

Emile Durkheim (Pages 77-86)

Background

- Sought to explain what held societies/groups together and how.
- Concerned with how modern industrial societies can be held together when people don't even know each other and when their experiences/social positions are all different from one another.
- One of the significant contributors to the founding of sociology as a discipline.

Biographical Sketch

- Born in eastern France in 1858
- Saw Christianity & Judaism as outdated for modern world.
- Attended Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, France
 - o First studied philosophy
 - o Then began to pursue sociology (more practical, scientific)
- Used this practical approach to central social issues to use sociological methods to reconstruct moral order of French society (which struggled after French revolution).
 - o Abuse of power by military leaders
 - o High rates of suicide, divorce, and anti-Semitism
- Married Louise Dreyfus in 1887
 - o Also became professor University of Bourdeaux
 - o Had two children
- In 1902, offered a position at Sorbonne University in Paris, France.
- His views were somewhat controversial
 - o His idea that any "social thing" could be studied sociologically (scientifically)
 - o Believed students should get a moral, secular education.
- No particular political views
 - o Although did share some qualities to that of socialism
 - o Believed sociologists should focus on education, not politics
- Viewed as a radical modernist/liberal
 - o Respectful of religion, but committed to rationality, science, humanism
- Saw *Dreyfus Affair* as symptomatic of a collective moral illness, not just anti-Semitism at individual level.
- His son was killed in WWI
- October 7, 1916 → suffered from stroke
- Died on November 15, 1917

Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas

- Articulate the nature of society → sociology = academic discipline
 - o Task of sociology is to analyze **social facts**
 - Conditions/circumstances external to the individual that determines one's course of action.
 - o Can attain social facts through collective data (ex: suicide, divorce rates)
 - Through systematic collection of data, the patterns behind and within individual behavior can be uncovered.
- Auguste Comte (1798-1857)
 - o Coined term *sociology*
 - o Said social world could be studied in a rational/scientific way like the physical sciences.
 - o Did not agree with Comte's "Law of Three Stages"
- Issue of **sociology solidarity** (cohesion of social groups).
 - o Wanted to know how people could feel tied with one another in such a individualistic world.
- Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)
 - o Helped explain developmental paths along which societies evolve.
 - o Society = system of interrelated parts that work to form a single, stable whole, indifferent to how the parts of the human body function independently to sustain general well-being.
 - o Influenced most by Spencer's theory of evolution of societies.
 - Individual's well-being becomes tied more and more to general welfare of the larger society (collective).
 - o Durkheim had less utilitarian approach
 - Society is not a result of individual conduct, but exists prior to it and thus shapes individual action.
 - Without restraints of sense of moral obligation to others, selfish pursuits of interests would destroy the social fabric.

Durkheim's Theoretical Orientation

- Predominantly collectivist approach to order (Ex: *Suicide*)
 - o **Collective conscience** - totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society.
 - o **Collective representation** - collective beliefs that exist independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed.
- Non-rational

- o Focuses on how collective representations and moral sentiments are a much more motivating force, not the "strategic" interests of economic/political institutions.
- o The penal system ultimately on collective notions of morality.

Introduction to *The Rules of Sociological Method*

- Three essential points
 - o Sociology = distinct field of study
 - o Although the social sciences are different from the natural sciences, the methods of the latter can be applied to sociology.
 - o Social field = distinct from psychological realm
- Two ways social facts can be identified.
 - o Social facts = general throughout the extent of a given society
 - o Social fact = marked by any manner of action capable of having power over individual
- Crime is normal in society not because there will always be bad people in society, but a society without crime is impossible because crime affirms/reaffirms collective sentiments.
 - o Crime is indispensable because the formation of collective consciences can never be complete.
 - o Cannot have a society without "crime" → cannot have a game without "rules" and "consequences"