

## EMILE DURKHEIM: (1858-1917)

Emile Durkheim (1858-1916) was born in Epinal in Lorraine, France. He was a contemporary of Weber (1864-1920), but probably never met Weber. Durkheim came from a Jewish background, and was a superior student at school and University. Eventually he was able to attend the elite Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He taught for a number of years, and then received an appointment to a position in philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887. In 1902 he was appointed to a professorship at the Sorbonne, where he remained until he died. He is known as one of the originators of modern sociology. He founded the first European University Department of Sociology in 1895 and one of the **first journals devoted to Social Science, L' Annee Sociologique in 1896**. He was a **follower of Comte's tradition**. He also aimed at developing a Scientific sociology, France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war had a lasting influence on his thoughts. He authored the following works, which were originally written in French.

1. Division of Labor in society (1893).
2. The Rules of Sociological method (1895)
3. Suicide (1897).
4. Education and Sociology (1922).
5. The Elementary form of Religious life (1912).
6. Sociology & Philosophy (1924).
7. Professional ethics and Civic morals (1950).

Durkheim distinguishes sociology from philosophy by focussing on empirical study of the social world. He first used the concept of **functionalism** in sociology. He pioneered the **comparative method in Sociology**.

Durkheim is often considered a conservative within the field of sociology, being concerned primarily with order, consensus and solidarity. This approach helped provide a basis for structural functional models of society. Durkheim argued that Marxism is composed of "disputable and out-of-date hypotheses." However, Durkheim was involved

politically in the **Dreyfus affair**, and condemned French racism and anti-Semitism.

In terms of the development of the field of sociology, Durkheim is especially important. He was the first to offer courses in sociology in French universities, at a time when sociology was not well known or favoured. His writings are important within the field of sociology.

## **I. DIVISION OF LABOUR**

Durkheim's explanation of the DOL is a characteristic combination of casual and functional analysis. Its function is the provision of a social cohesion suited to the complexities of modern industrial life, which **Durkheim calls "CIVILIZATION", is a purely social process.**

### **Causes-**

The answer to what increases the overall division of labor is **competition**. As society expands and population grows denser, human relations are forced to become more complex. Thus, a new type of social bond is necessitated. Human beings find new ways of working together to reduce competition and best serve the survival of the group. Survival of the species comes to depend on the individual's ability to perform a specific function; consequently, individualism becomes more important than the collective. Division of labor becomes necessary for survival and characterizes the organic form of solidarity. There are two main causes of the DOL. They are:-

1. Increase in the demographic density of population: With the increase in population social structure grows complex. Man's needs also grow. One individual or one group cannot do everything that is required to be done. Hence labour has to be divided.
2. Increase in the moral density of population: It is the moral responsibility of the society to provide adequate work and situation to individuals as the population grows.

He sets up an ultimate cause in concentration and dynamic density through Darwinian Competition.

# Western Thinkers

(i.e). As concentration increases, people have to diversify to survive, else they are competing for the same resources.

## Effects

1. **Society becomes more efficient**, which in turn becomes possible to result in social progress. Progress gives birth to many new vocations and a healthy competition starts. There are then new inventions conducive for social development.
2. There is **inter-dependence** on others who are specialized in their own fields. DOL “produces morality in and of itself by subjecting individuals to the duties of their specialized existence”.
3. Mechanical solidarity is replaced by **Social organic solidarity**. The people begin to co-operate with each others and live on the basis of logic and reason.
4. DOL will make the people **self-disciplined**. There will be social integration. The very status of individual in the society changes. Those who will try to violate social discipline will be subjected to moral and social pressures and also subjected to collective social will.
5. The moral effects of the division of labour is felt when people complement each other, when dissimilar join hands and **unity comes out of diversity**.

## SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

“While Marx was pessimistic about the division of labour in society, Durkheim was cautiously optimistic. Marx saw the specialised division of labour trapping the worker in his occupational role and dividing society into antagonistic social classes. Durkheim saw a number of problems arising from specialisation in industrial society but believed that the promise of the division of labour outweighed the problems.

Durkheim was greatly influenced by **Rousseau’s famous concept of “volonted generale”** which provided a conception of social solidarity directly dependent upon neither politics nor economics.

Social solidarity refers to “the condition within a group in which there is social cohesion plus co-operative, collective action directed towards the achievement of group goals.

However, the transition to modern organic society is not yet complete. So society is at present in a transition phase, and organic solidarity is not fully developed. We exist in a state of anomie – normlessness – in which there is increased class conflict. However, when the division of labour has been fully completed the class conflict will be eradicated.

In the final organic society there will exist private property and inequality, but the hereditary laws governing the transition of property will be abolished. Thus, the final organic society will be a meritocracy, since the only distinctions between people that will be allowed to exist will be those based on the functional differences between people and the need to reward different contributions to the organic whole in different ways. Everyone will accept this as socially necessary.

While organic solidarity and difference tend to dominate modern society, **similarity and mechanical solidarity never completely disappear**.

Mechanical Solidarity	Organic Solidarity
Characteristic of primitive Societies.	Characteristic of modern industrial Societies.
Solidarity is due to similarities. (i.e.) social differences are limited.	There exist vast social differences.
Homogeneous Society.	Heterogeneous society.
Simple division of labour.	Specialized and complex division of labour.
Limited productivity tend group size.	Increased productivity widen group size.
Subsistent economy.	Market oriented economy.
Private property almost	Private property has

# Western Thinkers

unknown.	become a legal right.
It has repressive laws.	It has restitute laws.
Very limited opportunities for social Mobility.	Unlimited opportunities for social mobility.
Closed system of social stratification.	Open system of social stratification.
Degree of Occupational diversity is low.	Degree of Occupational diversity is very high.
Religion acts as an agency of social control and provides social solidarity.	Religion becomes purely a private affair.
In the terms of Weber's classification authority system in such society is traditional type and based on patriarchy.	In terms of Weber's classification Authority system in such society is rational- legal type.
Kinship relations are strong. Fictive kinship ties come into existence.	Importance of kinship relations are declining.
Production is closely linked to domestic units.	Production is separated from domestic units.

### Pathological Forms of DOL

If DOL does not result in solidarity, then this is an abnormal condition, a consequence of the pathological form it has momentarily assumed. He saw three of them:-

1) **The anomic division of labor** - An increasing division of labor weakens the sense of identification with the wider community and thereby weakens constraints on human behavior. These conditions lead to social "disintegration"—high rates of egocentric behavior, norm violation, and consequent de-legitimation and distrust of authority. In these situations, people can more easily become alienated and cut off from one another. Rather than alienation, he called it **anomie**. (i.e) when extreme specialization is accompanied by decline in communication between persons performing different functions. This in turn increases the

likelihood of conflict. E.g: conflict between capital and labour.

2) **The forced division of labor** - which is the opposite – when one group, class, or race of people are forced into a certain kind of labor and denied the opportunity to join other parts of society. (i.e). When DOL is 'forced' instead of arising spontaneously. But spontaneity must mean not simply the absence of any deliberate, formal type of violence, but of anything that may hamper, even indirectly, the free unfolding of the social force each individual contains within himself." Caste and social class system are the principal causes of FDOL. **E.g:** A priest's son is born into a priest hood and thus he is forced to become a priest and so is the case with barber, goldsmith and so on.

3) **The poorly coordinated division of labor** - which is when different specializations don't result in increased interdependence, but rather in segmentation.

These abnormal forms of the DOL explained the various crises and tensions that modern societies of his day were experiencing. He concluded that "modern societies are no longer held together by shared experiences and common beliefs." Instead they are held together by their differences. This system works as long as those differences are allowed to develop in a way that promotes interdependence. The key to ensuring true social interdependence is to cultivate a sense of social justice that allows all citizens to have the opportunity to achieve their highest potential and their most appropriate social function.

Durkheim offers **two solutions for the pathological forms of DOL**.

1. The **state should play the key role** for ensuring moral and just rules. The appropriate values of individualism, responsibility fair play and mutual obligation can be affirmed through the policies instituted by the state in all these fields.
2. **Means of integration** have to be provided by the professional or occupational groups. What we

# Western Thinkers

especially see in the occupational group is a moral power capable of containing individual ego- of maintaining a spirited sentiment of common solidarity in the consciousness of all the workers, of preventing the law of the strongest from being brutally applied to industrial and commercial relations.

The anomic and abnormal forms of the division of labour could only be resolved by more planning of the economy, better organization, and more organized involvement of workers and employers in the joint regulation of their industries.

Durkheim formulates two conditions upon which a **cohesive division of labor** must be based: **regulation**, which concretely locates each individual in relation to others and society, **and justice**, which makes this location agreeable. The **former guarantees a non-anomic** form of the division of labor, whereas the **latter prevents a forced form**.

Durkheim claims that a **cohesive division of labor requires regulation**. He writes, "if the division of labour does not produce solidarity it is because the relationships are not regulated; it is because they are in a state of anomie". Society avoids this state of anomie whenever the links between individuals guarantee sufficient contact. Only this kind of contact can ground a "keen, continuous feeling of their mutual interdependence". According to Durkheim, this interdependence provides each member of society with a sense of purpose: in being made aware of how she depends upon each individual in society, he is made aware of how each individual depends upon him. This sensation of being "located", makes cohesion possible. As a tangible example of a way in which these links can be established, Durkheim cites "professional groupings": these, he writes, function to "absorb [the individual] into the mainstream of social life". Therefore, Durkheim concludes, when appropriate regulation exists that prevents purposelessness through eliminating indeterminate

relations, social cohesion, as a likely property of the non-anomic form of the division of labor, emerges.

Durkheim argues that **in addition to regulation that binds individuals** to each other in a definitive, consistent way, society must assign each individual a role that is agreeable to her. **Society needs justice**; it should function in such a way that unequal external conditions cease to impact the fortunes of its members. If individuals are largely left to their own devices and "individual initiatives" but regulated in concert, Durkheim believes that "a harmony between individual natures and social functions cannot fail to occur...Inevitably those most fitted for each type of activity will succeed in obtaining it". Durkheim demands "equality of opportunity". According to his argument, because individuals subject to this scheme operate in spheres of activity commensurate with their abilities, their lot appears agreeable to them. Durkheim's claim that the modern division of labor can be more cohesive thus revolves around guaranteeing this agreeability to individuals.

## Critique-

1. Rejection of Utilitarian concept of a society.
2. His claim that a great DOL results in an increase of social solidarity is questionable.
3. It is not uncommon for many modern states using highly repressive laws to enforce their authority.
4. His organic analogy and belief that all societies would follow the same evolutionary path have been severely criticized as socially inaccurate and historically false.
5. He failed to see class division and class conflict as expounded by Marx.

Durkheim suggests that **adherence to the code of professional ethics** is solution for this.

## II. SOCIAL FACTS

**Society is a reality sui generis**. Society comes into being by the association of individuals. Hence society represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. This unique reality of society must be the subject matter of sociology.



A social fact, as defined in Rules, is “a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him.”

Social facts include laws, customs, traditions, social values, moral codes, rituals and indeed any regularities of collective behavior that have an external power of coercion. Social facts thus exclude human events like eating, sleeping, drinking etc. **Durkheim saw social facts as lying along a continuum.**

First, on **one extreme are structural or morphological social phenomena.** They make up the substratum of collective life. By this he meant the number and nature of elementary parts of which society is composed, the way in which the morphological constituents are arranged and the degree to which they are fused together. In this category of social facts are included the distribution of population over the surface of the territory, the forms of dwellings, nature of communication system etc.

Secondly, there are **institutionalized forms** of social facts. They are more or less general and widely spread in society. They represent the collective nature of the society as a whole. Under this category fall legal and moral rules, religious dogma and established beliefs and practices prevalent in a society.

Thirdly, there are social facts, which are **not institutionalized.** Such social facts have not yet acquired crystallized forms. They lie beyond the institutionalized norms of society. Also this category of social facts has not attained a total objective and independent existence comparable to the institutionalized ones.

Durkheim attempted to differentiate sociology from philosophy and psychology. Sociology is empirical (unlike philosophy) Sociology deals with “social facts” (unlike psychology).

Social facts have an objective reality that sociologists can study in a way similar to how other scientists, such as physicists, study the physical world. An important corollary to the above definition is that **social facts are also internal to individuals**, and it is only through individuals that social facts are able to exist. In this sense, externality means interior to individuals other than the individual subject.

Social Facts exhibit **four main characteristics** namely

1. Externality
2. Constraint
3. Collectivity
4. Independence.

**1. Externality** - Social facts exist outside individuals' mind and consciousness. The individual is forced to obey the directives of social facts. When he tries to break them or resist the laws, societies show a hostile reaction. E.g. Religious beliefs, Currency used to undertake transactions.

These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his will. For **e.g.** language continues to function independently of any single individual.

**2. Constraint** - Social facts regulate human social action and act as Constraints over individual behavior and action. They may be enforced with law, with clearly defined penalties associated with violation of the sentiments and values of the group. Sanctions may be associated with social facts. For **e.g.:** as in religion, where resistance may result in disapproval from others or from spiritual leaders. Individuals may be unaware of social facts and generally accept them. In this case individuals may accept the values and codes of society and accept them as their own.

Sanctions can be formal (e.g., law) or informal (e.g., social control, shaming, exclusion, etc.).

**3. Collective Action** - Social facts are the product of collective action and not of individual action. Social facts are independent of psychological facts. Social facts can therefore be explained in terms of other social facts only. While obligations, values, attitudes and beliefs may appear to be individual, Durkheim argues that these social facts exist at the level of society as a whole arising from social relationship and human association. They come from “varying collective representative and diverse forms of social organizations”.

Durkheim later modified the notion of a single collective consciousness, (i.e.) there may be different norms and values for different groups within society. These collective representations are also social facts because they are in the consciousness of some collective and are not reducible to individual consciousness.

**4. Independence** - Social facts are to be regarded as things because they refer to **a)** an entity possessing certain characteristics which are independent of human observation **b)** an entity existing independent of human volition **c)** an entity that can be known only through external observation and not by introspection.

Individual mind is different from group mind and hence behavior. An individual acts differently when he is in group and when he is outside the group. It is because on account of his association with others, new facts are born, new situations arise and new patterns of behavior are bound to emerge.

### **Scientific Study of Social facts**

Durkheim holds that social facts can be analyzed in terms of natural science methodology. No other science, he asserts, includes, “social Facts” as a subject matter. The social facts exist as a distinctive level of reality and can be objectively studied.

### **Rules for Observing Social Facts**

Consider social facts as things. Before having any scientific idea about any social phenomena, one must develop commonsensical

notions about these phenomena. This is because reflection comes before science. It is very difficult to discard these notions, because social things are actualized only through men. They are a product of human activity. Yet, one must separate social phenomena from the conscious things which they represent. Only then will scientific objectivity be possible.

All preconceptions must be systematically avoided. But this rule is entirely negative. It does not teach the sociologist to avoid the dominance of popular notions and to turn his attention towards facts. For this reason, Durkheim advocates a formal definition of a social fact based on certain external characteristics. All phenomena, which fit into this definition, must be included.

### **Set of rules for studying social facts.**

The first rule is to treat social facts as things. What Durkheim means by this is that social facts have an existence independent of the knowing subject and that they impose themselves on the observer. Social facts can be recognized by the sign that they resist the action of individual will upon them; as products of the collectivists, changing social facts require laborious effort.

Another rule for studying social facts is that the sociologist must clearly delimit and define the group of phenomena being researched. This structures the research and provides the object of study a condition of verifiability. The sociologist must also strive to be as objective towards the facts they are working on as possible and remove any subjective bias or attachment to what they are investigating. Sociologist must systematically discard any and all preconceptions and closely examine the facts.

Durkheim applied these rules to empirical evidence he drew primarily from statistics, ethnography, and history. Durkheim treated this data in a rational way, which is to say that he applied the law of causality to it. At this, Durkheim introduced an important rationalist component to

## Western Thinkers

his sociological method, namely the idea that by using his rules, which work to eliminate subjective bias, human behaviour can be explained through observable cause and effect relationships. Accordingly, he used a comparative-historical approach, to eliminate extraneous causes and find commonalities between different societies and their social facts. In so doing, he strove to find universally applicable general laws.

### Durkheim's comparative method

Durkheim's logic of explanation laid stress upon the comparative nature of social science. To show that a given fact is the cause of another "we have to compare cases in which they are simultaneously present or absent, to see if the variations they present in these different combinations of circumstances indicate that one depends on the other".

Since sociologists normally do not conduct laboratory-controlled experiments but study reported facts or go to the field and observe social facts, which have been spontaneously produced, they use the method of indirect experiment or the comparative method. **Durkheim, following J.S. Mill's System of Logic**, refers appreciatively to the 'method of concomitant variations' as the procedure of the comparative method. He calls it 'the instrument par excellence of sociological research'.

In using the comparative method, Durkheim argued the merits of studying concomitant variations. This method holds that **if a change in one variable is accompanied by a change in another, then the two changes may be casually related directly or linked through some basic social fact**. Durkheim maintained that sociological data often require 'the establishment of an intricate causal situation rather than a simple cause and effect relation. In addition, a sociological investigation must include an account of the axiological significances in a causal situation. Ideals and values may be **concomitant variables**.

They also give direction to behavior and may properly be considered as causes and effects.

**The comparative method is the very framework of the science of society for Durkheim.** According to Durkheim "comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in-so-far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for fact".

### **Types of Social Facts**

Durkheim distinguishes between **material and nonmaterial elements in social facts**.

**Material elements** are like **cultural artifacts**: They are what would survive if the present society no longer existed. Examples: system of law, the economy, Church and many aspects of religion, the state and educational institutions, technology, housing arrangements, population distribution, etc.

**Nonmaterial elements** consist of symbolic meanings and **collective sentiments**. Often such features are attached to material objects, like the meanings behind statues and flags, but many times our most important meanings and feelings have a more abstract existence, like love and freedom. It is **non-material facts that constitute the main subject of study of sociology**. Non material social facts do not have a material reality. They consist of features such as norms, values and systems of morality. **E.g.:** Norm of the one to three child families, the positive values associated with family structures and the negative associations connected to aggression and anger, systems (language, currency, professional practices), Durkheim's analysis of suicide.

Normal and Pathological Social facts - Normal Social Facts are the most widely distributed and useful facts, assisting in the maintenance of society and social life. Pathological social Facts are those that we might associate with social problems and ills of various types. **E.g.** suicide.

For Durkheim the much greater frequency of the normal is proof of the superiority of the normal.

According to Durkheim, the desires and selfinterests of human beings can only be held in check by forces that originate outside of the individual. **Durkheim characterizes this external force as a collective conscience**, a common social bond that is expressed by the ideas, values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies of a culture.

### Significance-

1. His causal- functional analysis is highly fruitful.
2. His orientation on comparative analysis is a necessary requirement of Sociological Research.

### Critique-

- i) Excessive empirical emphasis.
- ii) Neglects the role of choice in human actions.
- iii) His contention of social phenomenon is fallacious.
- iv) His analysis is one sided and narrow.
- v) Both the terms exteriority and constraint are ambiguous.
- vi) Neglects the fact that individual forms the group.

### III. RELIGION AND SOCIETY

In the Elementary forms of religious life, Durkheim seeks to show that society is the soul of religion –that society is the foundation of all religious belief.

“First in the world, fear created the gods.” Durkheim **refutes this** – the gods were firstly friends, relations and protectors. Religion arose from society and man responds to society spontaneously and without resistance. His relationship with society is not experienced as yielding to coercion but responding to his inner nature.

An object becomes sacred only when the community invests it with that meaning.

Religion is not only a social creation; it is the power of the community itself that is being worshiped. The power of the community over the individual so transcends individual existence that people collectively give it sacred significance.

Durkheim also refutes naturalist and animist views of religion, e.g. Frazer’s naturalist view of religion as a response to the cyclical nature of the seasons. Man did not create religion from observation of the physical world. “From the tangible, we can only make the tangible.” Religion is not illusory, it is not a hallucination, **it is rooted in social reality**.

Religion is primarily a social affair. It moulds our understanding of the social facts. The notion of

### Divinity,

totality and Society are three modes of a single reality. Source of all religion is only society. It is the outcome of collective representation or outcome of group activity. Religion according to Durkheim is nothing else but group excitement. It is nothing else but a glorified society. Durkheim argued for the “**dualism of human nature**”. The limitations imposed on individual representations could be transcended only by higher ideals rooted in the collective process.

Durkheim’s two books “elementary forms of the Religious life” “Primitive Classification” (he wrote in combination with Marcel Mauss) examines the role that religion and mythology have in shaping the worldview and personality of people in extremely “**mechanical Societies**” (**Durkheim’s phrase**).

He was primarily concerned with **understanding religion in terms of the way it served an integrating function** in any society, rather than with an analysis of specific differences in religious practice. As he noted (“On the Future of Religion”): “There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and personality...this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments”. The essential features of Durkheim’s Sociology of religion are:-Dualism of human nature.

- Social nature of religion and morality.
- Sacred feature of religion.
- Roots of human reason, cognition and culture are to be found in religion.
- Religious symbolism expresses, yet transfigure social experience.
- Function of religious rituals in the creation of Social solidarity.



## Western Thinkers

Durkheim rejected any definition in terms of the supernatural and opposed both “naturism” and “animism” as inadequate accounts of religion. Instead he defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred ones that united their followers into a moral community.

While men are losing faith in the old religions, new religions will be born. For all societies feel the need to express their collective sentiments, ideas, and ideologies in regular ceremony. All societies need a set of common values and moral guidelines to inspire their members to transcend their selfishness. While the forms and particular symbols may change, religion is eternal.

### Primitive Totemism

Religion has its origins in totemism. Totems are collective symbols that represent both god and society. It contributes to group organization by linking the members to common ancestors and regulating their behavior through certain prohibitions. According to him the origin of religion may be traced in the **Arunta Tribe of Australian Aborigine** who used to practice totemism.

**The practices of totemism belong to the realm of the sacred.** He found Totemism as a basic social institution which prescribed **Willy- Nilly exogamy**. The essence of totemism is the worship of an impersonal, anonymous force at once immanent and transcendent. This anonymous diffuse force which is superior to men and very close to them is in reality society itself.

A totem was originally an animal or plant considered to have a particular symbolic significance by various ritual activities. The totem symbolized the clan while the sacred reality was actually the clan or society itself. Likewise, the religions themselves symbolize the followers of a religion, but in actuality what is sacred is the community or society.

### Sacred and Profane

Durkheim used the fact that in any form of religious belief there is a distinction to be made between the **sacred** (special symbols and ceremonies

involved in overtly religious activity and the **profane** (everyday (“non-sacred”) life as it is separated from religious activity). In this respect, the **sacred symbolizes society** whilst the **profane symbolizes the individual**. Thus, in worshipping the sacred (a **manifest function** of religious activity), people were also - more importantly - worshipping society (a **latent function** of religious activity). **Just as the sacred is more important than the profane, so too is society more important than the individual** - it is something that has to be venerated and continually reaffirmed as special if order and continuity is to be maintained.

All things can be divided into profane and sacred and religion belongs to the latter. **Sacred objects** are symbols and are treated apart from the routine aspects of existence or the realm of the profane. Eating the totemic animal or plant is usually forbidden and as a sacred object the totem is believed to have divine properties which separate it completely from other animals. What makes a thing sacred is an attitude filled with emotion and sentiments, a feeling that contain things are above the ordinary matters of everything life.

There is nothing intrinsic about a particular object which makes it sacred. An object becomes sacred only when the community invests it with that meaning. The circle of sacred object cannot be determined once for all. Their existences vary infinitely, according to different religions e.g. To the Hindu devotees the cow is sacred because the cow is imagined to represent a host of super empirical characteristics. A wafer made of flour when seen as bread is a profane object, but it becomes sacred to Catholics as the body of Christ when it is consecrated during the Mass.

The **PROFANE is the reverse of the sacred**. It embraces those aspects of social realities that are everyday matters of common life. The profane is the realm of routine experience which coincides greatly with what Pareto called “logical-experimental” experience.

But while these two categories are rigidly defined and set apart, they interact with one another and depend on each other for survival. The sacred world cannot survive without the profane world to support it and give it life, and vice versa. In general, those aspects of social life given moral superiority are considered sacred, and all other aspects are part of the profane.

### Religious Festivals and Rituals

Rituals establish a distinction what is to be treated as “sacred” as opposed to “profane”. Collective clan festivals, rites and rituals are at the root of the origin of religion. These rituals communicate between mankind and the gods, commemorate mythical beings and events, Expiate sins, transport the individual through the life course and function in a variety of other way to enhance the sense of participation in a symbolically rich social environment. In this great clan festival the individual feels his insignificance and the power of society.

Durkheim believes that scientific thinking increasingly replaces religious explanations to ceremonial and ritual activities gradually come to occupy only a small part of an individual’s life. Yet he says there is a sense in which religion in an altered form is likely to continue.

#### **“God is Society writ at large”.**

Emile Durkheim in his article **“The Origin of Beliefs”** placed himself in a positivist tradition, meaning that he thought of his study of society as dispassionate and scientific. He argued that **religion was an expression of social cohesion.**

Totemism is the original form of religion, because it was the emblem for the social group, the clan. The function of religion is to make people willing to put the interests of others ahead of themselves. Religion is a mechanism that protected a threatened social order. Religion thus serves to enhance social solidarity.

He sought the origins of religion in society rather than in the individual human mind. Religion

originated in communal emotion. He thought that the function of religion was to make people willing to put the interests of society ahead of their own desires. To do this, he suggested, **religion worked in two modes: the positive cult and the negative cult.**

The **negative cult consisted of all the taboos** and prohibitions of religion, like fasting and abstaining from sex. The purpose, Durkheim believed, was to teach self-discipline.

The **positive cult consisted of communal ceremonies**, which were centered around the totem, and which might involve relaxing the normal taboo on eating the totem in a communal meal, as well as dancing and other sensory indulgences, during

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which people achieved a state of heightened emotion, or effervescence, in the presence of other group members.

The heightened emotion led to

**positive feelings toward the social group.** Thus he remarked “A religion is a unified system of beliefs...relative to sacred things...beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” Religion is thus a communal experience than an individual experience. Religious phenomena occurred when a separation is made between the profane - the realm of everyday activities and the sacred - the realm of the extra ordinary. According to Durkheim religion has four functions:-

- Disciplinary.
- Cohesive, bringing people together in a bond that was strong.
- Vitalizing.

- Euphoric- a good feeling, happiness, confidence.  
Hence “God is society, writ large.”

### **Functions of Religion**

1. Religion should try to balance between sentiments and emotions.

By worshipping God people are unwittingly worshipping the power of the collective over them—a power that both created and guides them. **They are worshipping society itself.**

2. To keep the group intact and ensure that group solidarity is maintained. By worshipping God people are unwittingly worshipping the

power of the collective over them—a power that both created and guides them. They are worshipping society itself.

3. It should ensure people live in groups in a disciplined way. Religion allows the individual to transcend self and act for the social good.
4. It should keep the members away from profane activities. Religion acts to pull people together (mentally and physically, in the form of religious services or assemblies). By doing so, religion is able to reaffirm collective morals and beliefs in the minds of all members of society. This is important, because if left to their own for a long amount of time, the beliefs and convictions of individuals will weaken in strength, and require reinforcement.
5. It should try to convert a profane man into a sacred one and already sacred man into higher stages of sacredness.

### **Critique**

1. He rejected any psychological contribution as well as contribution of natural phenomena to the understanding of religious phenomenon.
2. The distinction between Sacred and profane is ambiguous.
3. It is wrong to assume that Society and the God are one as he asserted.

## Western Thinkers

4. **Illogical arguments** - Durkheim has neglected to look at religion as a source of conflict and social change. For example, if we look at religious fundamentalism in the form it has taken in Iran or the USA, it is clear that religion can be harnessed to the interests of various groups within society. Thus, religion as a force for conflict and change can be set against the interests of an established (in this example, non-fundamentalist) social order.
5. His view that excitement of crowd is the birth place of religion is not scientifically correct.

**Durkheim on Education:** Believed that education served many functions:-

- 1) **To reinforce social solidarity-** Pledging allegiance: makes individuals feel part of a group and therefore less likely to break rules.
- 2) **To maintain social roles** - School is a society in miniature: it has a similar hierarchy, rules, expectations to the “outside world,” and trains people to fulfill roles.
- 3) **To maintain division of labor** - School sorts students into skill groups, encouraging students to take up employment in fields best suited to their abilities.

**Secular morality** - Durkheim considered the relationship of man, society and nature. He noted that the study of nature had increasingly been taken over by science. Thus the **extension of science reduced the sphere of religion**. Earlier religion represented all forms of knowledge — sacred and secular. With the growth of science, the sphere of the secular increased. Earlier morality was considered as religious duty. Durkheim rejected the religious part of that duty and expressed his faith in secular morality. In the modern times secular morality would, according to him, provide the basis for the moral order in society. Thus secular morality could become a new form of group conscience.

### **III. SUICIDES**

Durkheim chose to study suicide because he thought that if he could prove that suicide, a very

## Western Thinkers

personal act, could be explained through social factors, then surely any action could be examined in such a way. Durkheim propounds the theory of suicide on the basis of comparative data obtained from various European nations.

The starting-point for Durkheim was a close analysis of the available official statistics, which showed that rates of suicide varied:

- From one country to another – countries experiencing rapid social change had higher suicide rates.
- Between different social groups – The divorced had higher suicide rates than the married.
- Between different religious groups – Protestants had higher suicide rates than Catholics

Durkheim noted that these rates were relatively stable over time for each group. The rates may have gone up or down, but the rates remained stable relative to each other. Durkheim theorised that if suicide was an entirely individual matter, untouched by the influence of social factors, it would be an astonishing coincidence if these statistical patterns remained so constant over a long period of time. Entirely individual decisions should lead to a random pattern.

Durkheim used his data to derive his now famous theory – that suicide rates increase when there is too little or too much social regulation or integration.

**Social Regulation** is the extent to which there are clear norms and values in a society, while **social integration** is the extent to which people belong to society.

Specifically, Durkheim analyzed differences between **Protestants and Catholics**. He found a lower rate of suicide among Catholics, and theorized that this was due to **stronger forms of social control and cohesion** among them than among Protestants. Durkheim noted that modern rates of suicide varied decisively with religious conditions. Protestants regularly had higher suicide rates than Catholics, because the latter religion integrated the

individual into a set of social practices that blunted the tendencies towards egoistic suicide. Protestant emphasis on salvation by faith alone as well as its diminished forms of religious support enhanced egoistic withdrawal. He also noted that some traditional religions like Hinduism encouraged distinctive obligatory forms of altruistic suicide (e.g. Sati) through their insistence on the **intense integration** of the individual into the group.

Additionally, Durkheim found that suicide was **less common among women** than men, more common among single people than among those who are romantically partnered, and less common among those who have children. Further, he found that **soldiers commit suicide** more often than civilians, and that curiously, rates of suicide are higher during peacetime than they are during wars.

**Cosmic Factors** - In all countries suicide is greater in summer months. The proportion of suicides in the six warmer months to the six colder months is very similar in each country. While suicides increase in number as temperature increasing suicides reach a peak before the temperature does. If temperature is a cause of suicide, warm countries might be expected to have more suicides than cold countries, but the opposites tend to be the case.

Suicides increase as the days grow longer and decrease in numbers as the length of day declines. But it is not the sun itself which is the cause, because at noon time there are fewer suicides than at other times of the day.

Based on the above inference what **Durkheim finds is that factors associated with higher numbers of suicides must be there that relate to “the time” when social life is at its height**” the time of day, the day of week, the season of the year, and so on are not in themselves the reason for the changes in the no. of suicides. Social Facts such as social solidarity, collective consciousness, sociability and normlessness provide the required context for the study of suicide.



# Western Thinkers

His interpretation of suicide has the following features.

1. He dismisses the psychological explanation of suicide.
2. The rate of suicide and crime generally remains static in a recognized group.
3. Suicide can be interpreted in the context of a sick society.

Durkheim discusses the differing rates of suicide by religion, family, and political structure to map out the first social current that affects suicide rates: that of **"integration."** As a starting point, he argues, Protestants are more likely to commit suicide than Jews or Catholics. He hypothesizes that this difference can be accounted for by the fact that **Protestants enjoy a type of "free inquiry"** that other religions do not and therefore pursue knowledge with an intensity that others do not. This pursuit of knowledge, however, is not the cause of suicide rates to rise. Rather, it signals a lack of integration of the religious society's norms and values.

Similarly, the lack of strongly aligned family structures or political structure signals a dangerous lack of integration. As he states, "when society is strongly integrated, it holds individuals under its control, considers them at its service and thus forbids them to dispose willingly of themselves". Thus the social currents of **differing levels of "integration,"** affect changes in suicide rates.

Durkheim then develops a second type of "social current" that affects the changing rates of suicide. This current he labels **"regulation."** As he describes, for society to regulate individuals' cohesion into the society, "the passions first must be limited". This is usually done with an establishment of social codes, laws and rules. He argues that these rules function so that an individual can neither expect too much, nor too little, thus maintaining a happy equilibrium as to his place in society.

The two scales (**regulation and integration**) work independently in equilibrium. It

is not sufficient to keep the levels high or low, since a drastic calibration in either direction is likely contribute to the increased prevalence of suicide. For Durkheim integration is the "degree to which collective sentiments are shared" and regulations refer to "the degree of external constraint on people".

## Other Social Factors

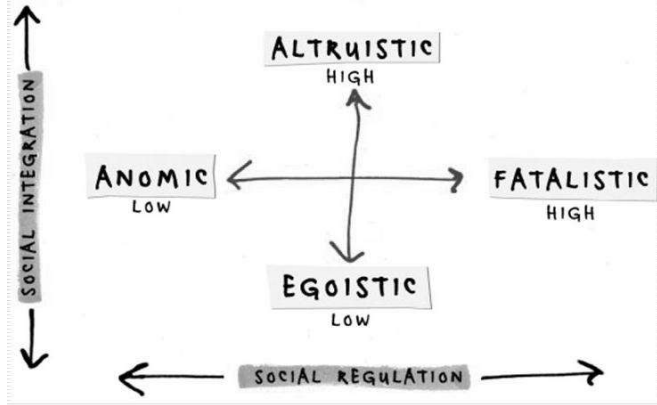
Times of political crisis, war and economic change are also associated with changes in the rate of suicide. He notes that there was a decline in the no. of suicides in all the European countries in 1848, a year of revolution and political change throughout Europe.

## Types of suicide

1. Altruistic Suicide - Altruistic suicide is committed by people who are deeply committed to group norms and goals and who see their own lives as unimportant. Basically, these suicides involved dying for a cause. Integration may not be the direct cause of suicide but the social currents that go along with it can lead to this.

An example is someone who commits suicide for the sake of a religious or political cause, such as the infamous Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II, or the hijackers of the airplanes that crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania on in 2001, sati, self immolation by the Buddhist monks. In such social circumstances, people are so strongly integrated into social expectations and society itself that they will kill themselves in an effort to achieve collective goals.

2. Anomic suicide - Anomic suicide is committed by people when society is in crisis or rapid change. In such times, customary norms may weaken or break down. With no clear standards of behavior to guide them, many people become confused, their usual goals lose meaning, and life seems aimless. The term Anomic was first propounded by Durkheim in his book DOL. It occurs due to very low degree of regulation or external constraint on people.



Anomie occurs during period of serious social, economic, or political upheaval, which results in quick and extreme changes to society and everyday life. In such circumstances a person might feel so confused and disconnected that they choose to commit suicide.

3. Egoistic suicide - Egoistic suicide is committed by people who are not strongly supported by membership in a cohesive social group. As outsiders, they depend more on themselves than on group goals and rules of conduct to sustain them in their lives. In times of stress, they feel isolated and helpless.

One type of weak integrated individual is the unmarried male. Marriage—more generally, family life—has the ability to “[neutralize] the suicidal tendency or [prevent] its outburst”.

Educated people are weakly integrated into society. Durkheim relates education to class, believing that the higher classes tend to pursue knowledge and have the “most active intellectual life. He concludes that well-to-do classes exhibit higher suicide rates and, more importantly, that “suicide increases with knowledge”. Therefore, **education can serve as an indicator of weak societal bonds.**

Elderly people who lose these ties are the most susceptible to egoistic suicide.

4. Fatalistic Suicide - Individuals that are highly regulated by society are more inclined to commit type of suicide referred to as “fatalistic suicide”.

Examples are suicides by very young husbands, childless married women, slaves, etc. These suicides are all attributable to excesses of physical or moral despotism. They are people whose futures are blocked and whose passions are suppressed by an oppressive discipline. But Durkheim thinks that this type of suicide is unimportant in modern society.

### Significance

# Western Thinkers

Suicides appear to be uniquely personal and private act. Its cause however lies in the nature of social groups. Durkheim’s study of suicide has after been taken as a modal for research methodology in sociology. Durkheim accepted that there may be an occasional suicide which could not be placed in any category

- Generally suicide has some relationship with social rules or values and the individual
- The causes of suicide are not individual
- Suicide is structural in origin

### Critique

1. On methodological grounds, he has been criticized for starting with a theory and then trying to prove it, rather than seeking diligently to disprove it, as the application of scientific method decrease.
2. **Halbawchs** said there is inverse relationship between social complexity and suicide rates as for example; suicides are lower in rural areas where lifestyle is simpler than in urban areas. Protestants urban location is the main cause for higher suicide rate than Catholics.
3. He did not provide adequate operational definition for social integration.
4. His categorical assertion that society determines individual behavior has been challenged by those who stress the individuals’ interpretation of his social world.

Any sociological explanation of suicide should therefore be a synthesis of theoretical structure and action. Giddens and Willis and others have attempted to explore the dialectical relationship between structure and action.