



EMILE DURKHEIM

Functionalist

Profile

Born in Espinal, France in 1858, Durkheim is seen by many as one of the founding fathers of sociology. Durkheim's work into suicide established sociology as an academic discipline and advanced our understanding of how the personal can be influenced by the social. A prolific writer, Durkheim wrote prolifically during his lifetime and was influenced by the works of psychologist Wundt as well as French philosophers such as Comte, Descartes and Kant. Durkheim was subject to political persecution from far-right due to his Jewish heritage and died in 1918, shortly after the death of his son in World War I.

Crime and Deviance

Durkheim contributed extensively to our understanding of crime and deviance. He suggests deviance has both positive and negative functions.

The positive functions were boundary maintenance - whereby society's collective conscience was reaffirmed in the aftermath of deviance. He also suggested that deviance leads to adaptation and change, as all social change is result of initial deviance from societal norms.

Furthermore, he suggested that too much deviance, leads society to a state of anomie - whereby norms and values of society mean little and chaos ensues.

Education

According to Durkheim, education performs the role of promoting social solidarity through teaching pupils about their shared heritage in subjects like history. This gives them a sense of belonging to society. It also prepares pupils for their future roles in society by teaching them the norms and values of wider society. Like many sociologists, Durkheim's work focused on how education could meet the demands of the newly industrialised economy.

Division of Labour

Durkheim wrote at the time of the industrial revolution in France and much of his work references the 'complex division of labour in modern society'. He argued that the industrial revolution had brought about many changes to French society, including the need for retraining individuals to meet the demands of the more diverse labour market. The division of labour has implications, not only for work, but also in terms of the social bonds between individuals.

Positivism

Sociologists must remain objective in their study of society. Behaviour can be directly observed and recorded as a 'social fact' if objectivity is maintained. Durkheim's 1899 study 'Le Suicide' is seen as being a seminal work in the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline. However, it was not without its critics, particularly as the death of a close friend has inspired Durkheim's interest in suicide in the first place.

