

Durkheim's theory: summary, critique and analysis



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This review is 'The Rules of the Sociological Method' by Durkheim. I will try to summarise the concepts of it and indicate some of objections of Durkheim's position which I encountered in this article and will highlight as I go along.

Durkheim states that the behaviour, phenomena and other societal dogma influence one to think, act, feel and react. Durkheim dedicated few fundamental elements such as the relationship between the individuals and society to the nature and social bond. He identified the two types of the societies into mechanical and organic societies. He distinguished them in terms of their shared beliefs, governing laws, level of individualism and social ills. According to Durkheim's main theory of social fact existed even before we were born; and as a result " a social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising based on the individual's external constraint given by the society" (p. 13).

He added that social structures have a 'coercive power' over the individual, which means that we are coerced into subsequent established rules of our society. According to Durkheim, social facts have main features such as: an external to the individual, coercive of the individual and not attached to any particular individual. The author argues that the basic norms of social facts as things to examine and understand.

Durkheim is key thinker of social science and his theory and methods of was positivism (holism/whole), and he considers that social structures exist independently of the individual, and the individual agent does not play a huge role in the social fact. He emphasised that social facts exist outside the

individuals, and the manifestation of the individuals is a social fact. He also suggested that society gives people a role to play based on their rationality and choices, therefore, society has made the individuals. Durkheim also suggested that belief existed since birth, and he gave his account on several inherent habits. It has been noticed that people are taught to be abided by certain obligation set by the society which termed as law and custom. The actions of individuals are totally connected with the education that one derives from his family or learnt through religion and customs of the society. Therefore, it is duty served by any individual by being a brother, mother, son or a husband or as a citizen which are defined as the education and the obligation set by the society. This shows these concepts and expectations did not come from the individuals but from the social community.

Although we might hold these normative community behaviours and share its values, we still constrained its existence. So, people have selected the social facts with conscious mind and their rationality. This means that people use their mind and brain to accept and follow the customs. However, in contrary to our modern day people are more rational and use their own autonomy and choice based on their own desires and will. Therefore, they rebel the norms and customs. In this sense, Durkheim sat the social level apart from psychology, and he insists that sociology and psychology are different. Psychology and Sociology goes hand in hand. Since people use their mind, brain to select their desires around them as well as their rationality. Durkheim referred understanding of the social fact belongs to sociology and it's different from biology and psychology. In this sense, both discipline affects human growth, their rationality, choices and relationships.

If he used consciousness/unconsciousness, and the effects of the emotions, how can he relate the sociology and psychology? This is the gap that needs to be considered.

Hence, the thoughts and the ideas that are controlling one's behaviour is not developed by any individuals, rather they are enforced by some outside power and are penetrated on the character of the individual. In our modern day, a constant constraint has been developed to make people aware that they are not only dependent upon themselves neither on the societal norms and customs, but law and legislations set. In the past century, the social norms could not be challenged or denied. People consider the norms are important and those failed to follow can either formally or informally can be sanctioned through the law and legislation, or by the communities as social control. They get excluded and shamed them. However, this is no longer valid.

In his century, people considered norms are vital and those failed to follow can either formally or informally can be sanctioned through the law/legislation, or by the communities. They get ashamed, isolation and excluded. However, this is no longer valid. People resist against religion and norms, and they don't face punishments. For instance, marriage were very crucial: husband and wife and children vice versa, and every individual expected to follow. However, today, all those are no longer essential, and whether an individual is one gender or another; or same sex marriage, bisexual or belong to LGB are acceptable now.

Conventions, on the other hand, are made by society to make people decide between the right and wrong, even if they are totally baseless. It has been analysed that if one tries to violate the rules set by the society, it acts against him and make him completely helpless to stand on his grounds. Furthermore, the society will ask him to anticipate his action if there is still time existed. In an alternative case, the society tries to nullify the action if it is considered to be reversible or make him pay a penalty if the action cannot be repaired. The restriction set by society causes an infringement in moral laws and ethics, special punishments are enforced to provide a check on the behaviour of the citizens which is seen a form of deterrence, p. 2)

However, there are some breach that goes against the ordinary convention of the society and treated less violently. Eventually, it has been examined that there are certain individuals who try to successfully break the rules forcing one to fight against them. Even if the forces of the society are overcome, they impose the power of virtue and moral constraints that will drive them to act and feel externally. They exercise control over the individuals and let them function the way they like. The actions represented by the society should not be confused with the organic and the physical phenomenon that does not exist in the human conscious mind.

There are certain facts in the society which are termed to be really ' social' as it is used without any clarity and accuracy in the society. The social facts generally cover the entire phenomenon and the occurrence within the society with the presence of little social interest of the people. Societies see each of the functions differently and are judged differently by all.

His example on (p. 6), on constrain and convention, as he used an example of the outset of a child's life. I believe the growing process of every child is similar to any given society. Although, he concentrated in France. Children learn through role modelling and imitations. Therefore, one may argue the existence of the external power which Durkheim believes is coercive forces which shapes them, merely is temporary, and it's rather can be general influences till child reaches a certain age. If they reach the ages of maturity, they can rebel and resist some of these norms and customs, as we experienced today.

In accordance, the term social has gathered a new meaning that is the factor on which individualism depends on. The social fact that existed in the well-defined society has emerged as the new form that contains the same objectivity controlling the behaviour of the individual.

Society creates a profound impact on the emotions and feelings of the individual so once the community of the society breaks up, it fails to influence the feelings of the individuals and fails to enforce its power on them. The feelings and the experiences that people faced while being exposed to the harsh system of the society are completely dissimilar to that experience while being alone. In this respect the law of society draws every harmless individual to its wicked and cruel act when they are exposed to the crowd and let people get introduced to the religious, political and the artistic matters that are constantly surrounding them. Form the very beginning of growing stage of the child, he is taught the way to eat, sleep in regular hours and maintain cleanliness, which is later observed as a power or force to mend his ways to become a respectable individual of the society. This

gradually gives rise to tendencies and habits that forms the inner and outer characteristics of the individual. The pressure of the society and the environment to which one is subjected to, helps to shape one's personality and behaviour since childhood.

Conclusion:

Even though, the concept of the individual agent is strictly limited, still there are ways of thinking, acting, feeling which external power of coercion to the individual is. However, this is mental controlling to the individuals and enforcing them to abide by, regardless of their mental capacity and rationality. Therefore, one can say there is no way that one can detach or separate sociology from psychology.

He also viewed an individual is tool and contributes little to the sociological knowledge. There are some premises are justified, however society evolved and transformed. Therefore, his argument are not fully compelling, when you look at other theories which makes a lot more sense. His clarification is functional but limited. The author failed to consider other possibility of the future change overtime. Therefore, there are many transformation took place now. Due to lack of integrations and technologies on his century, he failed to reflect on other societies which might happened to be different from France, such Europe and the global in general. Therefore, historical diversity is limited. The gap is not only the weakness of his argument it rather lacks the awareness of other societies outside France, which show the weaknesses of his premises, which not fully convincing.

Reference:

E. Durkheim, *The Rule of Sociological Method*, (New York: The Free Press, 1938. Ch. 1.