

**Emile Durkheim**

**P-I T-4**

# **Sociology**

**Civil Services (Main) Examination**

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**Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)**

Emile Durkheim was born in 1858, in Epinal, France. He grew up in a traditional, orthodox Jewish family. His father was a rabbi (as his grandfather and great-grandfather had been). The family was quite poor. Like his father before him, young Durkheim expected to become a rabbi. His training began early in Hebrew and Old Testament and the Talmud. His Jewish parents nurtured their son's ambition in the strongly homogeneous and cohesive community of Jews. The Jewish minority status and his early contact with the disastrous Franco-Prussian War made a major impression upon Durkheim, which is reflected in his constant fascination with the study of group solidarity. However, Durkheim changed his mind and later on even rejected the Jewish faith. He remained a non-believer for the rest of his life. In 1879 he became a student at the most prestigious postgraduate school of higher education, the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. Though his primary training was in philosophy, his strong personal interest was in politics and sociology. Because he was so astute in the application of his fledgling scientific skills of political and social analysis and partly because of his rebellious demeanor vis-a-vis the more traditional ways of doing things at the Ecole, Durkheim was not always in favour with the university establishment. Upon graduation in 1882, he taught philosophy in several provincial Lycees in the neighbourhood of Paris, the University, from 1882 to 1887. Determined in his professional growth, Durkheim took a leave of absence from teaching to do further study in Germany from 1885-1886, primarily in Berlin and Leipzig where he was especially impressed with the scientific precision in the experiments of the renowned psychologist Wilhelm Wundt.

During this time, Durkheim began to publish articles, first on the German academic life and then critical articles on various kinds of scholarship thereby gaining considerable recognition from the French academy. In 1887, he was appointed to the faculty of the University of Bordeaux where the first course in social science in all of France was created for him to teach. Shortly thereafter, he married Louise Dreyfus, a Jewish girl from a strong traditional family. They had two children, Marie and Andre. Little is known about family life except that Louise seems to have been a strong and supportive wife and encouraging mother.

During the years in Bordeaux (until 1902) Durkheim was very productive and wrote three of his most important books. His students and friends described him as very disciplined, serious, and stern. Durkheim along with Max Weber must be credited with founding the modern phase of sociological theory. It began with his first book, *The Division of Labour in Society*, submitted as his French doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne along with his Latin doctoral thesis on Montesquieu in 1893. Two years after his monumental work on the division of labour (1893), he

published his second major study, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), completing his Bordeaux trilogy in 1897 with his incomparable *Suicide*. Because of the tremendous impact Durkheim was having in French universities and given the increasing numbers of France's finest young intellectuals who began to cluster around him, Durkheim became convinced that a literary forum was necessary both to accommodate the burgeoning of sociological scholarship and to further enhance the already accelerating recognition sociology was receiving across the spectrum of the French academy. For this purpose, Durkheim founded in 1898, while at Bordeaux, the *L'Année Sociologique*, a scholarly journal under his own editorship that became the organ of research, debate, and discussion among not only Durkheim and his immediate followers but of all accepted sociological work going on in France. He remained its most important contributor until the war in 1914 when journal was closed.

Four years later and as everyone was anticipating, Durkheim was called to the Sorbonne, Paris's great university and headquarters of the French intelligentsia. The chair created for him in 1902 was in sociology and education, and though education was soon dropped from his prestigious title, Durkheim remained interested in the application of sociology to the field of education throughout his career. His final and in many respects provocative book came fifteen years after his previous study and ten years after going to the Sorbonne, entitled, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). It was the ripe harvest of a long process of intensive cultivation. Religion, once a major passion for him in childhood, became once again a major pre-occupation, not so much as an unwitting participant but as a scrutinizing observer.

The tragedy of the First World War was a very great blow to France, and Durkheim, a man so much committed to the understanding of social solidarity, felt the strain acutely. Half of his class from his Sorbonne student days were killed in combat. Keeping the university activities going in the name of truth and scholarship became increasingly difficult. Distraction, anxieties, despair over loss of friends, students, relations, and colleagues intensified. And, just before Christmas, 1915, Durkheim was notified that his only son, Andre, had died in a Bulgarian hospital of wounds taken in battle. The pride and hope of Durkheim had been shattered by the ravages of war. The loss was too great to bear, his health failed, and in less than two years at the age of fifty-nine, Durkheim died on November 15, 1917.

Dear Candidate, to a considerable extent, the great classical theories are influenced by, and expressions of, the political and moral conflicts, economic processes, and ideological movements of the nineteenth century. Durkheim's sociology too is characterized by this tension between science and morality,

politics and ideology. As already mentioned above, Durkheim lived through a very turbulent period in French history—the disastrous war with the Prussians, the chaos and socio-political turmoil which inevitably followed, and the instability and internal conflicts of the Third Republic. Durkheim was also involved in the greatest political conflicts of his time known as the Dreyfus Affair. In 1894, a French officer named Dreyfus was found guilty of treason for supposedly writing to the German embassy about secret French documents. What made the conviction especially controversial was that Dreyfus was a Jew and the French military had a notorious reputation for anti-Semitism. Two years later, when evidence came to light exonerating Dreyfus, the military tried to suppress it. In response to this the author Emile Zola wrote a famous letter accusing the French government of convicting an innocent man. Many leading French intellectuals defended the rights of Dreyfus and condemned the traditions of anti-Semitism and authoritarianism in the military. Because of prevailing public concerns this was soon framed as a conflict between individual rights and traditional authority. Although a Jew and therefore personally concerned about anti-Semitism, Durkheim, entered the debate on the side Dreyfus from a more abstract position. The idea of moral individualism became especially important to Durkheim after the Dreyfus affair. In his essay “Individualism and the Intellectuals,” he fully develops his idea of moral individualism. He cleverly shows how a defense of the rights of the individual is the best way to strengthen our traditions and to guard against the social threat of egoism. Individualism has become our modern tradition, and to attack it not only is to risk social disorder, but is tantamount to blasphemy.

All these problems of the French society along with his own back-ground of belongingness to a highly well-knit Jewish community, pre-disposed him towards a search for the basis of moral order in society. It made him assert the primacy of ‘group’ over the individuals and pre-occupied him with exploring the sources of social order and disorder, the forces that make for regulation or deregulation in the body social. His overriding concern as a moral man and scientist was with the social order. Durkheim believed that the traditional sources of morality upon which the social order was built, especially religion, were no longer viable or valid without serious and rational alterations. The new source of moral integration, so necessary for the establishment and stability of society, would be found in the discipline designed to scientifically analyze social order, stability, and continuity, viz., that of sociology.

Much of his scientific work displays an interest in promoting moral reform. His general sociological aim was to define the necessary conditions for a stable, smoothly functioning, modern society. On this foundation, he thought it possible to formulate “correct,” scientific solutions to the most pressing problems of his age. He was in favour of a liberal, democratic constitution, the development of the

welfare state, and the regulation of the capitalist economy. He aligned himself with reformist socialism, but was also influenced by *conservative* ideas on the importance of morality, the family, religion, and tradition. Please note that Durkheim's interest in socialism is sometimes taken as evidence against the idea that he was a conservative, but his kind of socialism was very different from the kind that interested Marx and his followers. In fact, Durkheim labeled Marxism as a set of "disputable and out-of-date hypothesis." To Durkheim socialism represented a movement aimed at the moral regeneration of society through scientific morality, and he was not interested in short-term political methods or the economic aspects of socialism. He did not see proletariat as the salvation of society, and he was greatly opposed to agitation or violence. Socialism for Durkheim was very different from what we usually think of as socialism: it simply represented a system in which the moral principles discovered by scientific sociology were to be applied.

Although Durkheim was aware of Marx's work, and was a contemporary of Max Weber (Durkheim died in 1917, Weber in 1920), his training and intellectual orientation were quite different. Marx built his social theory on the basis of the German idealist philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the British political economy of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and the French socialist tradition. Weber's social theory developed out of the philosophical debates that dominated German intellectual circles in the 1880s. In contrast Durkheim stood as the successor to a quite different current of thought in the French positivist tradition.

The roots of Durkheim's sociology reach deep into the history and intellectual life of France. His theory of the foundation and progress of modern society is based on ideas first clearly formulated during the dramatic social changes that came about from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. Durkheim's most significant predecessor was Auguste Comte, the founder of French positivism. Comte was the first to use the term "sociology" to identify the new social science, and his was one of the first attempts to establish an autonomous basis for the scientific study of society. From Comte he was inspired by the idea that it was possible and necessary to develop a knowledge of social phenomena that would be as rigorous, reliable and concrete as the positivistic knowledge provided by the biological and natural sciences. He also followed Comte in seeing human society in naturalistic terms as an organic unity. Although in his later work, Durkheim used the organic analogy less often, he always believed that a central task of social theory was to understand the linkages and dependencies between one part or organ of the social body and another. A doctor might have a specialist interest in the digestive system, but this system can only be understood in the context of the other bodily systems with which it is connected. A

similar challenge faces the social theorist in trying to understand how one social phenomenon interconnects with another.

Durkheim sets out his own view of these tasks in his influential book *The Rules of Sociological Method*, which was published in France in 1895. The key advance he makes on Comte's approach is to emphasise that it is possible to identify a category of social phenomena, or **social facts** as he calls them, which is objectively identifiable, and which can be studied quite independently of any grand system of analysis that might be applied to them:

“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....They constitute, thus, a new variety of phenomena; and it is to them exclusively that the term ‘social’ ought to be applied. And this term fits them quite well, for it is clear that, since their source is not in the individual, their substratum can be no other than society.”

Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895)

Durkheim believed that sociology, as an idea, was born in France in the nineteenth century. He wanted to turn this idea into a discipline, a well-defined field of study. Although the term *sociology* had been coined some years earlier by Auguste Comte, there was no field of sociology per se in late nineteenth-century universities. There were no schools, departments, or even professors of sociology. There were a few thinkers who were dealing with the ideas that were in one way or another sociological, but there was as yet no disciplinary “home” for sociology. Indeed, there was strong opposition from existing disciplines to the founding of such a field. The most significant opposition came from psychology and philosophy, two fields that claimed already to cover the domain sought by sociology. The dilemma for Durkheim, given his aspirations for sociology, was how to create for it a separate and identifiable niche.

To separate it from philosophy, Durkheim argued that sociology should be oriented toward empirical research. In his view, the two other major figures of the epoch who thought of themselves as sociologists, Comte and Herbert Spencer, were far more interested in philosophizing, in abstract theorizing, than they were in studying the social world empirically. If the field continued in the direction set by Comte and Spencer, Durkheim felt, it would become nothing more than a branch of philosophy. As a result, he found it necessary to attack both Comte and Spencer for relying on preconceived ideas of social phenomena instead of actually studying the real world. Thus Comte was said to be guilty of assuming theoretically that the social world was evolving in the direction of an increasingly perfect society, rather than engaging in the hard, rigorous, and basic work of actually studying the

changing nature of various societies. Similarly, Spencer was accused of assuming harmony in society rather than studying whether harmony actually existed.

Thus, in order to help sociology move away from philosophy and to give it a clear and separate identity, Durkheim proposed that **the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts**. Briefly, *social facts* are the social structure and cultural norms and values that are external to, and coercive of, actors. Students, for example, are constrained by such social structures as the university norms and the value that a given society places on education. Similar social facts constrain people in all areas of social life. Crucial in separating sociology from philosophy is the idea that social facts are to be treated as “things” and studied empirically. This means that social facts must be studied by acquiring data from outside of our own minds through observation and experimentation. This empirical study of social fact as things sets Durkheimian sociology apart from more philosophical approaches.

A social fact is every way of acting, *fixed or not*, capable of exercising on the individual an *external constraint*: or again, every way of acting which is *general* throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right *independent* of its individual manifestations.

Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895)

Note that Durkheim gave two ways of defining a social fact so that sociology is distinguished from psychology. First, it is experienced as an *external* constraint rather than an internal drive; second, it is *general* throughout the society and is not attached to any particular individual.

Durkheim argued that social facts cannot be reduced to individual, but must be studied as their own reality. Durkheim referred to social facts with the Latin term *sui generis*, which means “unique.” He used this term to claim that social facts have their own unique character that is not reducible to individual consciousness. To allow that social facts could be explained by reference to individuals would be to reduce sociology to psychology. Instead, social facts can be explained only by other social facts. To summarize, social facts can be empirically studied, are external to the individual, are coercive of the individual, and are explained by other social facts.

Dear Candidate, let me just simplify all that we have discussed above. Durkheim simply argues that when individuals come together and start living in a group, a new level of reality emerges, that is, social reality or society. In a given society, individuals interact and enter into relations with each other giving rise to a way of life (social currents, for Durkheim). For example, members of a given society may develop certain norms to regulate sexual behaviour of its members or

to regulate the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services. Over a period of time, these norms or social currents crystallize and take the form of social institutions such as marriage, kinship, market, etc. Thus emerge social facts. Durkheim argues that although society (and its various institutions) develop out of the continuous process of interaction of its individual members yet it comes to acquire a unique and independent existence of its own. It cannot be simply explained by reducing it to a mere aggregation of individuals. Society is not a mere sum of individuals. In other words, it is more than the sum of its parts. Despite the fact that society is made up only of human beings, it can be understood only through studying the interactions rather than the individuals. The interactions have their own levels of reality. For Durkheim, society is a *reality sui generis*. Society has an objective existence; it is independent of the consciousness of the individual members who comprise it. It is external, and enduring. Individuals may die and new members take their place, but society lives forever. This view of Durkheim (**his perspective**) is sometimes also described as '**sociological realism**' because he ascribes the ultimate sociological reality to the group and not to the individual.

Durkheim further argues that since each science is concerned with its own chosen aspect of reality, therefore, a new level of reality, *social reality*, must be studied by a new science namely Sociology. In keeping with the tradition of nineteenth century thinkers like Comte, Spencer, etc., Durkheim believed that this new science of society must be built on the lines of positive sciences. This, he thought would be possible because social reality has its own objective existence, independent of the consciousness of the individual members who comprise it.

Dear Candidate, please also note that Durkheim viewed society as an integrated whole made up of inter-connected and inter-dependent parts. These parts fulfill the needs of the society. This contribution of parts towards fulfillment of the needs of the whole is called, 'function'. Thus, these contributions of the parts enable the society to persist. An attempt to explain the persistence of society should therefore take into account the consequences of the parts for the society as a whole. You have already studied functionalism in detail in our discussion earlier.

The subject matter of sociology, Durkheim proposed, should be the study of social facts. Social facts are nothing but those aspects of social life which have an independent existence of their own, over and above their individual manifestations. According to Durkheim, *social facts are those ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are capable of exerting an external constraint on individual members, which are generally diffused throughout a given society and which can exist in their own life independent of their individual manifestations.* Examples of such social facts are religion, law, language, any form of socio-economic and political institutions, etc.

On the basis of the discussion above, let us summarize the major characteristics of social facts.

Firstly, social facts have distinctive **social** characteristics and determinants which are not amenable to explanation on either the biological or psychological level;

Secondly, they are **external** to the individual; it means that social facts are external to and independent of the individual members of the society;

Thirdly, social facts are diffused throughout the collectivity and are commonly shared by most of the members. In other words, they are **general** throughout a given society. They are not the exclusive property of any single individual rather they belong to the group as a whole. They represent the socially patterned ways of thinking, feeling and acting and exclude the individual idiosyncrasies;

Fourthly, they **endure** through time outlasting any set or group of individuals;

Fifthly, they are, in Durkheim's own words, "endowed with **coercive** power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will". In other words, social facts constrain the individual to abide by the social norms and code of conduct. People living in groups are not free to behave according to their volition. Instead, their behaviour follows the guidance laid down by the group and the group exercises a moral pressure on the individual members, compelling them to conform to group norms. According to Durkheim, true human freedom lies in being properly regulated by the social norms.

**Important:** Dear Candidate, I would like to elaborate this point a little further. As discussed earlier, the prevailing problems of the French society along with his own back-ground of belongings to a highly well-knit Jewish community had pre-disposed Durkheim towards a search for the basis of moral order in society. It made him assert the primacy of 'group' over the individuals and pre-occupied him with exploring the sources of social order and disorder. His overriding concern as a moral man and scientist was with the social order. Durkheim was a sociologist of morality in the broadest sense of the word. Durkheim's view of morality had two aspects.

First, Durkheim was convinced that morality is a social fact, in other words, that morality can be empirically studied, is external to the individual, is coercive of the individual, and is explained by other social facts. This means that morality is

not something which one can philosophize about, but something that one has to study as an empirical phenomenon. This is particularly true because morality is intimately related to the social structure. To understand the morality of any particular institution, you have to first study how the institution is constituted, how it came to assume its present form, what its place is in overall structure of society, how the various institutional obligations are related to the social good, and so forth.

Second, Durkheim was a sociologist of morality because his studies were driven by his concern about the moral “health” of modern society. Much of Durkheim’s sociology can be seen as a by-product of his concern with moral issues. It was not that Durkheim thought that society had become, or was in danger of becoming, immoral. That simply was impossible because morality was, for Durkheim, identified with society. Therefore, society could not be immoral, but it could certainly lose its moral force if the collective interest of society became nothing but the sum of self-interests. Only to the extent that morality was a social fact could it impose an obligation on individuals that superseded their self-interest. Consequently, Durkheim believed that society needs a strong common morality. What the morality should be was of less interest to him.

Durkheim’s great concern with morality was related to his curious definition of freedom. In Durkheim’s view, people were in danger of a “pathological” loosening of moral bonds. These moral bonds were important to Durkheim, for without them the individual would be enslaved by ever-expanding and insatiable passions. People would be impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification, but each new gratification would lead only to more and more needs. According to Durkheim, the one thing that every human will always want is “more.” And, of course, that is the one thing we ultimately cannot have. If society does not limit us, we will become slaves to the pursuit of more. Consequently, Durkheim held the seemingly paradoxical view that the individual needs morality and external control in order to be free. This view of the insatiable desire at the core of every human is central to his sociology.

Sixthly, social facts are not static but **dynamic** in nature. For example, as society evolves over a period of time, there is also a corresponding change in its socio-economic and political institutions (this point is important and we will come back to it in our discussion on ‘Anomie’); and

Finally, Durkheim argued that social facts can be explained only by other social facts. It implies that in order to understand social consequences, one must look for social causes.

For Durkheim, sociology is a science of such social facts. Society or ‘*Conscience collective*’ is the ultimate social fact. Further the constituent social facts of the conscience collective exist in a state of interrelationship or interdependence. Therefore, these social facts have to be studied in terms of their interrelationship and interdependence with each other. According to Durkheim, what holds the society together as an ongoing concern is the cohesiveness between these interdependent parts. This ‘cohesiveness’ has been termed by him as ‘**solidarity.**’

Before proceeding further, I would like to briefly mention about the distinction that Durkheim made between two broad types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. *Material social facts*, such as forms of technology, styles of architecture, and legal codes are easier to understand of the two because they are directly observable. Clearly, such things as laws are external to individuals and coercive over them. More importantly, these social facts often express a far larger and more powerful realm of *moral forces* that are at least equally external to individuals and coercive over them. These are *nonmaterial social facts*. The bulk of Durkheim’s studies, and heart of his sociology, lies in the study of nonmaterial social facts. He argued that a sociologist usually begins a study by focusing on material social facts, which are empirically accessible, in order to understand nonmaterial social facts, which are the real focus of his work. Some of the examples of nonmaterial social facts are morality, collective conscience, collective representations, and social currents.

Durkheim attempted to deal with his interest in common morality in various ways and with different concepts. In his early efforts to deal with this issue, Durkheim developed the idea of the *conscience collective*. *Conscience collective*, a French term, when translated into English is collective conscience. In French, the word *conscience* means both “consciousness” and “moral conscience.” Durkheim characterized the collective conscience in the following way:

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience....It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them.

(Durkheim, 1893)

Several points are worth underscoring in this definition. First, it is clear that Durkheim thought of the collective conscience as occurring throughout a given society when he wrote of the “totality” of people’s beliefs and sentiments. Second, Durkheim clearly conceived of the collective conscience as being independent and capable of determining other social facts. It is not just a reflection of a material

base as Marx sometimes suggested. Finally, although he held such views of the collective conscience, Durkheim also wrote of its being “realized” through individual consciousness.

In simpler words, we can describe collective conscience as “*the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average member of the society, which forms a determinate system with a life of its own.*” Thus collective conscience refers to the general structure of shared understandings, norms, and beliefs. It links successive generations to one another. Individuals come in and go out of society, however collective conscience remains. Although collective conscience can only be realized through individuals, it has a form beyond a particular person, and operates at a level higher than him. It is therefore an all-embracing and amorphous concept. As we will see later, Durkheim employed this concept to argue that “primitive” societies had a stronger collective conscience – that is, more shared understandings, norms, and beliefs – than modern societies.

Because collective conscience is such a broad and amorphous idea, it is impossible to study directly, but must be approached through related material social facts. Durkheim’s dissatisfaction with this limitation led him to use the collective conscience less in his later works in favour of the much more specific concept of *collective representations*. Durkheim used the concept of collective representations in order to highlight the richness and diversity of the commonly shared beliefs and sentiments, for example, commonly shared cognitive beliefs (concepts), moral beliefs, religious beliefs, etc.

The French word *representation* literally means “idea.” Initial definition forwarded by Durkheim in his book *Suicide* (1897) stated that ‘essentially social life is made of representations.’ Let us try to understand this. See, there is a difference between an object, and the way it is seen, the manner in which it is described, and its meaning understood commonly in a society. The object is thus presented again in terms of meanings, a word is given a meaning. The object or the word is thus ‘represented.’ *Collective representation* is a term introduced by Durkheim to refer to a symbol having a common intellectual and emotional meaning to the members of a group. They include not only symbols in the form of objects, such as a flag, but also the basic concepts that determine the way in which one views and relates to the world. Collective representations express collective sentiments and ideas which give the group its unity and unique character. Thus they are an important factor contributing to the solidarity of a society.

Collective representations are states of the collective conscience which are different in nature from the states of the individual conscience. They express the way in which a particular group of individuals conceives itself in relation to the

objects which affect the social group. Collective representations are socially generated and they refer to, and are, in some sense, about society. Durkheim states that collective representations result from the substratum of associated individuals. But they cannot be reduced to and wholly explained by features of constituent individuals. They are 'sui generis', that is, they generate themselves.

Durkheim used the term *collective representations* to refer to both a collective concept and a social "force." Examples of collective representations are religious symbols, myths, and popular legends. All of these are ways in which society reflects on itself. They represent collective beliefs, norms, and values, and they motivate us to conform to these collective claims. As stated earlier, collective representations also cannot be reduced to individuals, because they emerge out of social interactions, but they can be studied more directly because they are more liable to connected to material symbols such as flags, icons, and pictures or connected to practices such as rituals. Therefore, the sociologist can begin to study how certain collective representations fit well together or have an affinity, and others do not.

Sociology is Simple  
Sociology is Scoring  
provided that you  
Study Sociology Systematically

Dear Candidate, let us now look at some of the important ideas of Durkheim discussed in his major works.

### ***The Division of Labour in Society (1893)***

*The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) has been called sociology's first classic. It was Durkheim's first major theoretical work. It was written during the 1880s as part of his doctoral requirement and later published as a complete study in 1893 while Durkheim was at the University of Bordeaux. In this work, Durkheim traced the development of the relationship between individuals and society. Please note that since it was the first of his major works and his methodology for sociological research was still in its formative stage, it was to some extent a speculative exercise. Durkheim presented his methodological framework with clarity and precision in his second major work '*The Rules of Sociological Method*' (1895).

In his study on division of labour in society, Durkheim was primarily responding to the rise of industrial society highlighting both, its positive and negative sides. The rise of industrial society was seen as a consequence of technological advancement which itself was regarded as a natural concomitant of increasing division of labour or specialization. However, Durkheim was not the first to discuss the consequences of division of labour. Prior to him, classical economist Adam Smith had also explained division of labour in terms of its economic consequences.

The term 'division of labour' is used in social theory to refer to the process of dividing up labour among individuals in a group so that the main economic and domestic tasks are performed by different people for the purposes of the collective maintenance of society. The process of the division of labour therefore begins as soon as individuals form themselves into groups where, instead of living isolated or alone, they cooperate collectively by dividing their labour and by coordinating their economic and domestic activities for purposes of survival. Durkheim believed that the division of labour was therefore the result of a social process taking place within the structure of society rather than the result of the private choices of individuals or the result of organic traits that emerged during evolution.

Classical economist Adam Smith was the first to introduce the term 'division of labour' into social thought and to discuss the role it played in the manufacturing process. In looking at the division of labour in different societies, Durkheim, began by making a distinction between what he called the 'social division of labour' and what Adam Smith had called the 'economic division of labour'. In the

eighteenth century, Smith used the term economic division of labour to describe what happens in the production process when labour is divided during manufacturing. Smith had used the term initially to pinpoint the increase in productivity that takes place when production tasks are divided between workers during the manufacturing process. Smith noted that as soon as people divide their labour to perform various tasks and operations, the quantity of what they produce increases dramatically and that the process of dividing labour tends to accelerate the rate of production.

Durkheim rejected such a narrow and purely economic interpretation of division of labour. Durkheim argued that a purely economic interpretation of division of labour as given by Smith is sociologically inadequate. Since 'division of labour' is a social fact, it must be explained in terms of its overall social consequences and not simply in its economic consequences. The term social division of labour was thus used by Durkheim to describe the *social links and bonds* which develop during the process that takes place in societies when many individuals enter into cooperation for purposes of carrying out joint economic and domestic tasks. Under these circumstances, Durkheim thought that the social division of labour was distinct from the economic division of labour. When used by Smith, the division of labour referred only to the process of dividing up labour for purposes of increasing the rate of production; whereas when used by Durkheim, it referred to the *principle of social cohesion* that develops in societies whose social links and bonds result from the way individuals relate to one another when their labour is divided along economic and domestic tasks.

In other words, in this study Durkheim explores the consequences of division of labour for the society as a whole. Beyond focusing explicitly on the social division of labour, Durkheim looked at the question of the overall unity of society. Generally speaking, he referred to this unity as *social solidarity*. He argued that what holds a society together is the cohesiveness or solidarity among its parts. Hence in this study of social division of labour, Durkheim probes the relationship between division of labour and the manner in which solidarity comes about in a given society. Please remember that his preoccupation with the idea of social order and solidarity was largely a by-product of his own back-ground of belonging to a highly well-knit Jewish community and a very turbulent period in French history. This pre-disposed him towards a search for the basis of moral order in society.

Before proceeding further, let me just mention three important concerns which Durkheim was trying to address in his study of division of labour.

Firstly, Durkheim wanted to study the social dimension of division of labour. He made a clear distinction between economic and the social consequences of division of labour.

Secondly, since Durkheim and many other before him had explained the rise of industrial society in terms of increase in division of labour, he wanted to study that how division of labour affects social solidarity. In other words, how the change in the division of labour affects the structure of the society and consequently, the nature of social solidarity.

Thirdly, in the post-Enlightenment period, when individualism was on rise, how does individual, while becoming more autonomous, also becomes more solidary. As Durkheim puts it:

‘This work had its origins in the question of the relations of the individual to social solidarity. Why does the individual, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society? How can he be at once more individual and more solidary? Certainly, these two movements, contradictory as they appear, develop in parallel fashion. This is the problem we are raising. It appeared to us that what resolves this apparent antimony is a transformation of social solidarity due to the steadily growing development of the division of labour. That is how we have been led to make this the object of our study.’

Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893)

Durkheim argues that the change in the division of labour has had enormous implications for the structure of society. Durkheim was most interested in the changed way in which social solidarity is produced, in other words, the changed way in which society is held together and how its members see themselves as part of a whole. To capture this difference, Durkheim referred to two types of solidarity – mechanical and organic.

He argues that in pre-modern society the division of labour is relatively undeveloped. Agrarian production close to home is the prevailing way of life, and working relationships and other kinds of social dependence associated with it are also largely immediate, local and uncomplicated. The most typical trait of such primitive societies is their *segmentary* nature. Such societies consist of clearly delimited collectivities or clans, characterized by homogeneity and equality between individuals within these collectivities. Role specialization and division of labour are rudimentary – with the exception of some authority figures. Individuals have little or no autonomy within the group. The bond among people is that they are all engaged in similar activities and have similar responsibilities. However, in this form of society the division of labour is not in fact able on its own to provide enough in the way of social solidarity. The remainder comes from what Durkheim

calls the *collective conscience*, ‘the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society’, which binds individuals together not so much in terms of their daily activity but of the religious and cultural beliefs, the social and political ideology, they share. **Mechanical solidarity** is the term Durkheim uses for the association of actors that emerges here. This is the dominant foundation of cohesion in simple societies where there is little differentiation. People may be similar in many respects – in terms of housing, occupation and the use of tools, clothing, customs, cuisine and lifestyle; they may be equal with regard to power; experience the same emotions, needs, and ideas, and hold similar moral and religious attitudes. The more primitive a society, the more similarity will these be on all these dimensions, and the more conspicuous is its mechanical solidarity. Such societies are characterized by collectivism.

We may note that Durkheim takes both material and nonmaterial aspects into account – shared ideas are as important as equality in material living conditions in primitive societies. A comprehensive, strong conscience collective is an essential characteristic of any primitive society. The conscience collective is basically religious in primitive societies. By religious Durkheim means possessing a strong sense of right and wrong, of what is sacred, and this is manifest in the form of all the various rules, rituals, and ceremonies that must be observed to show respect for the sacred. As a result of equality in material living conditions and customs, the intimacy of social life and the continuous reciprocal “surveillance” of behavior, and the intense conscience collective which demands respect for rules and all that is held sacred, there will be a strong reaction to any form of deviancy in primitive societies. Deviancy is often regarded as a religious offence.

On the other hand, there is a comprehensive division of labour in modern societies. Individuals engage in different, often highly specialized occupations. They are no longer so closely bound to groups marked by a large degree of internal equality and homogeneity. They can move within and between several social groups or circles, and no single group has the kind of irresistible power – typical of collectivities in primitive societies – to rigidly impose a particular way of life on the individual. This is the primary reason why individuals in modern societies necessarily develop in different directions. Differences of many kinds emerge between individuals, just as differences also emerge between professions and trades. And because so many differences emerge between individuals, groups, and occupations, many theorists in Durkheim’s day thought that high levels of conflict were inevitable in modern societies. Solidarity or a sense of collectivity would be weakened as a result of the numerous conflicts of interest resulting from all the differences. Durkheim, on the other hand, thought that in a modern society marked by increased division of labour, a specifically modern form of solidarity would emerge, which he calls **organic solidarity**.

In primitive societies, solidarity is a manifestation of “attraction through similarity.” What type of attraction could possibly exist between people when similarity is replaced by numerous differences? Will these differences not rather give rise to conflict? Durkheim seeks to demonstrate that the many differences that develop as a corollary of modernization take a specific form: through occupational specialization, a large number of differences necessarily arise, but at the same time comprehensive *mutual dependency* is created between the many kinds of labour, and between individuals. The shoemaker dedicates all his working hours to making shoes, and thus simultaneously becomes dependent on others who produce the commodities he needs – clothes, tools, food, etc.. All producers are dependent on each other's products, and thus a complex dependency emerges. They complement one another, participating in a differentiated, coherent system, just as specialized organs function in a living organism (hence the term *organic* solidarity). For this reason, Durkheim also states that modern societies are “functionally integrated.” Modern society, in Durkheim's view, is thus held together by the specialization of people and their need for the services of many others. This specialization includes not only that of individuals but also of groups, structures, and institutions.

‘The most remarkable effect of the division of labour is not that it increases the output of functions divided, but that it renders them solidary. Its role in all these cases is not simply to embellish or ameliorate existing societies, but to render societies possible which, without it, would not exist.’

Durkheim (1893)

Durkheim further argued that primitive societies have a stronger collective conscience, that is, more shared understandings, norms and beliefs. The increasing division of labour has caused a diminution of the collective conscience. The collective conscience is of much less significance in a society with organic solidarity than it is in a society with mechanical solidarity. People in modern society are more likely to be held together by the division of labour and the resulting need for the functions performed by others than they are by a shared and powerful collective conscience. Nevertheless, even organic societies have a collective consciousness, albeit in a weaker form that allows for more individual differences.

Anthony Giddens points out that the collective conscience in the two types of society can be differentiated on four dimensions – volume, intensity, rigidity, and content. Volume refers to the number of people enveloped by the collective conscience; intensity, to how deeply the individuals feel about it; rigidity, to how clearly it is defined; and content, to the form that the collective conscience takes in the two types of society (see Table below).

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE

Solidarity	Volume	Intensity	Rigidity	Content
Mechanical	Entire Society	High	High	Religious
Organic	Particular Groups	Low	Low	Moral Individualism

Durkheim also argued that a society with mechanical solidarity is characterized by *repressive law*. Because people are very similar in this type of society, and because they tend to believe very strongly in a common morality, any offense against their shared value system is likely to be of significance to most individuals. Since everyone feels the offense and believes deeply in the common morality, a wrongdoer is likely to be punished severely for any action that offends the collective moral system. Theft might lead to the cutting off of the offender's hands; blaspheming might result in the removal of one's tongue. Even minor offenses against the moral system are likely to be met with severe punishment. In contrast, a society with organic solidarity is characterized by *restitutive law*, where offenders must make restitution for their crimes. In such societies, offenses are more likely to be seen as committed against a particular individual or segment of society than against the moral system itself. Because there is a weak common morality, most people do not react emotionally to a breach of the law. Instead of being severely punished for every offense against the collective morality, offenders in an organic society are likely to be asked to make restitution to those who have been harmed by their actions. Although some repressive law continues to exist in a society with organic solidarity (for example, the death penalty), restitutive law predominates, especially for minor offenses.

If Durkheim's theory was correct, modern society would normally have evolved relatively free of conflict. But Durkheim himself was aware of that antagonism and powerful conflicts were commonplace in the nineteenth century. He put this down to the fact that development had not occurred along "normal" lines, and attempted to explain this anomaly. He thought this was partly due to the persistence into modern society some old disparities of power and wealth – from feudalism, for instance – which were incompatible with the new order. He also argued that very rapid changes and adjustments in any given period do not allow the various elements of society time to adjust to one another.

In order to explain this anomaly between 'what ought to be' and 'what is', Durkheim makes a distinction between '*normal*' and '*pathological*' forms of division of labour. He called the above description as normal division of labour.

While on the other hand, he explained the prevailing chaos and conflict of 19<sup>th</sup> century laissez-faire society, its wholly unregulated markets, extreme inequalities, etc. as the manifestations of the pathological or abnormal division of labour. He identified three abnormal forms, viz., anomic division of labour, forced division of labour, and poorly coordinated division of labour.

Anomie, in literal sense, implies 'normlessness.' Durkheim used the concept of *anomie* to refer to the breakdown of the normative regulation in a given society. The *anomic division of labour* refers to the lack of regulation in a society that celebrates isolated individuality and refrains from telling people what they should do. Durkheim further develops this concept of *anomie* in his work on suicide. In both works, he used the term to refer to those social conditions where humans lack sufficient moral constraint. For Durkheim, modern society is always prone to anomie, but it comes to the fore in times of social and economic crises. Without the strong common morality of mechanical solidarity, people might not have a clear concept of what is and what is not proper and acceptable behaviour. Even though the division of labour is a source of cohesion in modern society, it cannot entirely make up for the weakening of the common morality. Individuals can become isolated and be cut adrift in their highly specialized activities. They can more easily cease to feel a common bond with those who work and live around them. This gives rise to anomie. Organic solidarity is prone to this particular pathology, but it is important to remember that Durkheim saw this as an abnormal situation. The modern division of labour has the capacity to promote increased moral interactions rather than reducing people to isolated and meaningless tasks and positions.

While Durkheim believed that people needed rules and regulation to tell them what to do, his second abnormal form pointed to a kind of rule that could lead to conflict and isolation and therefore increase anomie. He called this the *forced division of labour*. This second pathology refers to the fact that outdated norms and expectations can force individuals, groups, and classes into positions for which they are ill suited. Traditions, economic power, or status can determine who performs what jobs regardless of talent and qualification.

[Dear Candidate, it is here that Durkheim comes closest to a Marxist position. However, Durkheim did not elaborate in detail on the fundamental causes for the extreme economic inequalities prevailing in the modern industrial societies of Europe in those times, as Marx did in terms of the ownership and non-ownership of the forces of production. Moreover, Durkheim saw this only as an aberration of the industrial society, occurring only in an abnormal situation.]

Under the heading of the forced division of labour, Durkheim discusses those socially structured inequalities which undermine solidarity. Durkheim explicitly recognizes that class inequalities restrict the opportunities of the lower classes and prevent the realization of their abilities. Resentment accumulates and men are led to revolutionary thoughts. The problem here is not lack of rules but rather the excess of them in that rules themselves are the cause of evil. The rules have in fact arisen in order to enforce the division of labour coercively. Individual specialism and occupations are not freely chosen but forced upon each person by custom, law and even sheer chance. Individuals find themselves estranged, resentful and aspiring to social positions which have been arbitrarily closed off to them. The forced division of labour then brings about a situation which one modern author has called the *anomie of injustice*. It is this which has produced class conflict and not, as Marx would have it, the inherently exploitative nature of capitalism. Nor, did Durkheim consider that all inequality could be abolished. But whereas some inequalities are 'natural' and occur spontaneously, others are external inequality and can be mitigated. What in effect he is urging is the creation of what today is called 'equality of opportunity' or a meritocracy. For this to be possible all forms of hereditary privilege should be abolished.

Finally, the third form of abnormal division of labour is where the specialized functions performed by different people are *poorly coordinated*. Again Durkheim makes the point that organic solidarity flows from the interdependence of the people. If people's specializations do not result in increased interdependence but simply in isolation, the division of labour will not result in social solidarity.

Durkheim argued that for the division of labour to function as a moral and socially solidifying force in modern society, anomie, the forced division of labour, and the improper coordination of specialization must be addressed. Durkheim suggested a few broad guidelines to address the problems arising out of the abnormal or pathological division of labour. Please remember that this was essentially a speculative exercise, not based on any empirical research.

Durkheim argued that the conscience collective and religion would become less and less significant in a functionally differentiated society, due to the differences between people. With increasing differentiation in working and social life, as well as the weakening of the conscience collective as a binding force, modern society would be characterized by individualism. When individualism gains too much strength, it has the effect of destroying solidarity. To avoid total disruption, individualism must be counteracted through the development of new institutional bonds between people. There is some uncertainty on this point in Durkheim's theory. Because he views society as a self-regulating system, he assumes that such a correction of individualism will emerge naturally and

spontaneously. On the other hand, however, he is also interested in finding practical measures that might restrain rampant individualism. He thought the family had too limited an importance in modern society to constitute an effective counterweight. Nor did he believe in the socialist notion that a powerful state would be adequate. According to Durkheim, the state was too distant from everyday social life to be capable of having any decisive moral effect on the collectivity.

In several works after 1893 he suggested certain measures: for instance, he advocated establishing new types of organization in the economic sector – so-called corporations, which had certain similarities with the medieval guild system. The point was that those involved in a certain kind of occupation, employers and employees alike, should unite in a national organization. He thought this would lead to the development of solidarity between actors, and thus counteract the tendencies toward ruthless competition and individualism. He cites the example of professional organizations, such as lawyers' organizations, which create professional ethics governing their work. According to him, this would go a long way in controlling the anomic state of professional, industrial, and commercial life. He also thought school reforms, in the shape of new syllabuses and modes of cooperation, might restrain individualism. If children were educated in the spirit of solidarity at school, they would develop social habits that would also be important in adulthood. He also suggested restrictions on the right to divorce.

Many commentators have pointed to a tendency in the development of Durkheim's theories: early in his career, he expressed a strong belief in society's ability to develop solidarity and unity spontaneously. Later, he came to accentuate more and more the need for active political and moral regulation of social life, especially in the economic sphere. Eventually, he concluded that the basic principles of the modern market economy largely nurtured competition and egoism, and that the economy therefore had to be actively regulated in order to ensure widespread solidarity. We could not just wait for solidarity to evolve "naturally."

Later, Durkheim also modified his previously negative judgment of individualism. He reached the perception that individualism was not necessarily the same as egoism and the radical destruction of social bonds. It became clear to him that modern societies could not be based on a strictly collectivist ethos. The problems associated with the division of functions and specialization in modern societies could be solved only by assuming values and relations that took a high level of individualism for granted. He thought a more positive and more valuable type of individualism, one distinct from egoism, was in the process of emerging.

This he termed *moral individualism*. The autonomy of the individual is fundamental, but this autonomy also involves the capacity for moral reflection, and moral obligations. Given the correct form of socialization and the development of social relations, *modern* individualists would be able to strike a balance between individual independence and social bonding.

In other words, rather than driving a wedge between individuals and society the advanced division of labour gives rise to new kinds of individuals and endorses the strong notion of individuality. Modern society, just like modern industry, needs 'modern' individuals, just as individuals who want to behave in modern ways and to express modern attitudes and beliefs need an advanced division of labour where they can be expressed. The division of labour serves to reconcile the individual with society.

As Durkheim sees it, 'the problem of the individual' in modern society is that politicians and other intellectuals have been slow to recognize the emergence of this new kind of individualism. Like many other social critics, Durkheim believes that the earlier conception of 'acquisitive individualism' in which individuals are seen as selfish, egoistic and aggressively competitive, which had been popularised by utilitarian philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and liberal economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, had to be set aside. Utilitarian conceptions of competitive individualism were being superseded by a new and properly socialized conception. This is moral individualism, in which individuals are seen as an embodiment of the core virtue of doing things for the common good.

The strength of modern individuality is not measured in terms of how much it promotes the selfish and egoistic interests of any particular individual, but in terms of the contribution the individual makes to the collective social body, that is, to society. Indeed, Durkheim goes so far as to suggest that the new cult of the individual becomes a central facet of the *conscience collective* of modern society. Just as it is the duty of the individual to work towards the social good, it is the function of society to provide individuals with fruitful opportunities to express themselves in as many ways as possible. The key point to grasp is that individuality and social opportunity cannot be separated one from the other.

**Sociology is Simple**  
**Sociology is Scoring**  
provided that you  
**Study Sociology Systematically**

Dear Candidate, let us now assess Durkheim's study of division of labour both, in terms of its contribution to social theory as well as the criticisms it invited.

The key theme in Durkheim's sociological theory, the major theoretical issue he is concerned with throughout his work, is that of *the relationship of the individual to society*. In this book-length investigation, Durkheim analyses the individual-versus-society issue in terms of the different kinds of social solidarity that hold society and individuals together. One of the advantages of linking the individual-versus-society debate explicitly with the question of social solidarity is that it allows Durkheim to argue that developments in the demands of individuals and of modern notions of individuality, are actually complimented by changes in the nature of society rather than being in opposition to them. Durkheim sees the emergence of modern individuals, and of modern notions of individuality, as an inevitable corollary of the advanced division of labour in society.

Durkheim's study of division of labour, though to an extent speculative, but proved to be a landmark study as it was for the first time that the social significance of division of labour was explored in such a comprehensive manner. As stated earlier that prior to him division of labour was studied only in terms of its economic consequences. Durkheim was one of the first sociologists to explore the social dimension of division of labour. In this study he explained that how with increase in the division of labour new forms of solidarity emerge in society to provide for its cohesiveness and stability. This finding opened new vistas of research in social sciences. It initiated a number of studies which attempted to explore that how and to what extent the experience at work can also have social implications. So much so that it gave rise to an altogether new branch of knowledge called *Sociology of Occupations and Professions*.

For example, **Elton Mayo**, a professor at the Harvard Business School, in his investigation (from 1927-1932) at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago, found out that the 'sense of belongingness' to a social group is as important for a worker as the economic rewards. Mayo began with the assumptions of scientific management believing that the physical conditions of the work environment, the aptitude of the worker and financial incentives were the main determinants of productivity. The theory of scientific management was first spelt out in detail by Frederick W. Taylor whose book, *The Principles of Scientific Management* was published in America in 1911. Taylor assumed that man's primary motivation for work was financial. He argued that by increasing the monetary incentives paid to the worker, the productivity too can be maximized. In practice this usually involved a wage incentive scheme based on piece work – payment according to the amount of work done. Taylor believed that the scientific planning of work tasks, the selection and systematic training of suitable workers

for the performance of those tasks plus a carrot and stick system of financial incentives would maximize productivity. On the contrary, Mayo in his study found that the behaviour of the worker was largely a response to group norms rather than simply being directed by economic incentives. Most of the workers belonged to one or the other informal group. The researchers discovered that the workers had established a norm which defined a fair day's work, and that this norm, rather than standards set by management, determined their output. From the Hawthorne studies, and research which they largely stimulated, developed the human relations school. It stated that scientific management provided too narrow a view of man and that financial incentives alone were insufficient to motivate workers and ensure their cooperation.

However, though a remarkable study, Durkheim's study of division of labour also came under criticism on several accounts.

Firstly, the concept of *conscience collective* as a common and determinate system of shared beliefs and sentiments was criticized on various accounts by other scholars. For Durkheim, the reality of society preceded the individual life. Durkheim frequently, especially in discussions on the collective conscience, reached a degree of sociological realism that seemed to deny altogether the social significance of individual volition or decision. Society is real, to be true, but so is the individual. And the two, it should be remembered, are always in interaction. Giving priority to one over the other is misleading in the long run.

Further, conflict theorists also argued, on Marxian lines, that modern industrial society is characterized by class divisions and extreme economic inequalities. Given the pluralistic character of modern society it is difficult to conceive of an all encompassing and shared value system which is based on consensus of all its members. Rather they argue that such collective conscience is nothing but a reflection of the values of the dominant classes in society. The values of the dominant classes are imposed on masses either by indoctrination through education and religion, or by coercion. In other words, it implies that the ideas and aspirations of the subaltern groups may find no representation in such body of belief systems.

Secondly, anti-positivist scholars also question the concepts of collective conscience and social facts. They argue that human behaviour is a meaningful behaviour, guided by meanings, motives and values. By defining collective conscience in terms of an all embracing and determinate system and according primacy to groups over the individual has somehow subordinated the individual conscience to that of collectivity. Further, by focusing on the exteriority dimension

and empirical study of the social facts, Durkheim leaves no room for the interpretative understanding of human behaviour.

Thirdly, conflict theorists also question the suggestion offered by Durkheim of state intervention in regulating the economy in order to address the problem of abnormal division of labour. Durkheim believed that the state, being an executive organ of the conscience collective, would work for the welfare of all sections of the society. However, conflict theorists argue that state is nothing but an executive organ of only the dominant classes and would only further their interests.

Fourthly, conflict theorists also criticize Durkheim's theory for its conservative outlook. They argue that there is a built-in conservative bias in Durkheim's theory. By repeatedly emphasizing on the normative regulation and collective morality, Durkheim focus was primarily on explaining maintenance and sustenance of the stability and social order in society. Conflict theorists argue that Durkheim failed to account for conflict and conflict led change as Marx did.

Fifthly, some scholars also argue that the solutions offered by Durkheim to address the problems of abnormal division of labour are overly simplified. For example, Durkheim explained the anomic division of labour in terms of the breakdown of the normative regulation in the society. As if by restoring the normative regulation alone all problems associated with the increase in division of labour could be addressed. These scholars argue that there are certain inherent problems associated with the increase in division of labour such as de-skilling, fragmentation of work, alienation, etc., which Durkheim did not take elaborated upon.

Further, there are also some problems with the Durkheim's view of the individual. Despite having made a number of crucial assumptions about human nature, Durkheim denied that he had done so. He argued that he did not begin by postulating a certain conception of human nature in order to deduce sociology from it. Instead, he said that it was from sociology that he sought an increasing understanding of human nature. However, Durkheim may have been less than honest with his readers, and perhaps even with himself.

One of Durkheim's assumptions about human nature is that people are impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification that always leads to a need for more. If these passions are unrestrained, they multiply to the point where the individual is enslaved by them and they become a threat to the individual as well as to society. It can be argued that Durkheim's entire theoretical edifice, especially his emphasis on collective morality, was erected on this basic assumption about people's passions. However, Durkheim provides no evidence for

this assumption, and indeed, his own theories would suggest that such an insatiable subject may be a creation of social structures rather than the other way around.

### ***The Rules of Sociological Method (1895)***

*The Rules of Sociological Method* was Durkheim's second major work. It was published in 1895 while he was at the University of Bordeaux. Largely a methodological study, the primary aim of this study was to outline the nature of sociological subject matter and to set out the steps of sociological investigation. As discussed earlier, Durkheim described 'social facts' in terms of their exteriority, generality and constraint. He further argued that social facts are amenable to be studied by methods of positive sciences. Some of the important observations of Durkheim with regard to the scientific procedure to be adopted while studying social facts have been listed below:

#### **i) Rules for the Observation of Social Facts**

- Durkheim said that social facts must be treated as '*things*.' As 'things' they have to be studied by the empirical method and not by intuition.
- While studying social facts as 'things' all preconceptions must be eradicated. Sociologists must emancipate themselves from the common place ideas that dominate the mind of the layperson and adopt an emotionally neutral attitude towards what they set out to investigate.
- Observation of social facts should be confined to their external attributes only which can be tested and verified.

In other words, when sociologists undertake the investigation of some order of social facts they must consider them from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations. The objectivity of social facts depends on their being separated from individual facts, which express them. Social facts provide a common standard for members of the society. Social facts exist in the form of legal rules, moral regulations, proverbs, social conventions, etc. It is these that sociologists must study to gain an understanding of social life.

- The observation and study of social facts should be as definite as possible. Here, Durkheim insisted upon the clear definition of the range or area of observation. This would ensure that knowledge about social facts can be progressively ever more exact.

## **ii) Rules for Distinguishing between the Normal and the Pathological Social Facts**

Having given us rules for the observation of social facts, Durkheim makes a distinction between 'normal' and 'pathological' social facts. He considers these aspects important because, as he points out, the scientific study of human beings has been held back to a large degree by the tendency of many writers to consider as 'pathological' forms of behaviour, which were different from their own. But Durkheim explains that the social fact is considered to be normal when it is understood in the context of the society in which it exists. He further adds that a social fact, which is 'general' to a given type of society, is 'normal' when it has utility for that societal type. In other words, this means that a normal social fact shall also be functional in the society in which it exists, while an abnormal or a pathological social fact shall have harmful consequences for the society.

As an illustration he cites the case of crime. We consider crime as pathological. But Durkheim argues that though we may refer to crime as immoral because it flouts values we believe in, from a scientific viewpoint it would be incorrect to call it abnormal. Firstly because crime is present not only in the majority of societies of one particular type but in all societies of all types. Secondly, if there were not occasional deviances or floutings of norms, there would be no change in human behaviour and equally important, no opportunities through which a society can either reaffirm the existing norms, or else reassess such behaviour and modify the norm itself. To show that crime is useful to the normal evolution of morality and law, Durkheim cites the case of Socrates, who according to Athenian law was a criminal, his crime being the independence of his thought. But his crime rendered a service to his country because it served to prepare a new morality and faith, which the Athenians needed. It also rendered a service to humanity in the sense that freedom of thought enjoyed by people in many countries today was made possible by people like him.

Durkheim was impressed by the way study of medicine had become scientific. The doctors study the normal working of the body and its pathological features. The study of both of these features helps one identify the nature of the body. He applied this method to study social facts. In his study of division of labour in society, he explained both, the normal as well as the abnormal features. He considered crime and punishment both as normal.

How is a social fact normal? When the rate of crime exceeds what is more or less constant for a given social type, then it becomes an abnormal or pathological fact. Similarly, using the same criteria, suicide is a normal social fact (though it may be regarded as 'wrong' or 'immoral' because it goes against a set of values that makes preservation of life absolute). But the sudden rise in the suicide rate in Western Europe during the nineteenth century was a cause for concern for Durkheim and one of the reasons why he decided to study this phenomenon.

### **iii) Rules for the Classification of Social Types**

There have been two opposing conceptions of collective life among scholars. Some historians hold that each society is unique and so we cannot compare societies. On the other hand philosophers hold that all societies belong to one species - the human species and it is from the general attributes of human nature that all social evolution flows. Durkheim takes an intermediary position. He speaks of social species or social types. Though there is so much of diversity in social facts, it does not mean that they cannot be treated scientifically i.e. compared, classified and explained. If on the other hand, we speak of only one species we will be missing out in important qualitative differences and it will be impossible to draw them together.

Classification of societies into types is an important step towards explanation as problems and their explanations will differ for each type. It is also needed to decide whether a social fact is normal or abnormal, since a social fact is normal or abnormal only in relation to a given social type. Thus Durkheim attempts to outline a system for classifying societies according to their structure and complexity, a process Durkheim referred to as 'social morphology.' Durkheim advocated the use of *comparative method* to classify societies into a typology. He himself presented one based on the type of solidarity, viz., mechanical and organic solidarity.

### **iv) Rules for the Explanation of Social Facts**

There are two approaches, which may be used in the explanation of social facts - the causal and the functional. The former is concerned with explaining 'why' the social phenomenon in question exists. The latter involves explaining the functions the social phenomenon in question performs for the existence and stability of the society as a whole. In other words, functional explanation involves explaining the social phenomenon in terms of the needs it fulfils of the given social type.

Let us take an example of 'punishment' from the same work. Crime offends collective sentiments in a society, while the function of punishment is to maintain

these sentiments at the same degree of intensity. If offences against them were not punished, the strength of the sentiments necessary for social unity would not be preserved. (It may be pointed out here that functionalism which was dominant in Sociology, particularly in the USA in the 1940s and 50s owes a lot to Durkheim's conception of function)

Durkheim further argues that since the subject matter of sociology has a social character, it is collective in nature, the explanation should also have a social character. Durkheim draws a sharp line between individual and society. Society is a separate reality from the individuals who compose it. It has its own characteristics. There exists a line between psychology and sociology. Any attempt to explain social facts directly in terms of individual characteristics or in terms of psychology would make the explanation false. Therefore in the case of causal explanation "the determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of the individual consciousness". In the case of functional explanation, "the function of a social fact ought always to be sought in its relation to some social end."

The final point about Durkheim's logic of explanation is his stress upon the comparative nature of social science. To show that a given fact is the cause of another "we have to compare cases in which they are simultaneously present or absent, to see if the variations they present in these different combinations of circumstances indicate that one depends on the other." According to Durkheim, experimentation is the crucial method for testing theories in science. However, experimentation is not possible in sociology. Therefore, the comparative method is the closest alternative to experimentation, for testing sociological explanations. Since sociologists normally do not conduct laboratory-controlled experiments but study reported facts or go to the field and observe social facts, which have been spontaneously produced, they use the method of indirect experiment or the comparative method. The comparative method must be based upon the principle of concomitant variations. The comparative method is the very framework of the science of society for Durkheim. According to Durkheim, "comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in-so-far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for fact."

As can be seen from the above discussion, Durkheim, in order to establish sociology as a distinct scientific discipline, takes an extreme stance. This is reflected in his advocacy of positive science methodology to study social facts and, the definition of social facts in itself reflects his extreme sociological realism position. However, the positivists' emphasis on explaining a social phenomenon exclusively on the basis of its outwardly observable characteristics ignores the human side of social behaviour. This view fails to take into account the subjective

dimension of human behaviour manifested in the unique meanings, choices and motives of an individual.

### *Suicide (1897)*

*Suicide* was Durkheim's third book which was published in 1897. In broad historical terms, there are several reasons why Durkheim took up the theme of suicide when he did. First, suicide was a growing social problem in Europe by 1850 and many felt that it was associated with the development of industrial society. Industrialization had advanced individualism, accelerated social fragmentation, and weakened the social bonds tying individuals to society. Second, industrial society had made economic institutions dominant over other social institutions and this served to place individual self-interest and economic gain over the collective forces of society. As individual autonomy and political freedoms increased, the individual became the center of social life and this served to reduce the level of social restraint and to call into question the nature of collective social purposes. Third, the political crisis of the Dreyfus affair in 1894 was a serious blow to French national unity and drew attention to how much social fragmentation and egoistic forces had replaced the collective authority of society. This led Durkheim to believe that the theme of social dissolution brought about by industrial society could be examined sociologically by looking at the mechanisms in society which link individuals to social purposes outside themselves. Fourth, factual evidence made available by comparative mortality data from different societies linked suicide to social factors such as industrial change, occupation, family life and religion, and this served to focus attention on society and social institutions rather than on complex psychological factors. Durkheim found that the statistical data contained in the records of suicidal deaths for the period could be categorized according to age, religion, sex, occupation, military service and marital status, and this led directly to a search for the role played by social factors in the cause of suicide. Overall, Durkheim studied the records of 26,000 suicides, and his colleague, Marcel Mauss, helped assemble the maps contained in the study and aided in compiling the statistical tables on suicidal deaths relating to age and marital status.

One of the primary aims Durkheim had in pursuing a social theory of suicide was to look for the social causes of suicide within the existing framework of society rather than looking at the psychological states of individuals who take their own lives. This shift in perspective from a psychological to a sociological theory of suicide was disconcerting for many, and perhaps the best way to understand this shift is to look at the problem of suicide prior to Durkheim's work. At the time Durkheim began his study, suicide was largely treated as a nervous disorder and its

causes were believed to derive from the psychological states of individuals. Many believed that suicide was the result of mental illness, depression, sudden tragedy, reversal of fortune and even personal setbacks and bankruptcy. In this light, suicide was seen by many as the result of a weak disposition and a psychological response to the burdens of life. Durkheim, however, called these views into question by shifting the focus from individual motives and psychological states to social causes in at least two distinct ways. First, by stating that the social causes of suicide precede individual causes, Durkheim eliminated the need to look at the various forms suicide assumed in individuals, including depression, personal setbacks, and psychiatric disorders. Second, in focusing his attention on the various social environments to which the individual was connected, including the family group, the religious group and the national group, Durkheim eliminated the necessity of looking at individual disposition or personality. He put this clearly when he pointed out that 'the causes of death are outside rather than within us, and are effective only if we venture into their sphere of activity.'

Durkheim defined Suicide as '*all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result.*'

*Suicide* is cited as a monumental landmark in which conceptual theory and empirical research are brought together. He used considerable statistical ingenuity considered remarkable for his times. His use of statistical analysis was for two primary reasons: (1) to refute theories based on psychology, biology, genetics, climatic, and geographical factors, and (2) to support with empirical evidence his own sociological explanation of suicide. In this study, Durkheim displayed an extreme form of sociological realism. He speaks of *suicidal currents* as collective tendencies that dominate some very susceptible individuals and catch them up in their sweep. The act of suicide at times, Durkheim believed, is interpreted as a product of these currents. Durkheim rejected the various extra-social factors such as heredity, climate, mental alienation, racial characteristics and imitation as the cause of suicide and arrived at the conclusion that suicide which appears to be a phenomenon relating to the individual is actually explicable aetiologically with reference to the social structure and its ramifying functions which may (a) induce, (b) perpetuate, or (c) aggravate the suicide potential.

Durkheim's central thesis is that suicide rate is a factual order, unified and definite, for each society has a collective inclination towards suicide, a rate of self-homicide which is fairly constant for each society so long as the basic conditions of its existence remain the same. No complete understanding of Durkheim's assertion that suicide had social causes is possible without looking at the concept of the '*social suicide rate*'. Durkheim arrived at the concept of the social suicide

rate after a careful examination of the mortality data which had been obtained from public records of societies such as France, Germany, England, Denmark and Austria. These records contained information about cause of death, age, marital background, religion and the total number of deaths by suicide of the country from which they were gathered. The 'social suicide rate,' therefore, was a term used by Durkheim to refer to the number of suicidal deaths in a given society and the extent to which the 'suicide rates' themselves could be looked upon as establishing a pattern of suicide for a given society. But, what does this mean in relation to individual suicide? As we stated earlier, theories of suicide prevalent at the time had looked at individual motives and psychological causes. Suicide, many believed, was the desperate act of an individual who did not care to live or who could not face life's burdens. From this perspective, suicide was seen as an individual act dependent on factors which could only be explained psychologically.

Durkheim, however, took a completely different approach. Rather than looking at individual motives or psychological states, he began by looking at the 'social suicide rate' that existed in different countries. What he wanted to find out was whether individual suicides committed in a given society could be taken together as a whole and studied collectively. Durkheim's central question then was can the collective rates for a given society be studied independently of individual suicide? In order, therefore, to establish a theoretical footing, Durkheim began to look at the total number of suicidal deaths contained in public records of countries such as France, Germany, England and Denmark. The suicide rates for these countries had been collected between 1841 and 1872, and they contained a substantial amount of information related to social factors of suicide such as marital status, religion, occupation and military service.

After studying the rates, Durkheim made several key observations. First, he noticed that the rates varied from society to society. For example, they were higher in Germany in comparison to Italy; lower in Denmark in comparison to England and so on. Second, he observed that between 1841 and 1872, the number of suicidal deaths in each of the countries did not change dramatically and were considered to be stable. For example, between 1841-42 the number of suicidal deaths in France were 2814 and 2866 respectively; whereas in Germany for the same years they were 1630 and 1598. As far as Durkheim was concerned, the stability of the rates within a given society was crucial since it meant that each society not only produced a 'quota of suicidal deaths' but that certain social forces were operating to produce what Durkheim saw as the 'yearly precision of rates.' This turned out to be decisive because when considered collectively, the rates pointed in the direction of underlying social causes. This led Durkheim to reason that the predisposing cause of suicide lay not within the psychological motives of the individual but within the social framework of society. Third, the observed

stability of the rates meant that each society was a distinct social environment with different social characteristics, different religions, different patterns of family life, different military obligations and thus different suicide characteristics. Under these circumstances, each produced rate of suicidal deaths distinct from the other. Fourth, when compared to the mortality rate, Durkheim noticed that the suicide rate demonstrated a far greater consistency than did the general mortality rate, which fluctuated randomly.

As a result, Durkheim drew three fundamental conclusions which turned on the question of the stability of the rates. First, he believed that the stability of the rates showed that, while individual motives for suicide vary from case to case, the regularity exhibited by the social suicide rate was consistently stable. Second, though the rates varied between societies, the stability of the rates within a particular society meant that each society produces a 'quota of suicidal deaths'. Third, Durkheim took the position that the social suicide rate must represent a 'factual order' that is separate from individual disposition and, therefore, he thought it had a regularity which could be studied in its own right. In that the 'social suicide rate' is independent of individual suicide and has a stability of its own, it should therefore be the subject of a special study whose purpose would be to discover the social causes leading to a definite number of people that take their own lives in a given society.

Durkheim believed that the social suicide rate was the clearest evidence he had for a social theory of suicide since what a study of the social suicide rate had established was that different societies had different suicide rates, and that these rates changed very little over time within any given society. For example, between 1841 and 1842 France had 2866 suicides while Germany had 1598 suicides. He went on to reason that if suicide were entirely the result of individual causes and individual psychology, it would be difficult to explain why the French would be almost twice as likely to commit suicide in comparison with the Germans. Durkheim then reasoned that once we shift the focus from the study of individual suicides to the study of the 'collective suicide rate' – France's suicide rate in relation to Germany's suicide rate – it became apparent that the collective rates pointed in the direction of underlying social causes, which in turn indicated fundamental differences in the social framework that caused France to have 2866 suicides each year, while Germany had only 1598.

Durkheim's theory of suicide is divided into two explanatory sections. In the first, Durkheim explains suicide by drawing on the concept of **social integration**, referring to the strength of the social bonds existing between the individual and society. In this case, **egoistic** and **altruistic** suicide form opposite poles of social integration. In the second part of the theory, Durkheim explained suicide by

drawing on the concept of **social regulation**. Social regulation, in contrast to integration, refers to the restraints imposed by society on individual needs and wants and generally manifests itself through regulatory requirements that are imposed by society on individuals when their social needs and wants begin to exceed the means they have for attaining them. In the case of social regulation, **anomic** and **fatalistic** suicide form opposite poles in relation to the changes in the regulatory functions of industrial society that may lead to shifts in the suicide rate. Let us now discuss about these types of suicide in detail.

**Egoistic Suicide:** Egoistic suicide results from the lack of integration of the individual into his social group. Durkheim studied varying degrees of integration of individuals into their religion, family, political and national communities, and found that the stronger the forces throwing the individuals on to their own resources, the greater the suicide rate in society. For example, regardless of race and nationality, Catholics show far less suicides than Protestants. This is because, while both faiths prohibit suicide, Catholicism is able to integrate its members more fully into its fold. Protestantism fosters spirit of free inquiry, permits greater individual freedom, multiplies schism, lacks hierarchic organizations and has fewer common beliefs and practices. Catholicism, on the other hand, is an idealistic religion which accepts faith readymade, without scrutiny, has a hierarchical system of authority and prohibits variation. Thus “the superiority of Protestantism with respect to suicide results from its being a less strongly integrated church than the Catholic church.”

Family, like religious group, is a powerful counter agent against suicide. Non-marriage increases the tendency to suicide, while marriage reduces the danger by half or more. This immunity even increases with the density of the family. In other words, contrary to the popular belief that suicide is due to life's burdens, Durkheim insists that it diminishes as these burdens increase. Small families are unstable and short-lived; their sentiments and consciences lack intensity. But large families are more solidly integrated and act as powerful safeguards against suicide. Again, contrary to the common belief that great political upheavals increase the number of suicides, Durkheim contends that great social disturbances and popular wars rouse collective sentiments, stimulate patriotism and national faith, and force men to close ranks and confront the danger, leading to a more powerful integration of the individual into his community, thus reducing the rate of suicide.

**Altruistic Suicide:** Altruistic suicide results from the over-integration of the individual into his social group. An individual's life is so rigorously governed by custom and habit that he takes his own life because of higher commandments. Examples are legion: women throwing themselves at the funeral pyre of their husbands (known as *sati* in India); Danish warriors killing themselves in old age;

the Goths jumping to their death from high pinnacles to escape the ignominy of natural death; suicide of followers and servants on the death of their chiefs. As opposed to these obligatory altruistic suicides, there are optional varieties which do not require suicide but praise self-sacrifice or ultimate self-renunciation as a noble and praiseworthy act. Japanese Harakiri, self-immolation by Buddhist monks, self-homicide by army suicide squads and self-destruction in Nirvana under Brahminic influence (as in the case of ancient Hindu sages) illustrate other variants of altruistic suicide.

Durkheim believed that his analysis of military suicide lent support to his conclusion. He rejected the popular conception which attributes military suicide to the hardships of military life, disciplinary rigor and lack of liberty. While with longer service men might be expected to become accustomed to barrack life, their commitment to the army and aptitude for suicide seem to increase. While military life is much less hard for officers than for private soldiers, the former accounts for greater suicide rates than the latter. Above all, volunteers and re-enlisted men who choose military as a career are more inclined to commit suicide than men drafted against their will. This proves that where altruistic suicide is prevalent, man is always ready to sacrifice his life for a great cause, principle or a value.

**Anomic Suicide:** Anomic suicide results from normlessness or deregulation in society. Although this kind of suicide occurs during industrial or financial crises, it is not because they cause poverty, since crises of prosperity have the same result, but because they are crises of the collective order. Every disturbance of social equilibrium whether on account of sudden prosperity or instant misfortune, results in a deregulation and a greater impulse to voluntary death. Durkheim attributed anomic suicide to unlimited aspirations and the breakdown of regulatory norms. Man's aspirations have consistently increased since the beginnings of history. There is nothing in man's organic structure or his psychological constitution which can regulate his overweening ambitions. Social desires can be regulated only by a moral force. Durkheim views the collective order as the only moral force that can effectively restrain the social and moral needs. However, occasionally this mechanism breaks down and normlessness ensues.

Thus any abrupt transitions such as economic disaster, industrial crisis or sudden prosperity can cause a deregulation of the normative structure. That is why, Durkheim reasons, anomie is a chronic state of affairs in the modern socio-economic system. Sudden changes upset the societal scale instantly but a new scale cannot be immediately improvised. Collective conscience requires time to reclassify men and things. During such periods of transition there is no restraint on aspirations which continue to rise unbridled. "The state of deregulation or anomie is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they

need more disciplining.” Overweening ambition and the race for unattainable goals continue to heighten anomie.

In analyzing the consequences of anomie, Durkheim showed that there was a high rate of anomic suicide among those who are wealthy as well as among divorced persons. Sudden upward changes in the standard of living or the breakup of a marriage throws life out of gear and puts norms in a flux. Like economic anomie, domestic anomie resulting from the death of husband or wife is also the result of a catastrophe that upsets the scale of life. Durkheim also points to a number of factors that contributed to anomie in modern society. “Economic progress has largely freed industrial relations from all regulation, and there is no moral strong enough to exercise control in the sphere of trade and industry. Furthermore, religion has lost most of its power. And government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant.”

**Fatalistic Suicide:** There is a little mentioned fourth type of suicide – fatalistic – that Durkheim discussed only in a footnote in *Suicide*. Whereas anomic suicide is more likely to occur in situations in which regulation is too weak, fatalistic suicide is more likely to occur when regulation is excessive. While Durkheim had little to say about the characteristics of fatalistic suicide, he cited as an example the suicide of slaves who, seeing no alternative to life except enslavement under a master, take their own life.

Thus, to summarise, Durkheim argued that social currents cause changes in the rates of suicides. Individual suicides are affected by these currents of egoism, altruism, anomie, and fatalism. This proved, for Durkheim, that these currents are more than just the sum of individuals, but are *sui generis* forces, because they dominate the decisions of individuals. Without this assumption, the stability of the suicide rate for any particular society could not be explained.

Durkheim hence concludes that,

*“rate of suicide is inversely proportional to the degree of solidarity.”*

Durkheim concludes his study of suicide with an examination of what reforms could be undertaken to prevent it. Most attempts to prevent suicide have failed because it has been seen as an individual problem. For Durkheim attempts to directly convince individuals not to commit suicide are futile, since its real causes are in society. Of course, the first question to be asked is whether suicide should be prevented or whether it counts among those social phenomena that Durkheim would call normal because of its widespread prevalence. This is an especially important question for Durkheim because his theory says that suicides results from social currents that, in a less exaggerated form, are good for society. We would not

want to stop all economic booms because they lead to anomic suicides nor would we stop valuing individuality because leads to egoistic suicide. Similarly, altruistic suicide results from our virtuous tendency to sacrifice ourselves for the community. The pursuit of progress, the belief in the individual, and the spirit of sacrifice all have their place in society, and cannot exist without generating some suicides. Durkheim admits that some suicide is normal, but he argues that the modern society has seen a pathological increase in both egoistic and anomic suicide. Here his position can be traced back to *The Division of Labour*, where he argued that the anomie of modern culture is due to the abnormal way in which labour is divided so that it leads to isolation rather than interdependence. What is needed, then, is a way to preserve the benefits of modernity without unduly increasing suicides – a way of balancing these social currents. In our society, Durkheim believes, these currents are out of balance. In particular, social regulation and integration are too low, leading to an abnormal rate of anomic and egoistic suicides.

Many of the existing institutions for connecting the individual and society have failed, and Durkheim sees little hope of their success. The modern state is too distant from the individual to influence his or her life with enough force and continuity. The church cannot exert its integrating effect without at the same time repressing freedom of thought. Even the family, possibly the most integrative institution in modern society, will fail in this task since it is subject to the same corrosive conditions that are increasing suicide. Instead, what Durkheim suggests is the need of a different institution based on occupational groups. Hence in the form of ‘occupational associations’ Durkheim proposes a social solution to a social problem.

As we discussed above, the primary problem that Durkheim saw in modern society was the lack of integration and regulation. Even though the cult of the individual provided a collective representation, Durkheim believed that there was a lack of social organizations that people could feel part of and that could tell people what they should and should not do. The modern state is too distant to influence most individuals. The church tends to integrate people by repressing freedom of thought. And the family is too particular and does not integrate individuals into society as a whole. As we’ve seen, the schools provided an excellent milieu for children. For adults, Durkheim proposed another institution: the *occupational association*. Genuine moral commitments require a concrete group which is tied to the basic organizing principle of modern society, the division of labour. Durkheim proposed the development of occupational associations. All the workers, managers, and owners involved in a particular industry should join together in an association that would be both professional and social. Durkheim did not believe that there was a basic conflict of interest among the owners, managers, and workers within

an industry. In this, of course, he took a position diametrically opposed to that of Marx, who saw an essential conflict of interest between the owners and the workers. Durkheim believed that any such conflict occurred only because the various people involved lacked a common morality which was traceable to the lack of an integrative structure. He suggested that the structure that was needed to provide this integrative morality was the occupational association, which would encompass “all the agents of the same industry united and organized into a single group.” Such an organization was deemed to be superior to such organizations as labour unions and employer association, which in Durkheim’s view served only to intensify the differences between owners, managers, and workers. Involved in a common organization, people in these categories would recognize their common interests as well as their common need for an integrative moral system. That moral system, with its derived rules and laws, would serve to counteract the tendency toward atomization in modern society as well as help stop the decline in the significance of collective morality.

Durkheim’s analysis has had an enormous influence on all subsequent research into suicide, and many aspects of his theory have been confirmed by a number of studies, although many of these have also served to modify the original theory. Bearing in mind that many of the statistical techniques commonly used today had not been developed at the time, his statistical approach was very advanced. Still, he has been criticized both for his social realism perspective as well as his positivist methodology. In his study of *Suicide* Durkheim displayed an extreme form of social realism and explained suicide as a product of suicidal currents. However, later day scholars criticized this extreme sociological realism approach of Durkheim, and rather advocated a more comprehensive ‘causal pluralism’ approach to explain the phenomenon of suicide. They argued that apart from social factors, biological and psychological factors must also be explored while explaining suicide. Further, British sociologist J. Maxwell Atkinson has criticized Durkheim on his positivist methodology. Atkinson has raised doubts over the reliability and validity of the very data used by Durkheim in study of *Suicide*. He maintains that the social world is a construction of actors’ perceptions and subjective interpretations. As such it has no reality beyond the meanings given to it by social actors. Thus an act of suicide is simply that which is defined as suicide by social actors. Certain deaths come to be defined as suicide by coroners (investigating officers), medical practitioners, newspaper reporters, family and friends of the deceased and so on. Definitions of suicide depend on their interpretation of the event. For Atkinson, suicide is not an objective fact rather it is a subjective interpretation of the coroner. Thus, while some cases of unnatural death get classified as suicide and others are not, owing to the subjective interpretation by the coroner.

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

Durkheim wrote *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* between 1902-1911, and first published it as a complete study in 1912. By the time it was published, Durkheim, was 54 years old and had become one of the leading thinkers in French social thought. While he had begun working on the problem of religion as early 1902, there were several reasons why he chose to study religion as a central subject of sociological interest at the time. First, religion had been one of the leading themes in Durkheim's sociological journal, the *Annee Sociologique* where many of the issues had focused on the question of tribal religions as a result of Roberson Davies ethnographic research during the period. Second, as early as 1890, anthropologists and ethnographers had come to view religion and religious practices as the central subject matter of social and historical interest. Studies such as Spencer and Gillen's *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* published in 1899, and Benjamin Howitt's *Native Tribes of South Eastern Australia* were among the first to carry out ethnographic studies of the religious practices of tribal societies that had not been studied previously. Third, Durkheim's colleague Marcel Mauss was pursuing anthropological interests at the time and many of his articles were featured in the *Annee Sociologique*, giving it a distinct anthropological focus. By 1895, Durkheim was persuaded that religion would be a fitting subject of sociological study because it seemed to be at the center of the social framework of society.

Durkheim's last major book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), is often regarded as the most profound and the most original of his works. The book contains a description and a detailed analysis of the clan system and of totemism in the Arunta tribe of Australian aborigines, elaborates a general theory of religion derived from a study of the simplest and most "primitive" of religious institutions, and outlines a sociological interpretation of the forms of human thought which is at the heart of contemporary sociology of knowledge.

Durkheim began with a refutation of the reigning theories of the origin of religion. Edward B. Tylor, the distinguished English ethnologist, as well as Spencer himself supported the notion of 'animism', i.e., spirit worship as the most basic form of religious expression. Animism means the belief in spirits. Tylor believes this to be the earliest form of religion. He argues that animism derives from man's attempts to answer two questions, 'What is it that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one?' and, 'What are those human shapes which appear in dreams and visions?' To make sense of these events, early philosophers invented the idea of soul. The soul is a spirit being which leaves the body temporarily during dreams and visions, and permanently at death. Once invented, the idea of spirits was applied not simply to man, but also to many aspects of the

natural and social environment. Thus animals were invested with spirit, as were man-made objects. Tylor argues that religion, in the form of animism, originated to satisfy man's intellectual nature, to meet his need to make sense of death, dreams and visions.

*Naturism*, on the other hand, means the belief that the forces of nature have supernatural power. F. Max Mueller, the noted German linguist, believes this to be the earliest form of religion. He argues that naturism arose from man's experience of nature, in particular the effect of nature upon man's emotions. Nature contains surprise, terror, marvels and miracles, such as volcanoes, thunder and lightning. Awed by the power and wonder of nature, early man transformed abstract forces into personal agents. Man personified nature. The force of the wind became the spirit of the wind, the power of the sun became the spirit of the sun. Where animism seeks the origin of religion in man's intellectual needs, naturism seeks it in his emotional needs. Naturism is man's response to the effect of the power and wonder of nature upon his emotions.

Durkheim rejected both concepts because he felt that they failed to explain the universal key distinction between the sacred and the profane, and because they tended to explain religion away by interpreting it as an illusion, that is, the reductionistic fallacy. Moreover, to love spirits whose unreality one affirms or to love natural forces transfigured merely by man's fear would make religious experience a kind of collective hallucination. Nor is religion defined by the notion of mystery or of the supernatural. Nor is the belief in a transcendental god the essence of religion, for there are several religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism, without gods. Moreover, reliance on spirits and supernatural forces will make religion an illusion. To Durkheim it is inadmissible that systems of ideas like religion which have had such considerable place in history, to which people have turned in all ages for the energy they needed to live, and for which they were willing to sacrifice their lives, should be mere tissues of illusion. Rather, they should be viewed as so profound and so permanent as to correspond to a true reality. And, this true reality is not a transcendent God but society. Thus the central thesis of Durkheim's theory of religion is that throughout history men have never worshipped any other reality, whether in the form of the totem or of God, than the collective social reality transfigured by faith.

According to Durkheim, the essence of religion is a division of the world into two kinds of phenomena, the sacred and the profane. The sacred refers to things human beings set apart, including religious beliefs, rites, deities, or anything socially defined as requiring special religious treatment. Participation in the sacred order, such as in rituals or ceremonies, gives a special prestige, illustrating one of the social functions of religion. "The sacred thing," wrote Durkheim, "is *par*

*excellence* that which the profane should not touch and cannot touch with impunity.” The profane is the reverse of the sacred. “The circle of sacred objects,” continued Durkheim, “cannot be determined once for all. Its existence varies infinitely, according to the different religions.” The dichotomy of the sacred and the profane arises out of the dualistic nature of life experience itself. Sacredness is essentially a matter of attitude on the part of the people towards various animate and inanimate objects. But it is not an intrinsic characteristic of the objects themselves. It is the society which designates certain objects as sacred and expects its members to show an attitude of awe and reverence towards these objects. For example, the holy water from Ganges is regarded as sacred by the Hindus inspite of the fact that Ganges these days is highly polluted. Thus sacredness is a quality super imposed by society only. Further, according to Durkheim, the sacred is radically opposed to profane. Unlike the profane, the sacred is non-utilitarian and non-empirical, is strength giving and sustaining, elicits intense respect and makes an ethical demand on the believer.

Accordingly, Durkheim defines religion as a “*unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite in one simple moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to it.*” Beliefs and practices unite people in a social community by relating them to sacred things. This collective sharing of beliefs, rituals, etc., is essential for the development of religion. The sacred symbols of religious belief and practice refer, not to the external environment or to individual human nature but only to the moral reality of society.

Durkheim uses the religion of various groups of Australian aborigines to develop his argument. He sees their religion, which he calls **totemism**, as the simplest and most basic form of religion. Aborigine society is divided into several clans. A clan is like a large extended family with its members sharing certain duties and obligations. For example, clans have a rule of exogamy – members may not marry within the clan. Clan members have duty to aid and assist each other; they join together to mourn the death of one of their number and to revenge a member who has been wronged by someone from another clan. Each clan has a totem, usually an animal or a plant. The totem is symbol. It is the emblem of the clan, ‘It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from all others’. However, the totem is more than this, it is a sacred symbol. The totem is ‘The outward and visible form of the totemic principle or god’. Durkheim argues that if the totem, ‘Is at once the symbol of god and of the society, is that not because the god and the society are only one?’ Thus he suggests that in worshipping god, men are in fact worshipping society. Society is the real object of religious veneration.

Thus, instead of animism or naturism, Durkheim took the “totemism” among the Australian tribes as the key concept to explain the origins of religion. Ordinary objects, whether pieces of wood, polished stones, plants or animals, are transfigured into sacred objects once they bear the emblem of the totem. Durkheim writes:

Totemism is the religion, not of certain animals or of certain men or of certain images, but of a kind of anonymous and impersonal force which is found in each of these beings, without however being identified with any one of them. None possesses it entirely, and all participate in it. So independent is it of the particular subjects in which it is embodied that it precedes them just as it is adequate to them. Individuals die, generations pass away and are replaced by others. But this force remains ever present, living, and true to itself. It quickens today's generation just as it quickened yesterday's and as it will quicken tomorrow's. Taking the word in a very broad sense, one might say that it is the god worshipped by each totemic cult; but it is an impersonal god, without a name, without a history, abiding in the world, diffused in a countless multitude of things.

Totem, Durkheim explained, refers to an implicit belief in a mysterious or sacred force or principle that provides sanctions for violations of taboos, inculcates moral responsibilities in the group, and animates the totem itself. The emphasis, in keeping with his overall emphasis upon social analysis of social phenomena, was upon the collective activities as the birthplace of religious sentiments and ideas. According to Durkheim, the essence of Totemism is the worship of an impersonal, anonymous force, at once immanent and transcendent. This anonymous, diffuse force which is superior to men and very close to them is in reality society itself.

How does man come to worship society? Sacred things are ‘considered superior in dignity and power to profane things and particularly to man’. In relation to the sacred, man's position is inferior and dependent. This relationship between man and sacred things is exactly the relationship between man and society. Society is more important and powerful than the individual. Durkheim argues that, ‘Primitive man comes to view society as something sacred because he is utterly dependent on it’. But why does man not simply worship society itself? Why does he invent a sacred symbol like a totem? Because, Durkheim argues, ‘it is easier for him to visualize and direct his feelings of awe toward a symbol than towards so complex a thing as a clan’.

Here in lies Durkheim's functional explanation of religion. He is trying to bring out the consequences of religion, which is a part of the society, for the society as a whole. The attitudes of reverence and respect which are expressed, through religious beliefs and rituals, towards the sacred objects are in fact an indirect expressions of reverence for the society. Participation in religious worship builds respect for society's values and norms, hence, acting as an agency of social control. Further, collective participation in common rituals and holding common

beliefs creates a sense of 'We-ness' among the members of the society and thus strengthens solidarity in the society.

Durkheim argues that social life is impossible without the shared values and moral beliefs which form the 'collective conscience'. In their absence, there would be no social order, social control, social solidarity or cooperation. In short, there would be no society. Religion reinforces the collective conscience. The worship of society strengthens the values and moral beliefs which form the basis of social life. By defining them as sacred, religion provides them with greater power to direct human action. The attitude of respect towards the sacred is the same attitude applied to social duties and obligations. In worshipping society, men are, in effect, recognizing the importance of the social group and their dependence upon it. In this way religion strengthens the unity of the group, it promotes social solidarity. The social group comes together in religious rituals infused with drama and reverence. Together, its members express their faith in common values and beliefs. In this highly charged atmosphere of collective worship, the integration of society is strengthened. Members of society express, communicate and comprehend the moral bonds which unite them.

Moreover, Durkheim claims that just as societies in the past have created gods and religion, societies of the future are inclined to create new gods and new religions when they are in a state of exaltation. When societies are seized by the sacred frenzy, and when men, participating in ritualistic ceremonies, religious services, feasts and festivals, go into a trance, people are united by dancing and shouting and experience a kind of phantasmagoria. Men are compelled to participate by the force of the group which carries them outside of themselves and gives them a sensation of something that has no relation to every day experience. During such moments of sacred frenzy and collective trance, new gods and new religions will be born.

Durkheim believed he had solved the religious-moral dilemma of modern society. If religion is nothing but the indirect worship of society, modern people need only express their religious feelings directly toward the sacred symbolization of society. The source and object of religion, Durkheim pointed out, are the collective life—the sacred is at bottom 'society personified'. Therefore, a secular sociological explanation of religion could sound something like this—the individual who feels dependent on some external moral power is not a victim of hallucination but a responsive member of society. The substantial function of religion, said Durkheim, is the creation, reinforcement, and maintenance of social solidarity. He argued that religious phenomena emerges in any society when a separation is made between the sphere of the profane—the realm of everyday utilitarian activities—and the sphere of the sacred—the area that pertains to the numerous, the transcendental, the extraordinary.

Religion, as Durkheim saw and explained it, is not only a social creation, but is in fact society divinized. Durkheim stated that the deities which men worship together are only projections of the power of society. If religion is essentially a transcendental representation of the powers of society, then the disappearance of traditional religion need not herald the dissolution of society. Furthermore, Durkheim reasoned that all that is required for modern men now was to realize directly that dependence on society, which before, they had recognized only through the medium of religious representation. "We must," he explained, "discover the rational substitute for these religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas". On the most general plane, religion as a social institution serves to give meaning to man's existential predicaments by tying the individual to that supra individual sphere of transcendent values which is ultimately rooted in his own society. Thus, he advocated a new humanistic religion for the modern society.

With this study of religion, Durkheim successfully demonstrated the application of functionalist methodology in sociology and social anthropology which subsequently influenced the works of B. Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. Durkheim's ideas remain influential, though they are not without criticism. Some anthropologists have argued that he is not justified in seeing totemism as a religion. Most sociologists believe that Durkheim has overstated his case. Whilst agreeing that religion is important for promoting social solidarity and reinforcing social values, they would not support the view that religion is the worship of society. For example, like Durkheim, Malinowski uses data from small-scale non-literate societies to develop his thesis on religion. Many of his examples are drawn from his field work in the Trobriand Islands off the coast of New Guinea. Like Durkheim, Malinowski sees religion as reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity. Unlike Durkheim, however, he does not see religion reflecting society as a whole, nor does he see religious ritual as the worship of society itself. Malinowski identifies specific areas of social life with which religion is concerned, to which it is addressed. These are situations of emotional stress which threaten social solidarity.

Anxiety and tension tend to disrupt social life. Situations which produce these emotions include 'crises of life' such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. Malinowski notes that in all societies these life crises are surrounded with religious ritual. He sees death as the most disruptive of these events. Religion deals with the problem of death in the following manner. A funeral ceremony expresses the belief in immortality, which denies the fact of death, and so comforts the bereaved. Other mourners support the bereaved by their presence at the ceremony. This comfort and support checks the emotions which death produces, and controls the stress and anxiety which might disrupt society. Death is 'socially destructive' since it

removes a member from society. At a funeral ceremony the social group unites to support the bereaved. This expression of social solidarity re-integrates society.

A second category of events, undertakings which cannot be fully controlled or predicted by practical means, also produces tension and anxiety. From his observations in the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski noted that such events were surrounded by ritual. Fishing is an important subsistence practice in the Trobriands. Malinowski observed that in the calm waters of the lagoon, 'fishing is done in an easy and absolutely reliable manner by the method of poisoning, yielding abundant results without danger and uncertainty'. However, beyond the barrier reef in the open sea there is danger and uncertainty. A storm may result in loss of life. The catch is dependent on the presence of a shoal of fish which cannot be predicted. In the lagoon, 'where man can rely completely on his knowledge and skill', there are no rituals associated with fishing whereas fishing in the open sea is preceded by rituals to ensure a good catch and protect the fishermen. Although Malinowski refers to these rituals as magic, others argue it is reasonable to regard them as religious practices. Again we see ritual addressed to specific situations which produce anxiety. Rituals reduce anxiety by providing confidence and a feeling of control. As with funeral ceremonies, fishing rituals are social events. The group unites to deal with situations of stress, and so the unity of the group is strengthened.

Here we can see that while Durkheim analysed the functional aspect of religion for the society as a whole, Malinowski, on the other hand, also talks of the functional consequences at the individual level, thus offering a critique to Durkheim's extreme social realism. Malinowski's distinctive contribution to the sociology of religion is his argument that religion promotes social solidarity by dealing with situations of emotional stress which threaten the stability of society.

In his essay, '*The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology*', Radcliffe-Brown further extended the argument of Durkheim to explain why a particular totem is chosen by a society or group as its totem. In a comparative analysis of various tribes of Australia and north-west America, he found various instances whereby a tribe was divided into two exogamous moieties and each moiety represented by particular natural specie as its totem. For example, in case of Australian aborigines in New South Wales, the two moieties were represented by eaglehawk and crow. On the basis of his comparative study, he concluded that the selection of a particular set of natural species as the totem by the two exogamous moieties of a tribe is also associated with their inter-group social relations. He found it common that natural species were placed in pairs of opposites, with certain degree of resemblances as well as differences. He interpreted the resemblances and differences of animal species in terms of social relationships of friendship and antagonism in human society.

Further, Robert K. Merton argues that Durkheim's views on religion are more relevant to small, non-literate societies, where there is a close integration of culture and social institutions, where work, leisure, education and family life tend to merge, and where members share a common belief and value system. They are less relevant to modern societies, which have many subcultures, social and ethnic groups, specialized organizations and a range of religious beliefs, practices and institutions. Merton asserts that Durkheim's view that religion act as an agency of social control and provided solidarity, is true only for simple small scale societies which practice a single common religion. In the case of modern industrial societies religion has lost both these function. Given the highly differentiated and diversified nature of modern societies, religion can no longer act as an agency of social control. Further, the existence of a plurality of religions, quite often lead to inter-religious conflicts and therefore endanger solidarity rather than enhancing it. This could be seen in terms of the increasing communal riots at local level and deepening religious divide at international level.

Further, contrary to Durkheim's view that religion is in fact 'society divinized' and promotes solidarity in the society, Marx argues that religion is a part of the superstructure and thus it not only reflects but also reinforces the ruling class ideology. Marx further argues that religion acts as an opiate to dull the pain produced by oppression. In Marx's words, 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people'. It does nothing to solve the problem, it is simply a misguided attempt to make life more bearable. As such, religion merely stupefies its adherents rather than bringing them true happiness and fulfillment. To Marx, religion is an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. It is a series of myths which justify and legitimate the subordination of the subject class and the domination and privilege of the ruling class. It is a distortion of reality which provides many of the deceptions which form the basis of ruling class ideology and false class consciousness.

Durkheim, in his study of religion, pointed to two major functions of religion, viz. social solidarity and social control. However, as evident from Max Weber's study of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, religion may also serve as an agent of social change. Weber's study of ascetic Protestantism argued that religious beliefs provided the ethics, attitudes and motivations for the development of capitalism. Thus, leading to the transformation of a predominantly feudal European society into a capitalistic one.

More recently, some scholars have highlighted an altogether new role that religion is playing in the contemporary world politics, as an ideology of protest. They argue that with welfare state failing to deliver on the basic amenities of life

and communism still a utopia, religion has emerged as a potent ideology of protest by the disenchanting masses. This phenomenon is far more explicit and rampant mainly in the third world developing countries. Rapidly spreading and powerful currents of Islamic fundamentalism could be cited as an example here. In Indian context, we can also cite the example of Dalit movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In its later stage Dalit movement also made use of Buddhist ideology of egalitarianism to protest against the social inequalities and injustice perpetrated by the traditional caste system.

### **Durkheim: An Assessment**

Durkheim has exerted a great influence on the social sciences, especially the functionalist and structuralist schools of anthropology and sociology. His was the dominant theory of social science in France from the beginning of the twentieth century. After his death in 1917, many of his students refined his core ideas. In anthropology, central theorists like Radcliff-Brown and Levi-Strauss have built on the Durkheim an inheritance. In sociology, the structural functionalist Talcott Parsons refined many of Durkheim's ideas. Parsons's central role in sociology from World War II until the 1970s contributed to maintaining an interest in Durkheim, and Parsons's heirs still consider Durkheim an important forerunner.

Durkheim's theories have also been subjected to harsh criticism by later social scientists. Most of his most important ideas (for example, those on social facts and holism) have been rejected by many supporters of individualist positions, such as rational choice theory, exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology. And his belief in integration and consensus, and his lack of concern with problems of power, have been criticized by supporters of more conflict-oriented theory, for example, Marxists.

Durkheim carved out a special field of study for sociology, established a sound empirical methodology and laid the foundation of structural functionalism, the dominant school of sociological theory today. It is a fact that despite some criticism to his concepts such as collective conscience and social facts, very few have surpassed his sociological realism or matched his substantive contribution to the many concerns of theoretical sociology.

One of the important contributions of Durkheim is that he delineated the subject matter of sociology with great precision and clarity. He was successful in distinguishing the phenomena studied by psychology and sociology. According to him, sociology must study social facts, those which are external to individual minds and which exercise coercive action on them. Durkheim showed convincingly that

social facts are facts *sui generis*. In his *The Rules of Sociological Method*, he elaborated in detail the positivist methodology that a social scientist should adopt while studying a social phenomenon. Thus, to the main problems in sociological theory of his times, Durkheim gave clear answers, both for theory and method. Durkheim faced up to complex methodological problems and demonstrated by implementing in his works, the necessity of empirical research for a science of society.

Further, Durkheim was one of the first scholars to highlight the social consequences of division of labour. Prior to him, division of labour was explained in a narrow sense, limited only to its economic consequences. It was Durkheim who brought out vividly the social and cultural importance of division of labour. He analysed the nature and consequences of division of labour in terms of changing forms of social solidarity. In his book *The Division of Labour in Society* Durkheim analyses the individual-versus-society issue in terms of the different kinds of social solidarity that hold society and individuals together.

Durkheim's study of *Suicide* is also considered as a landmark study and the best demonstration of his application of social realism perspective and positivist methodology. It was for the first time that theoretical generalizations were arrived at on the basis of careful analysis of empirical data. This study gave sociology a firm footing among other social sciences and justified its claim of being a scientific discipline.

Durkheim also had emphasized that while studying any social phenomenon, a sociologist should seek for both causal as well as functional explanations. Durkheim's study of suicide is considered as the best demonstration of the causal explanation while his study of religion is cited as an example of functional explanation in the sociological world. He argued that it is the business of the sociologists to establish causal connections and causal laws. Although many are skeptical about this approach, a great number of causal connections and functional correlations have been established by sociology with a reasonable degree of probability. While pleading for causal explanations, Durkheim argued that since experimentation is impossible in sociology, we should go in for indirect experimentation, by using the *comparative method*. This particular method continues to be used by sociologists.

Durkheim is also considered the pioneer of functional approach in sociology. Functional approach was later pursued by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in studying various small scale and pre-industrial societies. But it was Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton who revived functional approach and suitably modified classical functional approach to account for the dynamics unfolding in the modern

industrial societies. Closely following Durkheim, Merton distinguished between 'manifest' and 'latent' functions. Also the idea of 'dysfunction' goes back to Durkheim's idea of pathological functions.

Without doubt, Durkheim shaped French sociology. His influence before the Second World War was insignificant, but following Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) in which Durkheim was fully and admirably introduced to American sociology, his influence flourished. By the 1950s he had become along with Weber the major influence in America and all Europe.

*Dear Candidate, after giving at least three readings to these notes and making notes in the 'pointer form,' please go through the questions asked in previous years and try to attempt them. Always remember that without answer-writing practice, any amount of sociological knowledge would be of little use for you in qualifying civil services examination. Thus, along with understanding the sociological ideas discussed here, you must also master the art of expressing them in your own words as per the standards of the examination and expectations of the examiner, and that too, in the given Time-and-Word Limit.*

**all the best**

Sociology is Simple  
Sociology is Scoring  
provided that you  
Study Sociology Systematically

**UPSC: Previous Years' Questions**  
**Paper I**

**4. Sociological Thinkers**

**Emile Durkheim**

- Q. Explain Durkheim's basic argument on suicide. Can you analyse high suicide rates of contemporary Indian society with Durkheim's theory? (2018/20)
- Q. Does collapse of functionalism and bankruptcy of Marxism coincide with the rupture of modernity? Discuss. (2018/20)
- Q. In what way did Durkheim perceive religion as functional to society? (2018/10)
- Q. Discuss distinct sociological method adopted by Emile Durkheim in his study of 'suicide'. (2017/20)
- Q. Give an assessment of Durkheimian notion of 'sacred' and 'profane' in sociology of religion. (2017/10)
- Q. How is Durkheim's theory of religion different from Max Weber's theory of religion? (2016/20)
- Q. Elaborate the views of Durkheim on "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life". (2015/10)
- Q. "According to Durkheim, the essence of religion in modern society is the same as religion in primitive society." Comment. (2014/10)
- Q. Compare Karl Marx with Emile Durkheim with reference to the framework of 'division of labour'. (2013/20)
- Q. Write short note on the following, keeping sociological perspective in view:  
Sacred and Profane. (2012/12)
- Q. Show how Durkheim through the study of totemism demonstrates the reality of religion. (2012/30)
- Q. 'Social fact is to be treated as a thing.' Discuss. (2012/20)
- Q. Compare Karl Marx with Emile Durkheim with reference to the framework of 'division of labour'. (2010/30)
- Q. Write short note on Subject-matter of Sociology, according to Emile Durkheim. (2009/20)
- Q. Elaborate Emile Durkheim's analysis of the Elementary Forms of Religious Life and role of religion in society. How does he explain existence of religion in modern industrial societies? (2007/60)
- Q. Write short note: Social facts. (2007/20)
- Q. What according to Emile Durkheim is the nature of relationship between the individual and society? Explain this with the help of his analysis of division of labour in society. (2006/60)
- Q. Give a Critical Review of Emile Durkheim's Theory on Religion and Society. To what extent does it explain the contemporary scenario in Asia? (2004/60)
- Q. Write short note : The sacred and the profane. (2002/20)

-----Aditya Mongra @ Professor's Classes-----

- Q. Examine the nature of social facts as understood by Durkheim. (2002/60)
- Q. What is the focus of sociological analysis in the contributions of Emile Durkheim? Give your answer with the help of any one of his contributions. (2001/60)
- Q. Emile Durkheim had argued that the function of division of labour in society is that of the promotion of social solidarity. Elaborate the statement and analyze the distinction between two forms of solidarity discussed by him. (2000/60)
- Q. Write short note: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft types of communities. (1999/20)
- Q. "Not all facts about human behavior are necessarily social facts." State the meaning of 'social facts' and the methods of studying them with reference to this statement. (1996/60)
- Q. Write short note : Division of labour and the differentiation of social structure. (1999/20)
- Q. Write short note : Anomie. (1997/20)
- Q. Write short note : Social fact. (1995/20)
- Q. Write short note : Organic analogy. (1995/20)
- Q. Write short note : Pathological form of division of labour. (1995/20)
- Q. Describe the functional analysis of religion given by Durkheim. Is this analysis applicable to the modern industrialized societies? (1993/60)
- Q. What are the basic questions which inspired Durkheim to study the division of labour in society? Critically comment on his conclusions. (1992/60)
- Q. Write short note : Concept of social structure. (1992/20)
- Q. 'Why does the individual, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society'? (Durkheim). How has the author tried to answer this question? (1991/20)
- Q. Write short note : The sacred and the profane. (1991/20)
- Q. Is the Durkheimian concept of religion entirely different from that of his predecessors? Why and how? (1989/60)
- Q. In what respects of you think Weber's conception of sociology differs from that of Durkheim? Which one of the two is more satisfactory? Substantiate your answer. (1988/60)
- Q. Write short note : Collective Representations. (1987/20)
- Q. Discuss Durkheim's concept of Division of Labour. In what way does it differ from that of classical and neoclassical economists. (1986/60)
- Q. Discuss the contributions of Durkheim to sociology. How far did his methodology influence sociological traditions? (1985/60)