Emile Durkheim

"Father of Sociology"

Biography

Early Life

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, was born on April 15, 1858 at Epinal, Voseges in Lorraine, France. His father, Moise Durkheim was chief rabbi of Voseges and Haute-Marne and his mother, Melanie, was daughter of a merchant. His family were very religious devout Jews and expected Emile Durkhiem to become a rabbi and so he was sent to rabbinical school. As a teen he became interested in Catholicism, but decided to take his studies under an agnostic point of view; he still remained close to his family and the Jewish community. For high school he was accepted to the Lyce Louis- Le grand in Paris. In 1829 he matriculated at cole Normale Superieure and graduated second to last in his class in 1882. Three years later, in 1885, Durkheim left for Germany to study sociology. He returned to France in 1887 and taught sociology—an area of study that had never been taught in the country before. He also married Louise Dreyfus (whom he had a son, Andr, and a daughter, Marie, with). In 1887 he was also named Charg des Cours de Pedagogie et des Sciences Sociale at Bordeaux.

Works Published and Accomplishments

In 1888, Durkheim gave a lecture on history and the practice of education in an excerpt called the "Course in Sociology: Opening Lecture." In 1892, Durkheim published *The Division of Labour in Society*—considered to be one of his earlier works— which was influential in advancing sociological theories and thought. In 1895, he published *Rules of the Sociological Method*, concerning what sociology is and how it should be practiced. In 1897, Durkheim published *Suicide*, a case study on suicide that also served as one of the first examples of the sociological monograph. He also established a journalistic collaboration program, which later came to found France’s first social sciences journal. In 1902, he was appointed Charg des Cours at Sorbonne (University of Paris). Four years later, he became a professor and shortly thereafter he became chair of Science of Education and Sociology. His last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Final Days of Life

WWI broke out in 1914. In 1916 Drukeich lost his son Andr who was at battle at the Bulgarian Front. The loss of his son caused great pain for Durkheim and soon afterward, he had a stroke at the age of 59. He passed away on November 15, 1917.

*Note: Published works are bolded and Italicized

Durkheim’s Philosophical Method

Durkheim has a different way of approaching the issues of the division of labor and social structure. He is a sociologist, and many of his processes and methods of analysis are based on a scientific basis. He uses a sort of scientific method, by basing his conclusions on observations and social properties. Also, he uses many biological examples in his writings, conveying a sense of scientific legitimacy. This is through his use of Holism.
Durkheim argued that societal progress, such as moral and personal development, were products of the common good. Indeed, the division of labour was a natural consequence of the pursuit of the common good, societal welfare. Just as Smith argued, it allowed for individuals to more easily function within society by specializing in their interests or talents. His nephew, Marcel Mauss, illustrated this argument further by labeling interactions between individuals as the transfer of Gifts. Because gifts have a positive connotation, Mauss showed that by providing someone with something that he or she did not have, you not only access the division of labour (providing services through your specialization) but also took a moral action (because you provide others with Gifts in order to reach a common good). While Durkheim noted that the pursuit of the common good was a central tenet of the common consciousness, Mauss would argue that the common good was derived from the obligations that people received from the hau to re-gift taonga.

The State, for Durkheim, is a regulatory faculty that operates as the brain does in the body. While it ensures that the organs of the body are functioning properly and fulfilling their roles, it does not replace the organs in their functions. This analogy is important to Durkheim in that he believes that the state ought not overstep its bounds and control the lives of people. While the state enforces laws, it only ought to enforce laws that the common consciousness creates. The state is both the a product and guardian of the division of labour: because common citizens do not have a monopoly on force, only the government can enforce laws. Additionally, the state is charged with ensuring that the division of labour does not fall prey to anomie and allow for anomalies (such as suicide) to occur.