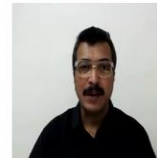


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**Durkheim on Education, Colonialism and Democracy**

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Durkheim on Education,  
Colonialism and Democracy



Welcome back to another class on Durkheim and in this class we will discuss the Durkheim's positions on some of the important themes like on education, on colonialism and democracy. Education is important because he has written extensively on education. His engagement with the question of morality is very specifically connected with the theme of education and Durkheim is widely considered as one of the earliest sociologist who had very significant theoretical arguments about the nature of education, the purpose of education, the philosophy of education, and a host of other aspects.

Personally as well, Durkheim had initiated lot of reforms in education. During his lifetime, he played a very active role in initiating a series of reforms in education during his time and colonialism is an important theme, because Durkheim really belonged to the period when European colonialist expansion was at its peak. It is important to know, as an intellectual, how far he was sensitive to this particular process, and to what extent he was able to come out or was he ever, was he at all able to come out of the influence of Euro-centrism, and then democracy is another important aspect.

It is just like the case we looked at Karl Marx and his argument about colonialism and democracy. It is also important to look at how Emile Durkheim looked at or Emile Durkheim analyzed this whole idea of democracy.

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#### Durkheim on Education



- Writing in the republican tradition of Aristotle, Rousseau, and Kant, Durkheim argues that liberty entails the conscious creation of the laws which govern oneself and, by extension, society. Liberty is not the freedom to be left alone to do what one wishes, to follow one's self-interest; rather, it means autonomy, the rational control of one's life.
- Only in the artificial realm of laws and institutions created by people are justice and freedom possible and they are not available in the natural world.
- Education involves learning social rules and morality. A moral education is an indispensable prerequisite for a good society.



Now, Durkheim has written extensively on themes related to education, specifically on its moral and especially on its moral considerations. Writing in the republican tradition of Aristotle, Rousseau and Kant, Durkheim argues that Liberty entails the conscious creation of the laws which govern one self and by extension, the society.

So, he very strongly believed that the Liberty entails the conscious creation of the laws which govern oneself and by extension society, as people become more free, people become more, people enjoy more form of liberty, that Liberty comes with responsibility, that Liberty comes with higher state of social and individual responsibility, a kind of a more a higher form of responsibility about regulating one's own life and that of society. So, in that sense, Liberty is not the freedom to be left alone to what one wishes.

It is one of the fundamental arguments that the Liberty is not without any control, or you cannot have any idea of liberty without any control or without any kind of checks, your freedom is always confined. So to follow one's own self-interest, rather, it means autonomy, the rational control of one's own life.

A modern individual and citizen, whole republican tradition emphasized on the fact that while we enjoy certain liberties and freedom, that also comes at a cost that we are supposed to be seen as responsible, we are supposed to regulate our own action, we must collectively come to certain conclusion about how do we regulate, how do we control the kind of a society in which we live.

A modern society is not a place where everybody can do whatever they want. Your ideas, your goals, your desires are well defined, and what is accepted and what is not accepted is very specifically drafted and you cannot go beyond that. So, Durkheim very strongly believed in this particular position about the freedom coming with whole lot of responsibility. So only in the artificial realm of laws and institutions created by people are justice and freedom possible.

It might look a kind of contradictory but he argued that this notion of justice and freedom is possible only in the kind of institutions and realms like laws which are aimed to put more and more control over that. Second, finding balance between the freedom and the regulation is something very important and they are not available in the natural world.

It is quite obvious that when we talk about this natural and social world, Durkheim is very clear that an Animal Society, an animal kingdom which does not have any rule of its own, is quite different from that of a human society where both written as well as unwritten rules govern the common activity of a society.

Most of these rules emerge on the basis of a host of ethical considerations, of course, mostly from religious, and also from the non-religious considerations. So, education involves learning of social rules and morality. This is a point where he connects his whole question of education with that of morality. At the same time, it is also important to note that he is not talking about morality in a rather conventional sense regarding what is good and what is bad on the basis of certain theological propositions. But on the other hand, he is talking about morality in a much higher sense where education involves learning social rules and morality. A moral education is an indispensable prerequisite for a good society. It then becomes very interesting to know what exactly he means by this

moral education as you know, that in many of the education institutions, especially those run by religious institutions, this moral class is something very important.

But Durkheim is not talking about that, Durkheim is not talking about how there are certain notions of what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, or from certain theological positions, he is talking about something much higher and different.

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- Autonomy, based on the rational understanding of one's actions and beliefs, is an important ingredient in moral education. Rationally understanding a belief or a social practice can make us assent to it without feeling constrained or coerced.



- Educators must be able to explain the reasons for social rules; this rational dimension is what distinguishes secular from religious morality. Thus, education invariably has a critical dimension in which rationality can be used to criticize existing social norms and practices.

- Education must encourage a "free-spirited and civic-minded" individual.

- Moral rules never can be understood and implemented mechanically, but "require intelligence in their application."



He argues that autonomy based on the rational understanding of one's action, and belief is an important ingredient of moral education. So an individual must be able to take decision on himself, or an individual must be able to take decision for herself or for himself. And this ability to take such decisions must be the product of a quality education.

So, autonomy based on rational understanding of one's own action, and he believes is an important ingredient in moral education. It is a kind of a rational ability of an individual to take a decision, appropriate and matured decision. These decisions must be based on certain ethical considerations. So rationally, understanding a belief, or social practice can make us assent to it without feeling constrained or coerced.

Here, he brings in this whole possibility of rationality, that how an individual is able to make use of her own rationality to come to the conclusion that I need to go by these rules,

I cannot act recklessly, I need to control my desires, I need to control my way of behavior, because I have certain responsibility to the society. And if a society as a whole needs to exist properly, then everybody must have these rules as well as obligations.

Thus he argues emphatically, that educational system must enable a pupil, a child to develop this kind of rationality, that about so that somebody accepts the rule as their own, they have a faith in the rule, they will not think that the rule is being imposed on them unreasonably.

They will not feel that these rules are created by somebody else, and it has been imposed on them, and they will not feel victimized rather, they will feel that they are part of these rules are made for them which have a positive contribution.

In that sense, he argued that they can assent to it without feeling constrained or coerced. This feeling of constrained or coercion, Durkheim would argue that it can have very disastrous consequences in the form of leading to suicide, we discussed about normlessness, we discussed about different kind of fatalistic suicide. Durkheim always believed that a kind of a more civilized, more humane exchange is required to bring out this kind of an ethical element of these rules.

Educators must be able to explain the reason for the social rules and look at how important is this argument, education must be able to explain the reason for social rules. Here, he wants the intellectual involvement of both the child as well as that of the educator, they are supposed to have a kind of a very healthy interaction between these two sections of people. This rational dimension is what distinguishes secular from religious morality.

Thus education invariably has a critical dimension in which rationality can be used to criticize existing social norms and practices. This is an extremely important point that he talks about when he distinguishes between the religious society and a secular society. In a religious society, this whole idea of what is good, what is bad, what is accepted, what is non-accepted, these are all supplied to you or they are imposed on you, they are transferred to you from a higher pedestal of religious authority.

Is not it? A religious scholar or religious priest, especially in the case of Catholicism which Durkheim is very familiar with. A Catholic priests or for that matter a Pope, Pope is also the spiritual authority, and Pope also was the political authority. So this combination of both spiritual as well as authority provides him extraordinary power to influence and inflict the kind of rules, ethics and morality that they want on the population.

There is hardly any dialogue. There is hardly any questioning. It is all willful acceptance, it is all you are supposed to accept, because you cannot question the Pope, you cannot question the religious authority. Durkheim is not talking about that kind of morality.

Rather, Durkheim is talking about a morality, a kind of an acceptance of morality that comes as a result of intellectual engagement as a result of dialogue. That is why he believes that the educators must be able to convince the people about why that they are supposed to believe in that.

This rational dimension is what distinguishes secular from religious morality. Thus, education invariably has a critical dimension in which a nationality can be used to criticize existing social norms and practice. Durkheim really encourages this ability or this quality of the children to rationally criticize, reflect over, criticize the kind of political system that exist in different societies or the kind of an authority structure that exist.

In other words, Durkheim believed that even the children have active stakes in this whole process of education, they should not be seen as the passive recipients, as if they are kind of a blank state on which the educator can write whatever they want, but education must be a kind of a completely democratic process, where the learner also has equal stakes, an important idea that has been incorporated into host of educational theories.

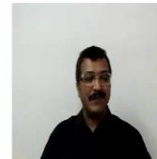
Education must encourage a free spirited and civic minded individual. This is the kind of ultimate objective of education according to Durkheim, it must create a free spirited and civic minded individual, individual who is kind of responsible, who has the kind of a

civic mindedness and who is free spirited, who is not somebody who would become easily convinced by existing power structures.

The moral rules never can be understood and implemented mechanically, but require intelligence in their application. He is talking about a kind of a morally higher form of existence, where the rules are accepted, they are widely practiced, shared, because the population also understand that these rules are important.

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- He writes that human nature is multiple and diverse, not singular, and education should reflect this diversity. Students must understand different cultures and historical eras to appreciate the complexity of human life.
- Education must move beyond the examples of a Eurocentric focus on Greece and Rome when looking at history, because "there are others, which are again different, commonly regarded as being 'less advanced,' but which nevertheless are worthy of investigation because they too constitute manifestations of the human spirit."
- Students should learn that different cultural attitudes and practices are not bizarre, but are grounded in a particular social order. Durkheim sees humankind "as an infinitely flexible, protean force, capable of appearing in innumerable guises, according to the perennially changing demands of his circumstances."



He writes that human nature is multiple and diverse, not singular, and education should reflect this diversity. This again is a very interesting debate within sociology, to what extent this modern education imposes a kind of singularity or impose a kind of a uniformity on the student population and thereby obliterating a host of alternative or other forms of ideas, lives and other things.

He argues that it has to have the ability to incorporate multiplicity and diversity. Students must understand different cultures and historical eras to appreciate the complexity of human life.

It is a very lofty ideal that while students do live in a particular context and find that particular context extremely natural, convenient and the best, they also must be exposed to alternative forms of existence, either in the past or in other parts of this world, because that exposure would really help them to understand their own situation in a far better manner.

Education must move beyond the examples of a Eurocentric focus on Greece and Rome, when looking at history, because there are others which are again different commonly regarded as being less advanced, but which nevertheless are worthy of investigation because they too constitute manifestations of the human spirit. So it is interesting to note



that Durkheim was aware of this whole Eurocentric idea, Eurocentric nature of knowledge system or intellectual life during his particular time.

He sincerely argued that the education system must come out of this Eurocentric character, and must be able to understand and encourage students to explore lives outside the European region, because they also are manifestations of human spirit. He also very strongly believed that Europe really represented the epitome of human advancement or human history.

But the same time, he believed that while being standing at this top of human civilization, students must understand how other forms of lives existed, because that also teach them about how human spirit manifest in different conditions. So students should learn that different cultural attitudes and practices are not bizarre, but are grounded in a particular social order which is an important argument. He is talking about cultural relativism here, cultural relativism is an argument that you must evaluate a culture on the basis of its own moral and ethical rules, instead of jumping into value judgment, saying that what they are doing is right, food could be an excellent example. We all have very strong preferences towards food and we tend to judge other countries or other societies who eat certain kinds of so called weird kind of food or strange kind of food.

People who eat dog, people who eat snake, or people who eat insects are often made fun of, but Durkheim or an host of anthropologists would argue that this is what we understand as ethnocentrism, you evaluate other's culture on the basis of your own value judgement, rather, you more acceptable or more important perspective is what is known as cultural relativism, you understand the practices of a particular culture on the basis of their own ethical and moral positions.

But again these are not very conclusive debates because a completely uncritical cultural relativism will really raise a lot of questions, whether cannot we be critical of some other particular culture being extremely cruel or extremely exploitative, extremely hierarchical or other things. It raises a lot of questions.

Durkheim sees humankind “as an infinitely flexible, protean force capable of appearing in innumerable guises, according to the perennially changing demands of his circumstances.” A very beautiful depiction of human life bringing in the kind of possible complexities, it is an infinitely flexible, protean force capable of appearing in innumerable guises, according to the perennially changing demands of his circumstances. You know how different societies evolved differently and how their ideas, articulations, predispositions are very different.

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- Education should not be primarily vocational or instrumental.
- For example, Durkheim states that there are two types of nationalism. In one, nations aggressively compete with one another for control of resources and territory; in the other, the nation attempts to increase its internal level of justice to benefit its citizens. Moral education involves teaching students an appreciation of the latter dimension of nationalism.
- According to Durkheim, “science is human reasoning in action.” Other disciplines should try to emulate the “exemplary rationality” of natural scientific methodology.
- In sum, for Durkheim, drawing on the republican tradition, education transforms the person into a social being who can appreciate other cultures and his or her society and govern it adequately.



As per Durkheim, education should not be primarily vocational or instrumental, an important argument even now you know that how powerful these debates are, there are very powerful arguments coming up, not now these arguments have been here that the primary objective of education is to impart skills, to enable a person a good worker, a good engineer or a good doctor and Durkheim was very much against such instrumentalist understanding of education.

He believed that these skills or abilities are of course important, but the primary aim of education is not to make a person skilled. Rather, at a much higher level, education has a much higher and lofty objectives. So, education should not be primarily vocational or instrumental. For example, Durkheim states that there are two types of nationalism, he gives this beautiful example of nationalism, which is extremely relevant in our times.

So, one nation aggressively compete with one another for control of resources and territory, and this is how most of, in most of the times nationalism is understood and articulated. Nationalism is often, people usually understand in opposition to somebody else. People usually show their love towards the nation by attacking or by criticizing or despising the other, the enemy. And that is the story of the whole world and Durkheim argues that this is a very restricted, this is a very narrow understanding of nationalism.

And Rather, he argues that the nation, on the other hand, attempts to increase its internal level of justice to benefit its citizen, it is an extremely important point. What prevents us from seeing nationalism as an extremely important value where we attribute more justice and benefits to our own citizen. Why can't we understand nationalism, as not only as allowed to our own country, or our own nation, but to love to our own people, our own citizen?

This is an extremely important question, how do we really understand, how do we articulate our love towards the nation. Is it the love towards the kind of geographic boundary? Is it the love towards the kind of certain symbols of nation or is it the love towards certain national song or national symbol or Independence Day or Republic Day?

Can it be expanded to a more larger understanding of love towards your own people, love towards your own citizen, can nationalism being seen as an attempt to bring in a more Justice Society, a society with less amount of social inequality, less amount of social exploitation, less amount of suffering, and then obviously, it will become apparent, it will become very visible that, once you adopt that definition of nationalism, you will not be able to stop that definition from going beyond the boundaries of your nation.

If you really love or if you think that showing you the love towards your countries, by showing the love towards your own people, then the national boundaries should not stop you and you will naturally develop abilities or sensitivity to understand the difficulties and the tragedies of people beyond your border, then you might even think that the national boundaries are not that significant, or they are kind of many times they are obstructions, towards a far better society. So, Durkheim argued that this the kind of

education must really develop, help people develop this kind of a rational understanding with for a far better society.

Moral education involves teaching students an appreciation of the latter dimension of nationalism. So, this morality here, according to Durkheim is not as I mentioned earlier, not the very narrow sense of morality regarding what is good, what is bad, what is sin, what is accepted kind of thing. It is not to frighten children, saying that, if you are not supposed to do and if you do this, you will be punished in the hell, it is not, that is a very narrow understanding of the life, and rather Durkheim wanted to have a much broader understanding about the life.

According to Durkheim, science is human reasoning in action, a very beautiful sentence, and other disciplines should try to emulate the exemplary rationality of natural scientific methodology.

This again is a very powerful statement and also a problematic one, because Durkheim like many other very powerful section of people believe that the scientists or science has this innate ability of rationality and others need to emulate, or everybody who practice science also practice rationality both of which are problematic statements. There are very interesting discussions and debates about it. But what do we mean by scientific rationality?

Do scientists constitute the most rational people or is rationality absent outside the realm of science? These are all very fascinating questions and have generated lot of interesting discussions and debates. So in sum for Durkheim, drawing on the republican tradition, education transforms the person into a social being who can appreciate other cultures and his or her society and govern it adequately.

This is the ultimate function that Durkheim talks about when he discusses education, so in that sense, his understanding of education was much broader. His arguments are important even now.

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## Durkheim on Colonialism



- Durkheim had little insight into the colonial social conditions influencing his thought. He equated progress with the rise of the nation-states of Europe, and did not address colonialism in any depth.
- He tends to see modernity as free, rational and progressive, compared to the beliefs of other cultures.
- For example, the aborigines do not understand what they are doing and why they believe, what they do when it comes to religion; their ideas must be placed in the rational framework of the European to make sense.
- Inconsistent positions



Another question is about his position on colonialism. Because as I told you this, it is very important for us to now critically examine these scholars, especially the founding fathers of sociology, on the basis of some of these recent concerns, because they were the products of colonialism. They were the beneficiaries of colonialism, knowingly or unknowingly, they benefited a lot from colonial expansion and colonial domination.

So, it is quite important that we critically analyze to what extent their works, and then intellectual contributions really recognize this form of society that existed then. So Durkheim had a little insight into the colonial social conditions influencing his thought. It is very natural or I do not know whether to call it is natural. But, of course, it is a limitation, but Durkheim, sadly belong to that section of scholars who did not realize, or did not acknowledge it very actively, he equated progress with the rise of the nation state of Europe, and did not add this colonialism in any depth.

So, unlike Marx, which we discussed in detail, Marx had a very ambivalent position towards colonialism, but Durkheim did not address this theme in a frontal manner, in a very open manner.

He tends to see modernity as free, rational and progressive, compared to the beliefs of other cultures. Definitely it almost every scholar of the Enlightenment era believe that they had very strong conviction in that the modern European society is the epicenter of

all radical liberal ideas, free, rational, progressive, and all other societies are lagging behind.

For example, the aborigines do not understand what they are doing, and why they believe what they do, when it comes to religion, their ideas must be placed in the rational framework of the European to make sense. And it is very evident when we discuss Durkheim's argument about religion, it becomes very evident that he believed that the Aboriginals do not understand their life, and it needs to be interpreted.

This is a position that was shared by host of anthropologists and sociologists during this particular time. With Marx, you remember his very famous statement, they do not have history. Indians do not have history. So anthropologists believed that the Aboriginal people only live, they do not know how to conceptualize, they do not know how to theorize it, they do not know how to place it in the larger canvas of social history, and this larger understanding of history, that there are certain origins of societies, and it moves in a particular uni-linear fashion and then reaches at Pinnacle, and that pinnacle is presently occupied by the Europe.

It is the kind of a larger picture that the Europeans have in mind. So that they argued, even Durkheim believed, it is only the prerogative of the Europeans, others simply do not understand that, and a host of inconsistent positions about his colonialism.

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### Durkheim on Democracy



- The connection between moral individuals and vibrant democracy
- Durkheim contends that the collective conscience of modern society is based on the cult of the individual. The modern world is becoming more rational and individualistic.
- People are still constrained by moral rules, but modern morality allows them more choice and freedom, and demands prudential judgment. This new sensibility has to be created through democratic interaction, for the common good is not a static object existing outside of social interactions, but emerges out of the deliberations and criticisms characteristic of modern democracy.



Also interesting to look at his ideas on democracy, because Durkheim was a modernist, and he was a liberal, unlike Marx, who believed, believed that democracy is a transient stage which will lead to a kind of a communism, where a true democracy will come into picture, but Durkheim was a more conventional believer in the potentials of democracy.

As we discussed a kind of the connection between the moral individuals and the vibrant democracy, it is an important point that comes up again and again, Durkheim very strongly believed that a morally rooted, a morally enlightened citizenry is an extremely important component of a vibrant democracy. You cannot have a democracy without a morally enlightened or morally rooted citizens, you must have convictions about why that you adopt particular positions.

Why that you adopt certain rules, and it must be an informed consent, and only through that a democracy can actually take shape. Durkheim contended that the collective conscience of modern societies based on the cult of the individual, the modern world is becoming more rational and individualistic. So, Durkheim argued that the collective conscience of modern society is based on the cult of the individual.

Durkheim argued that the God in the conventional sense was seen as manifestation in the unity of the societies, rather the God in the modern societies is the individual, individual

has become the modern God. Modernity is marked by the celebration of the individual, individual is the new sacred, that is his argument, exact argument, when he talks about this elementary forms of religious life, individualism is the new sacred in the modern era.

This modern world is becoming more rational and individualistic. So, people are still constrained by moral rules, but modern morality allows them to have more choices and freedom and demands prudential judgement. This new sensibility has to be created through democratic interaction for the common good which is not a static object, existing outside of social interactions. But emerges out of the deliberations and criticisms characteristic of modern democracy, such a typical liberal understanding of democracy, of a civil society, a society where the individuals engage, interact, debate with each other, and through this debate, new rules emerge, and every citizen abide by that and then and that new rules take the society into a far superior better position.

These rules are not seen as imposed on them and are not the ideas or the whims and fancies of a dictator, or the most powerful person or institution, rather, these rules are framed by informed citizenry. They are framed by people who understand why these rules are important. And so he believes that can affect a vibrant democratic spirit is something important.



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- In Durkheim's democratic vision, moral individualism has to be grounded in social groups, which informs his image of a rich, democratic civil society composed of a great number of voluntary associations.
- The moral individualism of the democratic state guarantees individual rights while facilitating rational dialogue between its citizens. Democracy works by making the people's will the laws of the state, which is why democracy has a moral superiority over other forms of government. Deliberations and discussion in the public sphere make the state more conscious of its moral and democratic responsibilities.
- While Durkheim does not address issues of state surveillance and sometimes advocates strong forms of community, he also recognizes that modern societies require increasing democratic popular reflexivity.



In Durkheim's democratic vision, moral individualism has to be grounded on social groups, which informs his image of a rich, democratic civil society composed of a great number of voluntary association.

This brings us to this whole theorization or conceptualization about civil society and public sphere. You must have heard about this public sphere, very important term. Habermas as a theoretician of public sphere, and also this term of civil society. So, civil society is understood as a space between the state and the family, the kind of an intermediary space between your private sphere, and that of the state.

The space of civil society is composed of a whole set of voluntary organizations like parties and other set of organization who actively engage in the process of dialogue and criticisms. He argues that this informs an image of a rich, democratic civil society composed of a great number of voluntary organizations. The moral individualism of the democratic state guarantees individual rights while facilitating rational dialogue between its citizens.

So, this moral individualism of the democratic state, as we discussed, a very rational enterprise that every individual uses her rationality to understand the relevance of certain rules and this facilitates a rational dialogue between its citizens and democracy works by

making the peoples will, the laws of the state. So the collective will of the people becomes the laws. It is not the other way around. It is not the law is framed on the basis of certain theological predispositions or certain ideas of the ruler, ideas of the dictator and then it is not imposed on the people.

It is the rules actually represent the collective ambitions of the people, which is why democracy has a moral superiority over other forms of government, obviously that how, why that we globally consider democracy as the most important, most valued form of governance, while there could be quite a lot of criticism against that, against it being inefficient. It is being corrupt. It is being so slow to take decisions.

Democracy is widely considered to be extremely important because it is definitely superior to other forms of political organization, whether it is dictatorship or despotism, or whatever different forms.

Deliberations and discussions in the public sphere makes the state more conscious of its moral and democratic responsibilities. So, he has a vision, a liberal understanding of society, where the society governs itself through an educated well informed citizenry. These citizens take active role in deciding their own political affairs, and it is helped and aided by a very vibrant civic society, which helps in the kind of a discussions with each other and the kind of a collective consensus emerges which gets translated as laws and that those laws have enormous legitimacy among the people.

While Durkheim does not address issues of state surveillance, and sometimes advocate strong forms of community. He also recognizes that modern society requires increasing democratic and popular reflexivity.

We can argue that the typical Marxian criticism against these kinds of arguments is that Durkheim is too naive. Durkheim's arguments are too simplistic, that he believes that in a society, modern society like ours, you can have a perfect democratic society by people coming together, and especially Marxist would criticize Durkheim's lack of focus on the economic sphere.

And remember the very famous criticism of Marx on democracy, Marx believed that unless you bring in economic equality, political equality has no meaning, you got the political equality which means very little for the people who are suffering under economic exploitation.

Durkheim is not a Marxist, he did not believe in Marxian beliefs. Durkheim was a liberal in that sense, a person who believed that a host of new things can be brought in, society can be taken into a higher level, when people come together, interact with each other, use their rationality and govern their own fate. So, let us stop here, wind up this session, and we will come back with the next class. Thank you.