

## **Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)**

First official sociology professor (1913)

### Key books

*The Division of Labor* (1893) (doctoral thesis)

Mechanical solidarity (based on shared values) vs. organic solidarity (based on division of labor)

Anomie: absence of clear rules of behavior, normlessness, unrealistic aspirations and expectations

Anomie is the major “pathology” of modern (organic) society

*The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895)

Durkheim attempted to differentiate sociology from philosophy and psychology.

Sociology is empirical (unlike philosophy)

Sociology deals with “social facts” (unlike psychology)

Social facts are external and coercive

“Here then, is a category of facts with very distinctive characteristics: it consists of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him.”

*Suicide* (1897)

First major statistical sociological study.

Societies with low integration (excessive individualism) result in higher suicide rates. Detachment from society results in detachment from life because society gives meaning to life. This is called anomic suicide. (Durkheim discussed three other types.)

*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912)

## *Durkheim's Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912)*

Study of religion of Australian Aborigines

The necessary component of religion: division of the universe into the sacred and the profane

The sacred: “extraordinary, transcendent and outside the everyday course of events”

The profane: everything else

Rites (ritual): rules governing how to behave toward sacred objects

Church: members united by common ideas and rites regarding the sacred

Religion: “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices, which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.”

Sacred object of Aborigines: totem (representation of animal or plant). The totem is also representative of some segment of society (e.g., clan)

Symbol of god & society are same because god & society are same

How is society like a god?

1. Superior to us
2. We depend on it
3. We must submit ourselves to its rules (which we haven't made & don't desire)

Religion's function is to provide symbols and rituals that connect people to their community.

Critique:

1. Durkheim's definition of religion (which ignores the supernatural) makes his conclusion inevitable
2. The ethnographic reports Durkheim drew upon have been discredited
3. Durkheim reduces religion to nothing but a reflection of society