

Émile Durkheim: A Deeper Look into His Contributions

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Abstract

This paper dives deeper into the life of Émile Durkheim, specifically focusing on his contributions. Through a study of his work, his concepts of solidarity, religion, and anomie are defined. His definition of mechanical and organic solidarity differs from one another and both concepts are elaborated on. While his career took off in the late 1800s, his valuable contributions are still relevant in society today.

Keywords: Solidarity, Religion, Anomie, Mechanical Solidarity, Organic Solidarity

Background

Émile Durkheim has left quite the impact in the field of sociology. Born in France, in 1858, his life began, and it was not one that was going to be the easiest. He came from a long line of rabbis, yet he decided to not follow in their footsteps. While he did break away from the religion, he remained in the Jewish community. Most of his life involved living through France's Third Republic, which was essentially a new system of government adopted in 1870. From the years 1879 to 1882, he attended École Normale Supérieure, where he studied philosophy. In 1887, at 17 years old, he married Louise Dreyfus and following his marriage, shortly after he turned 20, his father Moïse Durkheim, passed away. His wife, Louise, was heavily involved in his work. She helped him copy manuscripts and supported him in his many endeavors. They both had two children together, Marie and Andre. Andre died in the First World War at the age of 23. This event caused a significant decline in Durkheim's mental health.

Concerns

Durkheim's greatest concern was solidarity and its impact on society. He wanted to understand its purpose and how it was created amongst individuals. Additionally, this made him concerned with cultural diversity. Throughout his studies, he became focused on the concept of anomie, which is the decrease of social relationships and bonds. These changes were rapid and caused high levels of uncertainty. Anomie was a threat to society and its stability, creating an increase in levels of crime and suicide. Without an orderly society, nothing is run efficiently, and communities are chaotic. Durkheim took a deeper look into different conditions of suicide. He believed this issue should not be studied person by person, but instead it should be analyzed in a social view. Following the study of different conditions, he claimed there were four different types of suicide: Altruistic, Egoistic, Fatalistic, and Anomic. Altruistic suicide is one that many

associate with more modern societies. It is viewed as the sacrifice of one's life to benefit another person or group. It is intentional and is committed due to an obligation to protect the honor of a social group. Egoistic suicide is another one associated with modern society, but it is caused by weak connections, whereas Altruistic suicide involves strong connections. It stems from social solidarity where one may feel they are alone in society, sometimes feeling like an outcast. The lack of social connection is commonly caused by constant levels of competition whether that be at work or in other institutions. Fatalistic suicide is caused by extreme levels of regulation. Individuals are expected to follow strict rules, which may eliminate their sense of self. The final type of suicide is Anomic, and Durkheim believes it is caused by a sudden and large change in someone's life. The lack of regulation and stability turns into frustration and high levels of stress. These occurrences can be very harmful, causing one to commit suicide. Durkheim took these major concerns and further analyzed the issues. His findings would be a part of his lasting impact in sociology.

Contributions

Émile Durkheim, often known as one of the founding fathers of sociology, left extensive contributions to society and his research became the foundation for many theorists. His concept of solidarity remains key to our interpretation of social cohesion. Not only did he define social solidarity, but he believed there were two forms: mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity is cohesion based on similar beliefs. It is like a machine in the aspect that if a piece breaks, then it can be replaced with another part. Organic solidarity is based on interdependence. Individuals in society are independent, yet they are dependent too. For example, a farmer needs a mechanic to fix a tractor and that mechanic relies on farming for food.

Durkheim focused on religion and morality in his research as he believed it played a large role in the functioning of society. He defined two groups, the sacred and the profane, which he argued are two groups that society categorizes everything in. The sacred involves things that society categorizes as special while the profane refers to normal and non-sacred things. Durkheim believed that a sacred object or idea is anything of great significance within a group. These beliefs are not special to one person and instead they are shared amongst an institution, such as a church or school. His concept collective representation refers to symbols that are used to represent shared beliefs. For example, the cross is a symbol of the Christian religion. Religion unites many and requires shared ideas and gatherings. Due to that, Durkheim believed it is essential in society. The function of religion in society strengthens bonds and brings individuals together. Additionally, it provides people with support and purpose. According to Durkheim, society needs more than scientific evidence to bring people together. Science and religion both bring value to society, but in different ways. All the insights of Émile Durkheim give us a better understanding of social order and his influence on society continues to inspire the work of others in the realm of sociology.

Conclusion

Émile Durkheim's contributions to sociology are still relevant today. His thoughts on solidarity, anomie, and religion continue to impact the work of modern theorists. Society today is becoming increasingly diverse and through these changes, groups maintain solidarity. Different types of solidarity can be viewed through many ways in society. The concept of mechanical solidarity has been observed in the COVID 19 pandemic. While this was a time of crisis for many and several protective measures were put into place, society displayed high levels of

resilience and unity. Collective action was required to combat the pandemic and the overall well-being of society was prioritized over focusing on individual needs.

The source of organic solidarity is the labor between individuals. This concept will remain relevant in society as everyone has to be dependent on the work of someone else. Not everyone can produce every necessity needed to survive, independently. Specifically, doctors are needed to diagnose medical conditions, farmers are needed to produce crops, teachers are needed to provide education, mechanics are needed to work on machines, and types of religion are relied on to live. While these may not be relevant in the lives of everyone, these are common examples of how organic solidarity remains in society. Within the last decade, the anomie theory has been widely used when studying deviance and crime. Extreme levels of loneliness and feelings of worthlessness tend to encourage deviant behavior because behavior is not being regulated. Through extensive research, Émile Durkheim has left a lasting impact in sociology and his emphasis on social cohesion encourages solidarity and social order amongst many.

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