

The contributions of emile durkheim to sociology essay sample

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Emile Durkheim was one of the most important theorists within the history of sociology for a number of different reasons. It is perhaps the sheer range of his contributions that are most important. In many ways he invented the sociological viewpoint towards crime, religion, suicide and education. He is now widely regarded as the “ Father of Sociology”, and the scholar who most enabled the idea that there could be such a thing as “ *social science*” within the academe.

One of the main contributions of Durkheim was to formulate the idea of a scientific study of society which was as possible as the analysis of physical phenomenon. Most importantly, he sought to show how various institutions and trends within society contributed to it as a function. These ideas were essentially the beginning of the whole theory of functionalism within the field of sociology. Durkheim developed the idea of “ social facts” which are facets of society which are somehow divorced from the acts of individuals. These “ facts” lead to the sociological trends that are now studied within the modern field of sociology.

While he helped to develop the idea of wider trends within society, Durkheim also contributed to an understanding of how individuals might react within particular situations. In his famous work *Suicide*, Durkheim examined what happens to people who end up feeling a sense of *anomie*, especially within large cities in which they are surrounded by people but may feel a total sense of alienation. In many ways this was a precursor to many different sociological studies of minority and isolated groups within society, especially within the urban inner-cities which are now so poor.

Durkheim work on suicide also contributed to integration theory, in which sociologists study how far a society (or group/culture within that society) is organized and integrated, or disorganized and integrated. In this manner the relationship between the individual and society was concentrated upon, another great contribution to the whole field of sociology. He also contributed greatly to that aspect of sociology which deals with *crime*, particularly the function of crime within society. Unlike those of his contemporaries who say crime as merely a “problem” that needed to be solved, or through the moral lens of “good” and “evil” Durkheim suggested that crime actually had a functional role to play within society.

He regarded crime as actually “normal” because there was no society in which it did not occur. Crime enabled the safe (as long as it was limited) release of societal and individual malaise which is inevitable within a culture of groups. Crime acted as a sort of purge for tensions within society.

Durkheim was vital in forming a scientific, objective analysis of crime rather than the emotive attitude of condemnation which is perhaps understandable, but not useful in a scholarly sense. Again, the bringing of the scientific method, which is essentially *neutral* to the subject of crime gave a whole new field of endeavor to sociology.

Durkheim’s work within education may be seen as a precursor to the more socially active and politically conscious form of sociology that is now so popular. He say education as the route to stopping the sense of anomie within society by allowing individuals to feel connected with their world. He also sought to study religion in a sociological sense, asking what its function

was within society and how it contributed to social controls and the solidifying of a common culture within society. The analysis of religion in such an objective way was highly controversial at the time, but enabled a whole branch of sociology to take off and flourish. Durkheim suggested that the function of religion was initially to give the individual a sense of belonging within a group, and thus contributed to the social cohesion of a group that was so needed for a successful society. Durkheim did not seek to spiritual claims of religions as they were far beyond the range of his study: he analyzed those tribes who practiced *totemism* in as a serious a manner as he studied Catholicism.

To conclude, Durkheim's contributions to sociology are extraordinary. He would have been a major theorist if he had concentrated within just one of his many fields of endeavor, let alone all of them. His scientific study of a whole range of structures and functions within society were the beginning of the whole academic discipline of Sociology. The personal battles that he had to fight against fellow academics who would not accept that human societies could be studied in such a manner enabled future scholars, up to today, to study societies without constantly needing to "prove" that such studies were valid. So his contributions were wide, profound and invaluable. He is justifiably called the "Father of Sociology".

Works Cited

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