

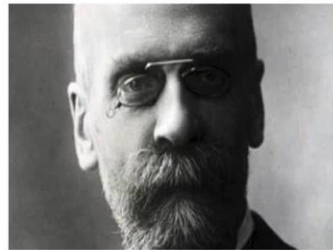
Classical Sociological Theory
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Lecture No. 26
Emile Durkheim: Life and Intellectual Influences

Welcome back to the class, we are beginning the discussion on Emile Durkheim a very important sociological thinker who we can say undoubtedly laid the foundation for the emergence of the discipline. These are the three people; Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, three intellectuals or trinities are considered to be the most significant scholars who shaped sociology in very distinct way.

Emile Durkheim as when we discuss the subsequent sections you will realize why that Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist is considered to be such an important figure and why that many of his arguments, substantive contributions are considered to be something so pivotal in the foundation as well as subsequent growth of the discipline.

In this class, an introductory session, we are trying to understand Emile Durkheim, his life, and most importantly the kind of intellectual influences of Emile Durkheim, who were the people who influenced his thinking, what was the kind of socio-economic and intellectual atmosphere during his time because these influences are something very important in shaping the contours of the theoretical as well as methodological orientation of every scholar.

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So, these are two photographs, very popular photographs of Emile Durkheim.

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- Central figure in classical sociological theories
- Contributions in the epistemology and methodology of sociology
- Contributions on the substantive themes of sociology such as religion, social facts, education, law, suicide, division of labour, ethics, social change and so on



He is a central figure in classical sociological theory. Durkheim's contribution is something quite immense and if you compare with Marx, you know that Marx was not a typical sociologist and it must have been clear by now for you that the stature of Marx cannot be reduced or cannot be understood within this label of a sociology, he was much more than that. I am not going into the detail but in comparison almost every other

sociologist whom we are going to discuss whether it is Max Weber or Emile Durkheim or Mead.

They were all kind of more of a typical sociologist in the confined sense of the meaning, they were academics, they were professors in some of the most famous universities, so they limited their sphere of interest within that of academics and like Marx who had a much larger life and much larger engagement with the life and so in that sense Durkheim was a sociologist, his intellectual influence, his intellectual inquiries were confined within the boundaries of this particular discipline and he is a central figure in classical sociological theories and he is somebody who laid foundations for the epistemological as well as methodological foundations of sociology.

Epistemology in the sense it is about the knowledge and methodology, how we carry on with a particular study. So, his contribution in defining what sort of a discipline or what sort of a knowledge system in sociology is something very important and we will see that when we discuss maybe in the next session or after that when we discuss his book very important book, 'The Root Sociological Method' we can see that he was actually trying to define sociology, he was trying to give shape to a new particular discipline, he was trying to establish a new particular discipline with very specific focus, with very specific definition that these are the purviews of this particular discipline.

This is its subject matter, it looks as these are its areas of interest and this is the way it is different from psychology, this is the way it is different from the philosophy, this is the way it is different from other disciplines. So, he played a very important role in establishing the epistemological uniqueness of sociology and also he played a very important role in defining a particular methodology for sociology and he was a positivist, he believed in positivism, he believed that sociology has to be treated as a science and he also believed in the overall argument that you can study society using scientific method the way scientists use science to understand the physical or natural world.

Along with these two aspects he shaped the discipline in very distinct ways. Also that his contribution to the substantive themes within sociology is also something quite phenomenal. He has, if you look into some of this themes like as he has written

extensively on religion, on social facts, on education, on law, on suicide division of labor, ethics, social change and host of substantive themes within sociology has been benefited by his theorization of his intellectual enterprise. So, in that sense his contribution is something quite immense.

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Biographical sketch



Émile Durkheim was born in Épinal, France, in 1858 in a Jewish family

Trained to become a rabbi, but soon lost interest in the divine aspect of religion and became an agnostic

- Admitted to École normale supérieure, one of the most prestigious graduate schools in Paris
- Joined University of Bordeaux where he wrote *The Division of Labor in Society*, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, and *Suicide*.



Now, a very brief biographical sketch. He was born in Epinal in France and he was born into a Jewish family, he his father wanted him to become a Rabbi but soon he lost all the interest in the religion, he was influenced by quite a lot of philosophical arguments that took a very critical position on religion and he later became a kind of an agnostic, completely moved away from the conventional religious settings of a Jewish family and then became very radical in his argument and later admitted to Ecole normale superieure, one of the most prestigious graduate schools in Paris, considered to be very elite place in Paris.

Later he joined university of Bordeaux where he wrote the Division of Labor in Society, The Rules of Sociological Method and Suicide. So, exactly in the university of Bordeaux, he establishes the kind of the discipline of sociology as a unique discipline, as a distinct discipline and this 'division of labor', the book is his doctoral research where he establishes a very unique argument and understanding about a very unique approach towards studying society and social change.

The Rules of Sociological Method is a canonical text for sociology which lays down the foundation of how one should methodologically understand the discipline or what should be the kind of methodological protocols of the discipline and of course, is very famous study on suicide.

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- He could revitalize the dream of August Comte of a 'scientific study of society with a moral basis'
- Became a professor of sociology at University of Sorbonne in 1913.
- Continue to edit the journal *L'Année* and became extremely influential academic, especially in the field of school education
- He passed away in 1917 at the age of 59, severely affected by the death of his son in the World War I



He could revitalize the dream of Auguste Comte of a scientific study of society with a moral basis. So, this is something extremely important in the kind of connection between Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, we will discuss in a couple of down the slides, but if Auguste Comte had a dream of making sociology as a science of society especially with the kind of particular moral basis we could say that he could revitalize and he could even establish it to a large extent, he succeeded in establishing the discipline as a distinct one. So, he got even the name of this university, the department of Sorbonne changed into that of a department of Sociology as well.

He became a professor of sociology at University of Sorbonne in 1913, one of the first full professorships in sociology and his writings became extremely important, he was able to influence quite a lot of students and then he was the editor of this very extremely influential journal *L'Année* and became extremely influential academic especially in the school of education and he was able to create a set of scholars and students and then became a very predominant figure in the French intellectual circles.

He passed away in 1917 at a relatively young age of 59 and it seems that this World War 1 had taken a toll on him, many of his promising students were killed in the battle and his own son who was also emerging as a very important sociologist was also killed. So, Emile Durkheim became quite dejected and he lost interest in his academic endeavors and then passed away prematurely at the age of 59.

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Intellectual Influences



- Durkheim's work represents the culmination of the French intellectual tradition that began with the Enlightenment
- Heavily influenced by French thinkers, English and German scholars



So, let us move on to the intellectual influences, who were the people who influenced Durkheim and what were the kind of very specific set of ideas that he borrowed from these people and what were the aspects that he was critical of these people and as I have mentioned several times no scholar creates a set of ideas without any influence, it does not really happen that way, every scholar who creatively and critically engages with the kind of current important academic or intellectual currents of his time, in the intellectual thoughts of his time and that engagement, that critical or reflexive engagement gives rise to new arguments, new theories, new refinements and kind of different arguments.

So, Durkheim also was able to put forward all lot of new ideas because he very successfully, very critically engaged with the host of the people who have contributed to the discipline of sociology and social philosophy before him. So, Durkheim's work represents the culmination of the French intellectual tradition that began with the enlightenment. We had a brief discussion in the beginning of the course, where we

discuss the role of French revolution and people like Montesquieu and host of others who played very important role in bringing a much revitalized philosophical discussion about the role of society, individual, state and a host of other things.

He was also heavily influenced by French thinkers, English and German scholars. Being a scholar of his caliber it is quite natural that he very critically engages with the people around him.

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Montesquieu



- Montesquieu marked the beginning of a French intellectual line that came to a climax with Durkheim
- He was an empiricist, concerned with actual data rather than speculation about the essence of humans and the ultimate origins of their society.
- Montesquieu was the first to recognize, Durkheim believed, that "morals, manners, customs," and the "spirit of a nation" are subject to scientific investigation.



So, one of the important scholars who we need to identify is Montesquieu. Montesquieu being a French sociologist, we had a brief discussion on Montesquieu earlier in the initial classes of this course. Montesquieu marked the beginning of the French intellectual line that came to a climax with Durkheim. So, there are quite a lot of observers who identify this as a particular intellectual tradition starting with Montesquieu and then ending with Durkheim, because he was an empiricist concerned with the actual data rather than the speculation about the essence of humans and the ultimate origins of their society.

We saw that when we discussed the Montesquieu, he really represents a very important transition from philosophy to that of sociology. A philosophical enquiry, a philosophical engagement, preoccupation with things about or which think about abstract ideas, about philosophical ideas into that of a more empirically based scientific orientations.

Durkheim was heavily influenced by that argument that you can deal with the data, actual historical epochs, you can look at the society as an empirical entity and you do not need always think about abstract ideas like essence of humans or ultimate origin of the society.

You need to make a transition from a philosophical metaphysical understanding into that of a sociological analysis. Montesquieu was also the first to recognize Durkheim who believe that the morals, manners and customs and the spirit of a nation are subjected to scientific investigations. This is something quite interesting because these questions about morals or manners or customs and the spirit of a nation are subjected to scientific investigation. For example, what does somebody mean by the argument of the spirit of a nation, what do we mean by the term spirit?

So, we will see in the subsequent discussion, in a couple of lectures down the line that Emile Durkheim was heavily intrigued by the question of social solidarity or in the contemporary parallel social reined in social integrates, what holds society together, why that the people are having a sense of attachment or a sense of belonging to this particular society? So, the questions about the kind of spirit of nation and he also believed that the kind of morals and manners and customs which are not tangible which are non-material aspects of culture can be studied in a scientific manner, they can be treated on par with a host of material culture. So, this is something very important influenced by Montesquieu.

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Durkheim gave Montesquieu credit for many insights that became a part of his sociology: the social world can be studied as a "thing"; it is best to develop typologies; it is necessary to examine the number, arrangement, and relations among parts in developing these typologies; it is important to view law as an indicator of broader social and cultural forces; and it is wise to employ both causal and functional analyses.



And so in a kind of a summary, Durkheim gave Montesquieu to credit for many insights that became part of his sociology. The social world can be studied as a theme, we will come back to this term because this is how Durkheim defines sociology. Social fact Durkheim argues that social fact can be seen as a thing and it is best to develop typologies you will see how you have already seen how Montesquieu develops different ideas about different types of society from a tribal society to military society. So, Durkheim was also heavily influenced by that and you will see that when he discusses about societies characterized by organic solidarity and society characterized by mechanical solidarity.

It is necessary to examine the number, arrangement and relation among parts in developing these typologies. So, how do we characterizes these typologies, how do we distinguish a tribal society from that of an industrial society? Montesquieu had a protocol and that was something which had a significant influence on Durkheim's scheme of things as well. It is important to view law as an indicate of broader social and cultural forces, very fascinating argument which we will come across when we discuss this argument about division of labor, that the kind of law that exists in a society it tells you a lot more things about that society.

It tells us a lot more things about the kind of division of labor, about the role of religion in that, about the kind of social integration in that, it is just a beautiful argument when Durkheim talks about the transition from a retributive law to that of restitutive law and it is wise to employ both causal and functional analysis. I will come back to this point later when we discuss division of labor and the rules of sociological method.

I will come back to this point but to make it very clear, both Montesquieu as well as Durkheim makes a distinction between the cause and the function. So, what is the cause of a particular social phenomenon and could be of course has to be seen as different from what it does or in other words you cannot explain or you must not explain a particular phenomenon on the base of what it does otherwise it could lead to what is known as teleological issues.

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Jean Jacques Rousseau and Durkheim



- Durkheim gave Rousseau credit for the insight that society comprises a moral reality, sui generis, that could be distinguished from individual morality.
- Durkheim viewed Rousseau's discussion of the natural state as a "methodological device" that could be used to highlight the pathologies of contemporary society and to provide guidelines for the remaking of society.
- The question of social order. How is the society bound together?



Now, another important scholar is Rousseau and Durkheim gave Rousseau credit for the insight that society comprises a moral reality, it is a *sui generis* that could be distinguished from an individual morality and this is an extremely important argument. Durkheim argued that society influenced by Rousseau is a separate entity, it has to be seen in its own right, and it is not a derivative. Society is not something that comes into picture when a group of people come together and it has to be distinguished from an

individual morality, it has its own morality, it is sui generis, and it comes into being of its own.

We will discuss these things later when we discuss his idea of social fact but Durkheim was heavily influenced by this argument that society constitutes an entity in itself which needs to be studied on its own words, it is not a derivative of something else. And Durkheim viewed Rousseau's discussion of the natural state as a methodological device that could be used to highlight the pathologies of contemporary society and to provide guidelines for the remaking of society.

Here we come across a very interesting position that Durkheim takes something similar to Comte. Durkheim believed that a completely neutral sociology which does not tell what is good and what is bad is of no use that is what Durkheim believe. Durkheim believed that by studying society in a scientific manner you must be able to distinguish the good from the bad, that is why he is able to use this term pathology and this term pathology I do not think that anybody or any sociologist would in the current times use this particular term.

Because it means that society has a natural setting, and a particular state of the society can be seen as pathological because this pathology is heavily influenced from medicine, you know pathological labs, when a virus attacks and you consider it as a pathological situation because that is not normal. So, this idea of pathology it presupposes that something else is normal and Durkheim stood by that argument, Durkheim argued that certain state of society must be seen as normal and certain other aspects of society or transformations of society must be seen as pathology.

For example, he argues if the crime rates of a particular society is too high, then it is a pathological situation which needs to be addressed. So, he had this very strong moral take on that, he did not claim to be very dispassionate analysis of that, he believed that sociology helps to establish a moral, a kind of a righteous position, righteous understanding about how a society should be and most of the sociological theories later will not do that and the question of social order, how is the society bound together and this is another very fascinating question, how is a society possible?

A society comprising of hundreds or thousands of people, it works more or less fine so what holds this society together, what is the kind of binding factor, why that people have a sense of belonging to that, why the people are many times even ready to lay down their lives, why that people are ready to sacrifice with their lives for that. So, what is the kind of mechanism which cements this kind of sentiments and how does society achieve that? And these are some of the very fascinating ideas of Durkheim we will discuss later.

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- Durkheim borrowed many ideas from Rousseau. Some of his central concepts about social pathologies—anomie, egoism, and the forced division of labor—owed much to Rousseau's work. Durkheim's vision of society as integrated by a strong state and by a set of common values and beliefs reflected Rousseau's vision of how to eliminate these pathologies. Rousseau also inspired Durkheim's desire to use schools to provide moral education for the young and to rekindle the spirit of commitment to secular society that people once had toward the sacred.
- But he did not share Rousseau's complete trust on the state.



So, in a nutshell, Durkheim borrowed many ideas from Rousseau, some of his central concepts about social pathologies anomie, egoism and the forced division of labor owed much to Rousseau work. Durkheim vision of society as integrated by a strong state and by a set of common values and beliefs reflected Rousseau's vision to eliminate these pathologies. So, just like Rousseau, Durkheim also believed that there is a state of nature and Rousseau also inspired Durkheim's desire to use schools to provide moral education for the young and to rekindle the spirit of commitment to secular society that people once had towards the sacred.

So, now they shared part of this similar ideas, commitment to secularism, secular ideals and not been influenced by religion the importance of schools and all these points. At the same time he did not share Rousseau complete trust on the state. Rousseau had placed so

much of importance to the state because he believed that the state is capable of establishing some kind of order and Durkheim did not agree with that.

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Auguste Comte and Durkheim



- Idea of positivism
- Organic analogy.
- Statics and dynamics
- Idea of social progress and the role of sociology



Coming to the connection or the influence of Auguste Comte, of course, the idea of positivism which we discussed elaborately when we discuss Auguste Comte, the argument that you can use scientific methodology to understand society with its different protocols and the idea of organic analogy, the kind of argument that you can make a comparison between a human society and the living organism and that tells you a lot of similarities between the way a living organism and the human society are structured, the idea of a structure and function are from there and then the argument of statics and the dynamics, for Comte the most fundamental object or the fundamental objective of sociology is to study these two things, social statistics and social dynamics.

How the society is able to maintain itself, the social order of equilibrium, at the same time how is society able to change? So, a combination of these two important focal points of sociology proposed by Comte which Durkheim also agrees with i.e. an idea of social progress and role of sociology in it. So, Comte believed that sociology is a science of society so, once you study the science, you will be able to make a better society, make it as again progressive one and Durkheim also believe in that.

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Herbert Spencer and Durkheim



- He was critical of Spencer's extreme utilitarian view that highlighted competition, contracts etc and vehemently criticized the idea of the 'survival of the fittest'.
- But Durkheim was heavily influenced by Spencer's idea of social progress and evolution

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Durkheim was actually more critical of Herbert Spencer, though he was influenced by Spencer's argument about the organic analogy and evolution, he was critical of Spencer's extreme utilitarian view that highlighted competition, contract, and vehemently criticized the idea of survival of the fittest, we discussed about it, I hope you remember, we discussed about it when we discussed the Herbert Spencer he looked at the social evolution and then argued that human beings act on the basis of their self-interest and only the fittest will survive as there is a struggle for existence and Durkheim was heavily critical of that.

Spencer was arguing this towards the end of his life and that brought him quite a lot of criticism and he was extremely critical of looking at social change, the social evolution through this kind of a lens of the biological evolution which looked at the successful animals as the most suitable animals who survived by defeating the others. So, that utilitarian ideas were not acceptable to Durkheim, but Durkheim was heavily influenced by Spencer's idea of social progress and evolution.

That becomes very evident when Spencer talks about this transition from simple societies to compound societies, Durkheim also speaks the similar language that he talks about a transition from society is characterized by mechanical solidarity, to society is

characterized by organic similarities, though the argument is very different and of course, with the idea of evolution.

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Karl Marx and Durkheim

- Mostly critical of Marx's over emphasis on the role of working class
- Celebration of revolution as normal but for Durkheim it was pathological
- He felt that the problems of alienation, exploitation, and class antagonism were relevant to all sectors of society and that revolution caused more pathology than it resolved.



Karl Marx, of course, Durkheim was critical of Marx's over emphasize on the role of working class. He was never unlike Max Weber who whom quite a lot of observers say that who had a dialogue with the ghost of Marx. Durkheim's engagement with Marx was very minimal and he did not, he was not a follower, he was not very much impressed with the Marxian argument and he was critical of Marx who over emphasized on the role of working class and the celebration of social conflict and revolution by Karl Marx was something not acceptable to Durkheim because Durkheim looked at these conflicts as pathology.

For Durkheim, a society that is more peaceful was something more normal and a society that sees violence, upheavals, conflict was something pathological as per Durkheim and here you will see the kind of fundamental conflict between the structural functional school of thought and the critical or the Marxian school or conflict school of thought and these are the fundamentally different perceptions about that while, structural functionalism over emphasizes the whole question of stability and equilibrium Marxian school or critical school or conflict school it privileges or it understands this social conflict as something quite natural, they even welcome that.

He felt that the problems of alienation, exploitation and class antagonism were relevant to all sectors of society and that revolution caused more pathology than it resolved. A very important argument that while he agreed that issues of alienation, exploitation, class antagonism were relevant because this whole point of alienation even identifies alienation as the prime reason for one particular type of suicide, so it is not that he was not aware of these issues that were raised by Karl Marx, but he did not or he was not ready to accept the argument that these issues emerged from the economic base or economic structure.

And he also did not believe or he was also not ready to accept that all these issues will be resolved if a revolution takes place. He believe very strongly that these revolutions will bring more pathology than whatever it can resolve. So, these are couple of scholars who I just thought I just flag it so that you get some idea about what were the ideas that Durkheim was influenced by and how he had a very productive critical engagement with the arguments of the important scholars of his time and these dialogues, reflections and engagements really shaped his intellectual career which of course, laid foundation to the discipline of sociology.

So, we are stopping here and next class we will begin with more substantive contributions of that Durkheim, thank you.