

An Introduction to Durkheim's Approach

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Émile Durkheim (1858—1917), a French sociologist, was considered to be among the founders of modern sociology. His explanation of a society's dynamics through presenting a sociological, scientific analysis instead of an individual psychological perspective are works of crucial importance. He was particularly interested in how social integrity and coherence could be maintained in modern society and was a proponent of studying society more holistically through structural functionalism, which provided insights into key social consequences of laws, religion, education, and other such forces on societal integration (Allan, 2005). Society should be studied through an analysis of 'social facts' through the use of the scientific method, which according to him, was an ultimate guide to objective knowledge. He agreed with Auguste Comte that by stripping sociology of philosophical speculation and metaphysical abstractions, the study of its social sciences could become scientific (Marjolin, 1937) and chose a realist angle to establish the presence of social realities external to the individual and showed that these realities manifested themselves at the macro level in shaping society's objective relations (Morrison, 2006). Keeping Durkheim's approach in perspective, the paper seeks to critically analyze Durkheim's theories on individualism, moral education, and religion, and their utility in a social context, which has promoted a greater understanding of effective social-educational policies.

Theoretical Sociological Perspectives On Education

It is well acknowledged that education and schooling have a crucial function to play in the lives of individuals as well as society as a whole. In this regard, various theories have been used by sociologists to understand its nature. Common theories to understand education involves the functional theory, the feminist theory, the conflict theory, and the symbolic interactionist theory. Durkheim was the founder of the functional theory of education and viewed education as a vital social institution. Functionalists maintain that education provides two important functions in the school setting: latent functions and manifest functions; the concealed and involuntary functions and the obvious and intended functions of education, respectively.

In functionalist theory, education's visible and manifest functions begin with socialization. From the start, even in preschool and kindergarten, various societal roles are taught to students who practice them in various settings. The child observes and learns the norms and rules of society in this social exercise. Educational systems in the U.S, for example, manifest functions like social control are used to convey core American values, and students are taught respect for authority and conformity to law.

Another function is to prepare the student for the workplace, where they will be required to work and integrate with people that may have authority over them. Teachers and instructors in the classroom work to fulfill this function primarily. Education also contributes toward social placement, as a method by society to generate upward social mobility. College and Universities function as an instrument to place students closer to careers to allow them to seek financial security and freedom.

The latent functions of education in functional theory see the educational setting perform an important less visible function, i.e., to develop contacts and social networks that can help students in finding placements. The ability to work together with others in small groups serves an important latent function to inculcate a skill transferable to the professional setting, one that a homeschool setting may not be able to provide. Students find a place to learn about a variety of social and international issues on college campuses, to develop not only tolerance for diverse views represented on campus but find an ample opportunity for political and social justice advocacy. Further latent functional roles include an academic sorting or classification of students based on their potential. Students that are more capable are identified through testing or classroom achievements from early in school. Functionalists also observe that those functions that were traditionally undertaken by the family have been taken over to an extent by the school. Society now increasingly relies on schools not only for basic skills such as budgeting and employability skills but teaching them about human sexuality as well, topics that were once left only to be addressed by the family (OpenStax, 2012).

Durkheim's Theory Of Education

The functional sociologist Emile Durkheim believes that there are two main functions of education in modern industrial societies: to transfer the common values and principles of society while teaching alongside specialized skills according to the economy's requirement of specialized labor divisions. He believes that schools are one of the few institutions that can help shift a traditional society, which Durkheim sees as centered on mechanical solidarity, toward a broader modern society that is based on organic solidarity.

"Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity: education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands" Emil Durkheim (M Harlambos, 2013)

Education performs this function by insinuating a sense of social solidarity in the individual by instilling a perception of belonging to the community in general, a sense of duty, a realization of the significance of working collectively for a society's common goals, and promoting awareness in him that society is higher than the individual. He contended that in complex societies, school plays a role that can not be accomplished by the family that is built on kinship, compared to a friendship that is grounded on a personal decision as a member of a larger society, where learning ways to follow and cooperate with people who are not our parents or friends is needed, in order to achieve goals. Durkheim was of the opinion that rules must be firmly enforced in schools, with a chain of penalties

for violations of the institution's regulations, reflective of the severity of harm inflicted on the whole group, by the child who broke regulations (Ottaway, 2010). Durkheim similarly noted that by knowing the reason why sanctions were imposed on offenders, children understand self-discipline not only for fear of being reprimanded but also because their deviant behavior causes them to run through the damage seen by their group as a whole. The other crucial function Durkheim saw for schooling in a modern industrial nation is imparting specialized competencies to perform skilled labor roles. Durkheim is of the opinion that schools deliver "the necessary homogeneity for social survival and the 'necessary diversity for social cooperation.'" (M Harlambos, 2013).

Durkheim's functional theory of education has been criticized for his hypothesis that people need common values to function as a society. British society, for example, is a highly multicultural society to such an extent that the notion that a unique British culture exists is itself controversial, entire communities exist inside Britain living an isolated life from what is seen as mainstream culture. Critics suggest that the school indoctrinates working-class children to be passive so that it is easier to use them in their later lives. Today's education systems are still based on an industrial paradigm of education. The school has become more a place to "find the right answers for passing tests" than to stimulate different thinking. Also, for the contention that schools are a prerequisite to transfer complex specialized skills, (Illich, 1971) in the "society of out of school", proposed methods that can help students absorb and develop skills related to specialized labor in a fairly decentralized way.

Durkheim's Notion Of Individualism

In 'the Division of Labor, Durkheim regrets that traditions have lost their dominant power and that "individual judgment has been liberated from collective judgment". Important Institutional roles and functions were "interrupted" without being given time to adapt or prepare (Émile Durkheim, 1933). Profound structural changes in modern society are seen by Durkheim as affecting society's perception of the Moral good. He envisions the Individual to be an embodiment of the sacred. Durkheim's view of social solidarity in advanced societies involves links between highly interdependent but autonomous individuals. He recognizes some modes of individualism to be selfish that threaten the common good by fostering individuals to be selfish and egotistical. His view of moral individualism is highly distinguishable from what he terms the "utilitarian egoism of Spencer and the economists." For Durkheim, Individualism implies deep respect for humanity and a morality of cooperation. Moral Individualism is not "glorification of the self" but generally of the person himself. Durkheim is positive that moral individualism may well develop into "moral catechism" to build the foundation for a new morality. He sees the "cult of the individual" to have developed into one of the most recognizable traits of modernism that replaces all other religions (Cristi, 2012).

Durkheim consistently argues that "social phenomena do not arise in the individual;

In the group "(Durkheim, 1997), Spencer, in direct contrast, claims, however, the

Phenomena are strictly and exclusively a product of the individual and between individuals

Interaction and all social facts are understood from this point of view:

“We should not, as does Spencer, present social life as the result of individual natures alone since, on the contrary, it is rather the latter that emerges from the former. Any personality, however powerful it might be, could do nothing alone against a whole society” (Émile Durkheim, 1933)

Rejecting Spencer’s assertion that the individual could produce anything social without the direct regulation and influence of society at large, Durkheim asserts that “...members of a society can only be dominated by a force that is superior to themselves, and there is only one of these that possess this quality: that of the group” (Émile Durkheim, 1933)

The fatal flaw in Durkheim’s criticism of Spencer’s notions of individualism rests on a lack of understanding and contempt for innate human singularity and the associated genetic nature of the human individual. Although individuals often share many similarities with their social group, the human process and internalize social life in different ways (Nisbet, 1974). Durkheim ignores psychological and social assumptions and basic differences between people. Our ability to interpret, conceive and integrate society is characteristic of itself (Luc, 1973). In short, Durkheim’s claim that individual life is born of collective life ignores all possible biopsychological explanations of individual variations, including natural instinct and genetic disposition (Smith, 2009).

Religion And Durkheim’s Concept Of Moral Individualism

Religion was one of Durkheim’s main themes. He saw it as a social phenomenon, as a form of collective human behavior that changes over time, depending on historical conditions. His frequent use of the term “sacred” does not reflect a religious worldview or a moral position. It’s simply a recognition of a certain type of social behavior. From his point of view, the “sacred” represents what a social group considers valuable, to determine what is acceptable or unacceptable based on individual decisions. Shared values are represented and maintained by participating in group activities: and rituals. As society developed and became more complex and diverse, these values and rituals also became diverse and fragmented. This led to a transition from collective meanings, values, and practices toward individualism. The collective religious sense of what is most valuable gradually moved to the remaining matters about which people collectively agreed on, the value of individual life. The individual, therefore, became “Sacred”. The “cult of the individual” according to Durkheim does not imply that individualism is exaggerated, or is a myth that should be discarded in the transition to a scientific worldview. This means that the same feelings and social practices that were once associated with traditional religions are embedded in the current sense of society for values in people’s lives. These beliefs and collective actions are “the cult of the individual”.

Durkheim's conception of religion as a necessary societal phenomenon has been met with criticism as well. Religion arises in a community, in which the shared effervescence of ritual gives beliefs and religious practices extra-human power. He bases his argument on accounts of ancient cultures for his concept and claims that "the totem of the society reflects society as a whole" and therefore grows larger than any person and society itself. The authority of the sacred Totem originates from society. His opponents say that it may not be true that religion is always social (Uricoechea, 2011). Ascetic traditions, for instance, prefer isolation and segregation, and may not fit into Durkheim's hypothesis. Durkheim saw Christianity like any other religion and without privileging Christianity, his studies were an important step in studying the social science of religion. His functionalism did not let him foresee that in the inter-regional sphere, religion could also produce conflict. He also did not mention that there might be conflicts within religion because it is never symmetrical (Uricoechea, 2011).

Individualism is considered by Durkheim as the only form of mechanical solidarity that remains in modern society. In trying to explain the moral foundation of modern society, Durkheim struggles with explaining the nature of the relationship between his conception of moral specialization or diversity-related with organic solidarity and the morality of the collective consciousness related to his idea of the "cult of the individual" (Marske, 1987).

Analysis Of Durkheim's Concept Of Moral Education

In "moral education," Durkheim defines morality to be composed of three vital elements on which it is constructed: attachment, discipline, and autonomy (Durkheim, 1961). According to him, discipline restricts selfish tendencies and impulses and functions to control aggressive and egocentric behavior. Attachment is the extent to which an individual is prepared to commit to a communal group, while autonomy is self-responsibility and accountability for one's deeds. The triad relationship between discipline, autonomy, and attachment constructs morality as a code that is fulfilled by sources of action that are interdependent and complementary to each other.

Durkheim's vision of a moral education suggests these three aspects of morality for children to learn, that are necessary for the functioning of society. In a school, children are required to display discipline ("sit down and shut up"), autonomy ("do your homework") as well as attachment ("love your country"). If education is to be a foundation for morality, that implies that morality can be modified or changed by education in order to reform society. The reform of a community for Durkheim through moral education takes place not just at the level of the content of education, but perhaps more at the level of form. As Durkheim described in works such as "division of labor in society" (Emile Durkheim, 1933), attachment can be considered among the weak aspects of morality, because of the low level of social cohesion in modern societies that have a high division of labor. Moral education, therefore, focuses on the feeling of belonging to a community. For instance, Durkheim proposes that adults can also obtain a moral education by connecting to different unions or associations (like professional

associations) (Durkheim, 1997).

For Durkheim, morality was decisive from both a theoretical and practical point of view. Theoretically, any permanent system of interpersonal relations must be considered inherently moral, with essential elements that enforce behavior and which, representing common ideas of goodness, provide the basis for community unity. From a practical perspective, a strong secular morality for Durkheim was the condition of national health or even survival. But Durkheim's ideas have not been fulfilled uncritically, for example, skeptics argue that Durkheim does not appeal to the contribution of social interaction among peers in the development of autonomy. Durkheim does not set the rules to promote moral development in detail. The Durkheim theory lacks empirical support. Durkheim's ideas justify a "political education" in which public education systems are used to indoctrinate citizens. Durkheim is a reductionist to the collective level.

For Durkheim, people have links with the state / social institution, but not necessarily with each other. Pluralism plays a crucial role in the dynamism and diversity of the civil community. Durkheim supported a deliberate democratic social community and felt that this form of community could lead to social change (Bouas, 1993). Individuals define morality individually through their struggles to achieve just solutions. Unlike Durkheim, Piaget believed that autonomy should include a spontaneous and creative initiative as well as exploration. Teachers should promote the personal discovery of students by solving problems (Eberhardt, 2014).

Humanistic Buddhism

Humanist Buddhism was created in China in the early 20th century. The movement was created as a collective attempt to emphasize the importance of life in Buddhist practice, rather than focusing on traditional Buddhist rituals for the dead. (Xue, 2013). From its early stages in northern India to its present-day resurgence, Buddhism has undergone many developments and changes. The founder of Buddhist FO Guang Shan humanistic Buddhist order, Hsing Yun, was a Chinese Buddhist monk, philanthropist, and author who sought to combine the unique spirit of Buddha's teachings with applications based on today's world to develop new interpretations adapted to the needs of the current era (Kimball, 2000). The aim of Humanistic Buddhism promoted by FO Guang Shan is to make Buddhism applicable in people's lives today. "The Buddha never asked us to flee this world; he taught us to understand it and deal with it." (Yun, 2009)

Humanistic Buddhism is based on six basic concepts: humanism, altruism, spiritual practices in everyday life, joy, opportunity, and universality to save all living things. From these principles, the goal of humanist Buddhism is to unite Buddhist tradition with ordinary norms, emphasizing care for the physical world and not only concerned with achieving salvation within or after it. (Nan Tien Temple, 2016). Xing Yun, one of the principal figures of modern-day humanistic Buddhism, has reshaped Buddhist rituals that have to do with not only the deceased but the spiritual progress of living people as well. It does not completely discard rituals. The performance of rituals in humanistic

Buddhist practice maintains the idea of Buddhist transcendence while recognizing the secular life and extending the sacred space outside the walls of the temple, to the public (Xue, 2013).

Durkheim's Socialistic Views Of Religion And Humanistic Buddhism

In 'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life' (Durkheim, 1915), Durkheim used his understanding of the Buddhist tradition to put forth two crucial arguments in his classification of religious phenomena: that spirits and deities for religion are not indispensable because Buddhism does not have supernatural beings; And that the characteristic common to all religions is the "sacred-profane dichotomy", that is even found in a non-deistic religion such as Buddhism. (Marco ORRU, 1992). Emile Durkheim has studied historically and functionally the place of religion in the development of society. He is best recognized for his analysis of suicide and the idea of anomie: if the rate of social change is faster than the rate of moral development of society, the resulting insufficient moral orientation leads to a social crisis. Lived and felt by individuals, religion, theorized, is a human framework for maintaining an integral moral reality. According to Durkheim, society and religion are closely related structures that continually develop as components of each other, that is, what is "sacred" is not fixed forever, but is defined by society in evolution (Giddens, 1971).

It has been suggested that Buddhist morality, especially Xing Yun's humanist Buddhism, is adaptive and compatible with the rational and individualistic framework of modernity. (McMahan, 2008) Some even wonder whether Buddhism should be considered a philosophy rather than a religion (Cassaniti, 2015). We can refer to humanist Buddhism as the form proposed by Emile Durkheim, which indicates that the moral fabric of society is developing, that religion is constituted and the collective consciousness of society. And so lived, done, and restored can be the individual beings who practice it (Giddens, 1971). Other critics have also supported the sociological interpretation of Durkheim, which can be merged with humanist Buddhism, as in the case of Buddhism, religion can slowly turn into a culture in which formal and "secular" rituals. Daily life is mixed, and the distinction fades quickly as it goes back and addresses the practical aspects of everyday life (Cassaniti, 2015). The functional role of religion in the case of humanistic Buddhism may persist even if it is a cultural philosophy rather than an organized religion, which Emil Durkheim also predicted in religion, which will be a means of unification of religious Communities, fulfilling the function of social consciousness and creating social cohesion. In this case, humanitarian Buddhism is a good reference to Durkheim's thoughts.

Those who argued against Durkheim's position suggested that the fear of superhuman beings in the world's religions is so widespread that it is almost universal and necessary for the study of religion, which becomes needlessly vague if one follows the inclusive views of Durkheim (Goody, 1961) (Spiro, 1966). For example, his critics (Marco ORRU, 1992) contend, in their argument against Durkheim's use of Buddhism to prove the practicality of sacred-profane theory for interpreting religion, that the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism are not considered sacrosanct in themselves, but have importance

because they are related directly to the “superhuman” Buddha. They claim that any authority that the four noble truths have in Buddhism stems from their connection with the Buddha himself, especially in his transcendental form (Herbrechtsmeier, 1993), thereby challenging Durkheim’s social theory of religion.

Utility Of Durkheim’s Works On Individualism, Morality, And Education

Durkheim’s focus on describing social dynamics at the macro level was one of the motives for his work. Structural functionalism, as a theoretical perspective, was borne out of Durkheim’s ideas. However, Durkheim’s understanding of the individual has noticeable problems, when despite a series of fundamental assumptions about human nature, Durkheim thought individuals to be driven by their desires in a mad quest for satisfaction that does not satiate (Ritzer, 2011). When these cravings have no limits, they grow to the point that the individual tends to become enslaved by them, which is when he becomes a threat to himself and society. It can be said that the whole of Durkheim’s hypothetical construction, particularly his insistence on shared morality, was based on this elementary supposition concerning the desires or passions of human beings. Individuals are regulated by social forces in Durkheim’s theories; instead of vice versa. For Durkheim, autonomy only meant a complete acceptance of these social forces (Ritzer, 2011). Morality, according to him, was not just the driving force behind his sociology but also his ultimate goal, as he thought that a science of morality could be produced through the sociological study of morality. His sociology, which attempts to determine the moral future, is intrinsically conservative. The most often cited criticism of Durkheim is his conservatism (Pearce, 1989). Even if a scientific study of morality is possible, it can not prevent us from making moral decisions. In fact, it is likely that this study hinders moral choice. In the highly pluralistic culture of today, it is evident that we can not simply accept moral traditions per se since it is highly difficult to determine which moral traditions all people must universally accept. Durkheim rightly claimed the benefits of social morality, as have other sociologists, that simply creating a new morality distinct from our moral traditions is not possible and that our shared morality must emerge through our moral traditions (Ritzer, 2011).

The two main themes of Durkheim’s sociology were that society takes priority over the individual and that society can be scientifically studied. In France, Durkheim effectively introduced a new moral education program that focused on teaching children discipline, autonomy, and attachment to society. He proposed to restore professional associations for adult education to educate them in collective morality (Ritzer, 2011). Although he strongly advocates that the state assumes its responsibility as an authority for the social regulation of morality, Durkheim’s sociology presented no political strategy to implement his recommendations.

Durkheim examined education and pedagogy from a sociological perspective. From his point of view, a school is a model in which social interaction and relations between individuals and society are

conveyed through the teacher-student relationship. Durkheim's thesis on the sociology of education gave rise to a scientific approach to approaching education through its social functions (Filloux, 1993). This led to the development of extensive literature in several countries, which dealt with a further inquiry into school-society relations, equality and opportunities, and the functioning of the class group. Although criticism has been made of Durkheim's approach to moral education (Eberhardt, 2014), it is clear that Emile Durkheim's theories on education, school environment, and student-teacher attitude hold key elements that should be taken into consideration in the educational process (Filloux, 1993).

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