position in Paris when he became the chair of education at the Sorbonne. Because French universities are technically institutions for training secondary school teachers, this position gave Durkheim considerable influence — his lectures were the only ones that were mandatory for the entire student body. Despite what some considered, in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair, to be a political appointment, Durkheim consolidated his institutional power by 1912 when he was permanently assigned the chair and renamed it the chair of education and sociology. It was also in this year that he published his last major work, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.

The outbreak of World War I was to have a tragic effect on Durkheim's life. His leftism was always patriotic rather than internationalist — he sought a secular, rational form of French life. But the coming of the war and the inevitable nationalist propaganda that followed made it difficult to sustain this already nuanced position. While Durkheim actively worked to support his country in the war, his reluctance to give in to simplistic nationalist fervor (combined with his Jewish background) made him a natural target of the now-ascendant French Right. Even more seriously, the generation of students that Durkheim had trained were now being drafted to serve in the army, and many of them perished in the trenches. Finally, Durkheim's own son, André, died on the war front in December 1915 — a psychological blow from which Durkheim never recovered. Emotionally devastated and overworked, Durkheim collapsed of a stroke in Paris in 1917 and now lies buried at the Cimetière du Montparnasse in Paris.
Theories and ideas

Theoretical foundations of sociology

A fundamental influence on Durkheim's thought was the sociological positivism of Auguste Comte, who effectively sought to extend and apply the scientific method found in the natural sciences to the social sciences. According to Comte, a true social science should stress for empirical facts, as well as induce general scientific laws from the relationship among these facts. There were many points on which Durkheim agreed with the positivist thesis. First, he accepted that the study of society was to be founded on an examination of facts. Second, like Comte, he acknowledged that the only valid guide to objective knowledge was the scientific method. Third, he agreed with Comte that the social sciences could become scientific only when they were stripped of their metaphysical abstractions and philosophical speculation.\[17\]

A second influence on Durkheim's view of society beyond Comte's positivism was the epistemological outlook called social realism. Although he never explicitly exposed it, Durkheim adopted a realist perspective in order to demonstrate the existence of social realities outside the individual and to show that these realities existed in the form of the objective relations of society.\[18\] As an epistemology of science, realism can be defined as a perspective which takes as its central point of departure the view that external social realities exist in the outer world and that these realities are independent of the individual's perception of them. This view opposes other predominant philosophical perspectives such as empiricism and positivism. Empiricists such as David Hume had argued that all realities in the outside world are products of human sense perception. According to empiricists, all realities are thus merely perceived: they do not exist independently of our perceptions, and have no causal power in themselves.\[18\] Comte's positivism went a step further by claiming that scientific laws could be deduced from empirical observations. Going beyond this, Durkheim claimed that sociology would not only discover "apparent" laws, but would be able to discover the inherent nature of society.

Throughout his career, Durkheim was concerned primarily with how societies could maintain their integrity and coherence in the modern era, when things such as shared religious and ethnic background could no longer be assumed. To study social life in modern societies, he hence sought to create one of the first rigorous scientific approaches to social phenomena. Along with Herbert Spencer, he was one of the first people to explain the existence and quality of different parts of a society by reference to what function they served in maintaining the quotidian (i.e. by how they make society "work"), and is thus sometimes seen as a precursor to functionalism. Durkheim also insisted that society was more than the sum of its parts. Thus unlike his contemporaries Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber, he focused not on what motivates the actions of individuals (an approach associated with methodological individualism), but rather on the study of social facts.

Social facts

Durkheim's work revolved around the study of social facts, a term he coined to describe phenomena that have an existence in and of themselves and are not bound to the actions of individuals. Durkheim argued that social facts have, sui generis, an independent existence greater and more objective than the actions of the individuals that compose society. Being exterior to the individual person, social facts may thus also exercise coercive power on the various people composing society, as it can sometimes be observed in the case of formal laws and regulations, but also in phenomena such as church practices or family norms.\[19\] Unlike the facts studied in natural sciences, a "social" fact thus refers to a specific category of phenomena: it consists of ways of acting, thinking, feeling, external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him. According to Durkheim, these phenomena cannot be reduced to biological or psychological grounds.\[20\]

Hence even the most "individualistic" or "subjective" phenomena, such as suicide, would be regarded by Durkheim as objective social facts. Individuals composing society do not directly cause suicide: suicide, as a social fact, exists independently in society, whether an individual person wants it or not. Whether a person "leaves" a society does not
change anything to the fact that this society will still contain suicides. Sociology's task thus consists of discovering the qualities and characteristics of such social facts, which can be discovered through a quantitative or experimental approach (Durkheim extensively relied on statistics).[21]

Method and objectivity

In his Rules of the Sociological Method (1895), Durkheim expressed his will to establish a method that would guarantee sociology's truly scientific character. One of the questions raised by the author concerns the objectivity of the sociologist: how may one study an object that, from the very beginning, conditions and relates to the observer? According to Durkheim, observation must be as impartial and impersonal as possible, even though a "perfectly objective observation" in this sense may never be attained. A social fact must always be studied according to its relation with other social facts, never according to the individual who studies it. Sociology should therefore privilege comparison rather than the study of singular independent facts.[22]

It has been noted, at times with disapproval and amazement by non-French social scientists, that Durkheim traveled little and that, like many French scholars and the notable British anthropologist Sir James Frazer, he never undertook any fieldwork. The vast information Durkheim studied on the aboriginal tribes of Australia and New Guinea and on the Inuit was all collected by other anthropologists, travelers, or missionaries.[23]

This was not due to provincialism or lack of attention to the concrete. Durkheim did not intend to make venturesome and dogmatic generalizations while disregarding empirical observation. He did, however, maintain that concrete observation in remote parts of the world does not always lead to illuminating views on the past or even on the present. For him, facts had no intellectual meaning unless they were grouped into types and laws. He claimed repeatedly that it is from a construction erected on the inner nature of the real that knowledge of concrete reality is obtained, a knowledge not perceived by observation of the facts from the outside. He thus constructed concepts such as the sacred and totemism exactly in the same way that Karl Marx developed the concept of class.[23]

Sociological studies

Education

Durkheim was also interested in education. Partially this was because he was professionally employed to train teachers, and he used his ability to shape curriculum to further his own goals of having sociology taught as widely as possible. More broadly, though, Durkheim was interested in the way that education could be used to provide French citizens the sort of shared, secular background that would be necessary to prevent anomie in modern societies. It was to this end that he also proposed the formation of professional groups to serve as a source of solidarity for adults. Durkheim argued that education has many functions:

1. To reinforce social solidarity
   - History: Learning about individuals who have done good things for the many makes an individual feel insignificant.
   - Pledging allegiance: Makes individuals feel part of a group and therefore less likely to break rules.
2. To maintain social role
   - School is a society in miniature. It has a similar hierarchy, rules, expectations to the "outside world." It trains young people to fulfill roles.
3. To maintain division of labour.
   - School sorts students into skill groups, encouraging students to take up employment in fields best suited to their abilities.
Crime
Durkheim's views on crime were a departure from conventional notions. He believed that crime is "bound up with the fundamental conditions of all social life" and serves a social function. He stated that crime implies, "not only that the way remains open to necessary change, but that in certain cases it directly proposes these changes... crime [can thus be] a useful prelude to reforms." In this sense he saw crime as being able to release certain social tensions and so have a cleansing or purging effect in society. He further stated that "the authority which the moral conscience enjoys must not be excessive; otherwise, no-one would dare to criticize it, and it would too easily congeal into an immutable form. To make progress, individual originality must be able to express itself...[even] the originality of the criminal... shall also be possible" (Durkheim, 1895).

Law
Beyond the specific study of crime, criminal law and punishment, Durkheim was deeply interested in the study of law and its social effects in general. Among classical social theorists he is one of the founders of the field of sociology of law. In his early work he saw types of law, distinguished as repressive versus restitutive law (characterised by their sanctions), as a direct reflection of types of social solidarity. The study of law was therefore of interest to sociology for what it could reveal about the nature of solidarity. Later, however, he emphasised the significance of law as a sociological field of study in its own right. In the later Durkheimian view, law (both civil and criminal) is an expression and guarantee of society's fundamental values. Durkheim emphasised the way that modern law increasingly expresses a form of moral individualism - a value system that is, in his view, probably the only one universally appropriate to modern conditions of social solidarity. Individualism, in this sense, is the basis of human rights and of the values of individual human dignity and individual autonomy. It is to be sharply distinguished from selfishness and egoism, which for Durkheim are not moral stances at all. Many of Durkheim's closest followers, such as Marcel Mauss, Paul Fauconnet and Paul Huvelin also specialised in or contributed to the sociological study of law.

Suicide
In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim explores the differing suicide rates among Protestants and Catholics, arguing that stronger social control among Catholics results in lower suicide rates. According to Durkheim, Catholic society has normal levels of integration while Protestant society has low levels. There are at least two problems with this interpretation. First, Durkheim took most of his data from earlier researchers, notably Adolph Wagner and Henry Morselli, who were much more careful in generalizing from their own data. Second, later researchers found that the Protestant-Catholic differences in suicide seemed to be limited to German-speaking Europe and thus may always have been the spurious reflection of other factors. Despite its limitations, Durkheim's work on suicide has influenced proponents of control theory, and is often mentioned as a classic sociological study. Durkheim's study of suicide has been criticized as an example of the logical error termed the ecological fallacy. Indeed, Durkheim's conclusions about individual behaviour (e.g. suicide) are based on aggregate statistics (the suicide rate among Protestants and Catholics). This type of inference, explaining micro events in terms of macro properties, is often misleading, as is shown by examples of Simpson's paradox. However, diverging views have contested whether Durkheim's work really contained an ecological fallacy. Van Poppel and Day (1996) have advanced that differences in suicide rates between Catholics and Protestants were explicable entirely in terms of how deaths were categorized between the two social groups. For instance, while "sudden deaths" or "deaths from ill-defined or unspecified cause" would often be recorded as suicides among Protestants, this would not be the case for Catholics. Hence Durkheim would have committed an empirical rather than logical error. Some, such as Inkeles (1959), Johnson (1965) and Gibbs (1968), have claimed that Durkheim's only intent was to explain suicide sociologically within a holistic perspective, emphasizing that "he intended his theory to explain variation among social environments in the incidence of suicide, not the suicides of
More recent authors such as Berk (2006) have also questioned the micro-macro relations underlying Durkheim's work. For instance, Berk notices that Durkheim speaks of a "collective current" that reflects the collective inclination flowing down the channels of social organization. The intensity of the current determines the volume of suicides (...) Introducing psychological [i.e. individual] variables such as depression, [which could be seen as] an independent [non-social] cause of suicide, overlooks Durkheim's conception that these variables are the ones most likely to be effected by the larger social forces and without these forces suicide may not occur within such individuals.

Durkheim stated that there are four types of suicide:

- **Egoistic suicides** are the result of a weakening of the bonds that normally integrate individuals into the collectivity: in other words a breakdown or decrease of social integration. Durkheim refers to this type of suicide as the result of "excessive individuation", meaning that the individual becomes increasingly detached from other members of his community. Those individuals who were not sufficiently bound to social groups (and therefore well-defined values, traditions, norms, and goals) were left with little social support or guidance, and therefore tended to commit suicide on an increased basis. An example Durkheim discovered was that of unmarried people, particularly males, who, with less to bind and connect them to stable social norms and goals, committed suicide at higher rates than married people.

- **Altruistic suicides** occur in societies with high integration, where individual needs are seen as less important than the society's needs as a whole. They thus occur on the opposite integration scale as egoistic suicide. As individual interest would not be considered important, Durkheim stated that in an altruistic society there would be little reason for people to commit suicide. He stated one exception, namely when the individual is expected to kill themselves on behalf of society -- a primary example being the soldier in military service.

- **Anomic suicides** are the product of moral deregulation and a lack of definition of legitimate aspirations through a restraining social ethic, which could impose meaning and order on the individual conscience. This is symptomatic of a failure of economic development and division of labour to produce Durkheim's organic solidarity. People do not know where they fit in within their societies. Durkheim explains that this is a state of moral disorder where man's desires are limitless and, thus, his disappointments are infinite.

- **Fatalistic suicides** occur in overly oppressive societies, causing people to prefer to die than to carry on living within their society. This is an extremely rare reason for people to take their own lives, but a good example would be within a prison; people prefer to die than live in a prison with constant abuse and excessive regulation that prohibits them from pursuing their desires.

These four types of suicide are based on the degrees of imbalance of two social forces: social integration and moral regulation. Durkheim noted the effects of various crises on social aggregates -- war, for example, leading to an increase in altruism, economic boom or disaster contributing to anomie.

**Religion**

In classical sociology, the study of religion was primarily concerned with two broad issues:

1. How did religion contribute to the maintenance of social order?
2. What was the relationship between religion and capitalist society?

These two issues were typically combined in the argument that industrial capitalism would undermine traditional religious commitment and thereby threaten the cohesion of society. More recently the subject has been narrowly defined as the study of religious institutions. In his article, 'The Origin Of Beliefs' Émile Durkheim placed himself in the positivist tradition, meaning that he thought of his study of society as dispassionate and scientific. He was deeply interested in the problem of what held complex modern societies together. Religion, he argued, was an expression of social cohesion. His underlying interest was to understand the existence of religion in the absence of belief in any
religion's actual tenets. Durkheim saw totemism as the most basic form of religion. It is in this belief system that the fundamental separation between the sacred and the profane is most clear. All other religions, he said, are outgrowths of this distinction, adding to it myths, images, and traditions. The totemic animal, Durkheim believed, was the expression of the sacred and the original focus of religious activity because it was the emblem for a social group, the clan. Religion is thus an inevitable, just as society is inevitable when individuals live together as a group.

Durkheim presented five elementary forms of religious life (The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life; Conclusion) to be found in all religions, from the more "primitive" to Judeo/Christian/Moslem. These are: 1. Sacred/Profane division of the world; 2. Belief in souls, spirits, mythical personalities 3. Belief in divinity, either local or multi-local 4. a negative or ascetic cult within the religion 5. Rites of oblation, communion, imitation, commemoration or expiation.

He argued that these five forms were communal experiences, thereby distinguishing religion from magic. Durkheim thought that the model for relationships between people and the supernatural was the relationship between individuals and the community. He is famous for suggesting that "God is society, writ large." Durkheim believed that people ordered the physical world, the supernatural world, and the social world according to similar principles. Durkheim's first purpose was to identify the social origin of religion as he felt that religion was a source of camaraderie and solidarity. It was the individual's way of becoming recognizable within an established society. His second purpose was to identify links between certain religions in different cultures, finding a common denominator. Belief in supernatural realms and occurrences may not stem through all religions, yet there is a clear division in different aspects of life, certain behaviours and physical things.

In the past, he argued, religion had been the cement of society—the means by which men had been led to turn from the everyday concerns in which they were variously enmeshed to a common devotion to sacred things. His definition of religion, favoured by anthropologists of religion today, was, "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e., things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." (The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Book 1, Ch. 1)

Durkheim believed that "society has to be present within the individual." He saw religion as a mechanism that shored up or protected a threatened social order. He thought that religion had been the cement of society in the past, but that the collapse of religion would not lead to a moral implosion. Durkheim was specifically interested in religion as a communal experience rather than an individual one. He also says that religious phenomena occur when a separation is made between the profane (the realm of everyday activities) and the sacred (the realm of the extraordinary and the transcendent); these are different depending what man chooses them to be. An example of this is wine at communion, as it is not only wine but represents the blood of Christ. Durkheim believed that religion is 'society divinised', as he argues that religion occurs in a social context. He also, in lieu of forefathers before who tried to replace the dying religions, urged people to unite in a civic morality on the basis that we are what we are as a result of society.

Durkheim condensed religion into four major functions:
1. Disciplinary, forcing or administrating discipline
2. Cohesive, bringing people together, a strong bond
3. Vitalizing, to make livelier or vigorous, vitalise, boost spirit
4. Euphoric, a good feeling, happiness, confidence, well-being
See also
- Anomie
- Antipositivism
- Collective consciousness
- Collective effervescence
- Normlessness
- Organic solidarity
- Positivism
- Social fact
- Social research
- Social structure
- Structural functionalism

Selected works
- Montesquieu's contributions to the formation of social science (1892)
- The Division of Labour in Society (1893)
- Rules of the Sociological Method (1895)
- On the Normality of Crime (1895)
- Suicide (1897)
- The Prohibition of Incest and its Origins (1897), published in L'Année Sociologique, vol. 1, pp. 1–70
- Sociology and its Scientific Domain (1900), translation of an Italian text entitled "La sociologia e il suo dominio scientifico"
- The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912)
- Who Wanted War? (1914), in collaboration with Ernest Denis
- Germany Above All (1915)

Published posthumously:
- Education and Sociology (1922)
- Sociology and Philosophy (1924)
- Moral Education (1925)
- Socialism (1928)

Further reading
• Tekiner, Deniz (2002). “German Idealist Foundations of Durkheim’s Sociology and Teleology of Knowledge”, Theory and Science, III, 1, Online publication [38].

External links

About Durkheim:
• The Durkheim pages (University of Chicago) [39]
• Bibliography on Durkheim (McMaster University) [40]
• Annotated bibliography on Durkheim and Religion (University of North Carolina) [41]
• Review material for studying Émile Durkheim [42]

Online works:
• Moral Education [43]
• Professional Ethics and Civic Morals (collection of lectures) [44]
• Primitive Classification (with Marcel Mauss) [45]
• Pragmatism and Sociology (collection of lectures) [46]
• The Evolution of Educational Thought (selected writings) [47]
• For all of Durkheim’s works in French, including many unpublished essays, go to: http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/Durkheim_emile/durkheim.html
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