Works of Emile Durkheim

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Author Note

Based on Capitalism and Classical Social Theory by John Bratton and David Denham

Works of Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim was a French Sociologist, who is deeply regarded as one of the largest contributors to Modern Sociology alongside Max Weber and Karl Marx. He published several influential writings during his life on several topics. He analyzed the roles played by different social institutes, laying the foundation for structural functionalism. It should be noted that during his writings, sociology was not recognized in academic circles as an independent field of study. Therefore, Emile's works were classified under the discipline of Philosophy, a subject that he thought had a lot in common with Sociology. This works includes the study of the philosophy of religion, hermeneutics, language, meta-ethics, morality and epistemology. In this paper, we will be discussing the works of Emile Durkheim but under the given text called ‘Capitalism and Classical Social Theory’ by authors John Bratton and David Denham. Only the relevant chapter which has elaborated Durkheim's works will be discussed.

**Background of the Main Text Used**

The works of Emile Durkheim have been discussed in chapters seven, eight and nine of the relevant texts. Chapter seven elaborates Emile's point of view regarding the work done to develop modern societies. He also highlights the differences between his views and that of Marx and Weber. The book discussed in this chapter is called "The Division of Labor in Society". In this book, he introduced the failure of the effect of the established norms and the people within a society. He also believes that placing people with a unique skillset for their specified jobs is highly beneficial for the functioning of society while honing the skills of the labor as well. He also believes that the division of labor into different skilled teams goes beyond the commercial benefits of society. It establishes a kind of order within society. He thinks that the division of labor is in direct relation to the density of a society.

Chapter eight is about the rules of sociological method and on suicide. The framework of rules of sociological research that he specified in the former can be seen as the groundwork on which all his future research is based. He terms reality as ‘Sui Generis’, a Latin word phrase meaning ‘of its kind’. He believed that all the social facts are objective and they can only be understood by sociological laws. There can be no other scientific or psychological explanation of these facts. He went so far as to declare sociology as a science of hard-core facts. Emile's other text on suicide, commonly known as ‘Le Suicide’ was an unprecedented text that is still the basic building block of the discipline of psychology. Again, he links the causes of the suicide of a person with societal factors. He concludes that the person who socializes and integrates himself into the fabric of the society does not have a reason to commit suicide.

Chapter nine, also the last chapter to feature Emile’s works, is based on his book called ‘Rationalization and the limits of Rationality’. In this scripture, he describes the importance of unity in society. He believes that a force or an idea is needed to yoke the society together in a bond. He classifies this force into two categories, namely mechanical unity and organic unity. The former is the creation of homogeneous behavior in a society. This can be observed in the post-industrial era societies, especially those that were under the influence of the Soviets. In, organic unity, heterogeneous behavior is the main selling point. We observe a higher rate of dependency on the diversity in the skillset of the people involved. Durkheim argues that the bonds of society become stronger over time since diversity increases the chances of survival of society due to diversified knowledge which guarantees an easier path to financial success.

## Theories of ‘Le Suicide’

I believe that Emile Durkheim's theories of suicide is his greatest achievement. Suicide was seen as the greatest social problem of the nineteenth century. It also proved how affectivity the sociological methods of research used by Emile Durkheim, and to what extent they could be used. He showed through his research that the suicide victim has a reason when he decides to take his own life. The victim thinks that the act of suicide will somehow benefit the society that he is the part of. Durkheim tried to increase the focus of the society on the objectivity of the act of suicide and emphasized the fact that many states have a rather stable percent of suicide victims rather than the common belief of its rising rate at the time. He refuted the established jargon related to suicide and listed a series of factors such as race, imitation, heredity and mental state of the victim at the time of committing the act. These explanations later helped him to develop the basic framework of his book Le Suicide.

He linked two types of suicide with the intensity of social unity in a society, meaning the feeling of belonging to a single group. He was of the view that a highly integrated society will naturally have almost zero suicide rates. He believed that a person is generally more selfish and that he favors individual goals over collective ones. The condition mentioned above gives rise to ‘Egoistic’ suicide. According to Durkheim, the victim feels like, to use the phrase, a fish out of water. When the victim feels as part of the sea, his desire for committing suicide vanes. His attachment to the group will give rise to a kind of collective pride, which in turn gives him a reason to work harder for the survival and prosperity of his group. The main factor that Durkheim discusses in his theories is the factor of religion in both acceleration and prevention of suicide. Although religion condemns the act of suicide, it can also be observed that sometimes it comes to the cause of it too. The split in religious values among ethnic groups creates an incentive for the victim to commit suicide. He cites the example of Protestants vs Catholics, declaring that the former has a higher tendency to commit suicide as compared to the latter.

A factor that he discusses as an antidote to the suicidal tendency is family. Theoretically, we can assume that a single person has a lesser chance to commit suicide due to a lack of burdens and responsibilities, but Durkheim proved otherwise. He proved through the careful analysis and collection of data that married people have a lesser chance to commit suicide. But he argues that the decrease in the tendency of the above mentioned depends on the environment of his home and family. Quoting the data from the French census (1886), he underlines that married men without children are more likely to commit suicide. He also points out the political integration as an important factor in the prevention of suicide. We can quote the example of the French Revolution in this regard, showing the turmoil between 1789 and 1800, a lot of people lost their lives due to the lawlessness in the state by committing suicide.

He also argues with another type of suicide, with he dubs as Altruistic suicide. He gives the example of an old man or a soldier who would give his life to avoid dishonor that will come to his family or nation. Another option that he gives in the same category is the "option" for a person to commit suicide after a severe row with his family or peers. Lastly, he discusses who someone would feel pleasure in committing suicide that he would consider noble. The custom of "Settee" in the religion of Hinduism is the classic example of such a case. It is a centuries-old custom where the widow would commit suicide to prove her love for her dead husband.

His work on Anomic suicide is, in my opinion, one of the most contributing to the societal understanding of suicide. The most common suicide is when the person loses hope in the system. The financial crisis of Vienna (1873) is cited by Durkheim as a case that lead to almost three-quarters of the city's populace into suicide.

# Conclusion

Durkheim's theories started the trend of observing the scientific method in the field of Sociology. He proved that a human is codependent on the structure of society and vice versa. He was the first sociologist that highlighted the role of the state in the cause and prevention of the act of suicide. Indeed, the Global North is still plagued by this epidemic. The tremendous increase in street crimes and demonstrations should be studied in the light of his theory so that his issue could be curtailed.

# References

John Bratton, D. D. (2014). *Capitalism and Classical Social Theory, Second Edition.* Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.